

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

JULY-AUGUST 2025



GLOBAL HEALTH DIPLOMACY

**A MESSAGE FROM
THE MILITARY**

**MED GOES
DIGITAL**

**WHEN USAID
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The Privilege of Serving You

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

As my time as AFSA president draws to a close, I want to use my final column to thank you all for being members and supporting AFSA in this trying time of upheaval. It has been humbling to witness the outpouring of support that has helped AFSA confront this existential challenge to the Foreign Service.

When my good friend, former AFSA President Eric Rubin, asked me in January 2019 to run on his ticket as State vice president, I gladly accepted, though I wasn't sure what I could really accomplish. A term as president and two terms as State VP have given me a deep appreciation of AFSA's ability to make life better for our members and, by so doing, to strengthen the Foreign Service as an institution.

Some have argued that there is an inherent contradiction with AFSA being both a labor union and professional association. I have never seen it that way: If you want a strong Foreign Service, one that attracts and retains top talent, then you need to support and defend its members, full stop. One is intrinsically linked with the other.

The Fight Will Continue

AFSA will continue to fight the executive orders that dismantled USAID and



USAGM, two of our member agencies, and eliminated our collective bargaining rights at State and USAID. We are still arguing our

case in the courts, but our fight has already borne fruit. In mid-May, the bargaining rights we have enjoyed for more than 50 years were reinstated by a federal judge. We then moved quickly to demand back our rights to negotiate major personnel changes, including the State reorganization underway and the establishment of new precepts that form the basis for Foreign Service promotions.

These rights enable AFSA to hold this—and any—administration to account. Without these rights, decisions can be made behind closed doors, without AFSA's knowledge, imperiling the nonpartisan, professional career Foreign Service. In the worst-case scenario, if our rights as a union are lost, we will continue the fight as a professional association in the media, in Congress, and in the court of public opinion. And I ask you to join us in this important endeavor. The future of our country and our Service depends on us.

Profound Thanks

I have been deeply impressed with the professionalism and results-oriented approach of our great AFSA staff in the offices of general counsel, congressional advocacy, professional policy issues, membership/outreach, communications, and the *FSJ*. I know their wise counsel and understanding of the many issues affecting our members has given me the wherewithal to make informed decisions, and they will do the same for the incoming board.

Thank you to our Governing Board members, most of whom are volunteers. Discussion at our monthly meetings could sometimes be spirited, but always with the intention of arriving at the best decisions for our members—and for that I am grateful. I also want to thank our indefatigable post reps overseas and all those who volunteered their time for AFSA, whether on the *FSJ* Editorial Board or elsewhere. Your work is much appreciated.

Looking Ahead

By the time this issue goes to print, we will be in the final stages of preparing incoming President John Dinkelman and the new Governing Board members for their first meeting on July 16. I congratulate John and all of those who ran in an election that saw the highest voter turnout of any in AFSA's recent history. This energized electorate can only be beneficial for AFSA. I know that AFSA will be in good hands going forward, and I ask you to lend the new team your support.

As for me, I am looking forward to becoming an outspoken member of our great AFSA retiree/alumni cohort. As I look back on nearly 34 years in the Foreign Service (plus three in other USG agencies), I am grateful for a career that has given me so much that I feel a deep sense of obligation to give back.

Thank you for giving me the privilege of a lifetime in serving you. And may AFSA thrive for another hundred years. ■

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

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Global Health Diplomacy Today

BY SHAWN DORMAN

When we set out late last year to put together a focus on global health diplomacy, we reached out to officials running USAID and State Department international health programming and policy. We found enthusiastic authors. We wanted to hear from USAID's global health division and to learn about priorities for State's Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy, established in August 2023.

But that was not to be. Within a month of taking office, the Trump administration was dismantling USAID, firing thousands of federal employees, freezing and terminating myriad global health programs, and making plans for a major reorganization and downsizing of the State Department (in addition to attempts to eliminate AFSA's role as a union at State and USAID).

Channels began collapsing, as people were put on administrative leave and federal email accounts were turned off. It became difficult to find out what was happening and to get anyone to put anything in writing. Would USAID and State's global health programs and priorities survive? What would happen to life-saving programs and to staff? Too

much was in flux.

We were advised to drop the focus topic.

But discussion of a vital foreign policy matter hanging in the balance was still

appropriate, maybe even more so. We pushed the topic from May to July-August and sought out a different set of writers to explore the strategic imperatives of U.S. leadership in global health.

As the most recent deputy assistant administrator for global health at USAID, Nidhi Bouri oversaw the agency's work in global health security and health emergencies. In "Putting America First by Stopping Outbreaks at Their Source," she uses the Ebola case study to show that preventing diseases from entering our borders costs far less than responding to them after they've arrived.

In "Why Continued U.S. Leadership on HIV Is Essential," Angeli Achrekar explains that largely because of two decades of U.S. leadership, the end of AIDS as a public health threat is within sight, but continued vigorous U.S. support is essential to reach that goal. Achrekar served for more than 20 years with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

In "How the CDC Protects Americans Overseas," Audrey Knutson Luxenberg from the CDC Côte d'Ivoire team answers our questions about the people and the work of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention overseas.

Antimicrobial resistance is not simply an emerging global medical problem; it is a diplomatic challenge. Jorge A. Huete-Pérez, biotechnology and science policy professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, explains in "How to Prevent a Bacterial Pandemic in Central America."

Finally, in "Wherever the Wind Takes Us—Poor Air Quality and Long-Term Foreign Service," recently retired FSO Michelle Zjhra sets out to discover how poor air quality at some posts might affect the health of members of the Foreign Service community.

Also in medical news, Alice Abrams, an experienced State medical provider, tells us about the new online "MED Provider Portal."

Elsewhere in this edition is a special "Message from the Military" from Admiral James G. Foggo. In "Diplomats Serve at the Tip of the Spear," he explains how he learned that "without a strong Foreign Service, America's security would be at risk."

In the Speaking Out, FSO Jason Rubin leads us to "Reimagining the Foreign Service EER," while in Reflections FSO Gordon Duguid looks at "Effective Public Diplomacy During NATO Enlargement."

In the third installment of our Service Disrupted series, we hear from USAID Senior FSO (ret.) Jim Bever and two USAID FSOs on what happens "When USAID Disappears."

Tom Yazdgerdi's farewell President's Views column assures members that AFSA will continue its fight to defend the Foreign Service and thanks them for the privilege of serving.

Last, though the *FSJ*'s July-August edition is traditionally a double issue, we will continue to produce double issues through the end of the year, and into 2026, as a cost-saving measure during this difficult time. Please keep writing to us at journal@afsa.org. ■



Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

The Fruits of Our Labor

I was most interested to read about Vietnam in the April-May 2025 *FSJ*, in particular the reference in the article, “Through the Visa Window,” about Vietnamese migrants to the U.S.

The article refers to the Orderly Departure Program, which was set up in Bangkok 45 years ago, principally to try to encourage desperate South Vietnamese with some ties to the U.S. not to take to the boats to try to get to Indonesia, Malaysia, or the Philippines because of rampant piracy and oceanic deaths.

As a second-tour consular officer, I was sent to Bangkok to help set up the program, working with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) representative who would be preprocessing applicants in Vietnam, based on lists prepared by the Vietnamese government (primarily Chinese citizens they wanted to get rid of) and lists the U.S. government prepared, containing names of people with relatives in the U.S. and former U.S. government employees. Initially there were no names that appeared on both lists, but over time there was some crossover.

It is rewarding to see that this program went on for 20 years, and it is deeply pleasing to read decades later about the fruits of our labor and the faithfulness of U.S. citizen husbands in getting their spouses (often with multiple non-U.S.-related children) brought safely to the United States. I hope all those reunifications were happy and successful ones.

Sue H. Patterson

FSO, retired

Antigua, Guatemala

Moved by Vietnam Coverage

As a former FSO in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970, I was emotionally moved and cherished your coverage of Vietnam from

the 1968 Tet invasion until today in the April-May 2025 *FSJ*. I lived across from the embassy on Mac Din Chi at the time of the attack.

I lived and worked in virtually every province of South Vietnam, developing the computerized hamlet evaluation report for 12,000 hamlets for MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam]. I worked in pacification under Bob Komer and ended my career as USAID industry chief, responsible for the War Reconstruction Program and the USAID Commercial Import Program.

I left South Vietnam fluent in Vietnamese in December 1970 and returned to Vietnam in 2005 as co-founder of Vietnam Holding, creating an IPO in 2006 on the U.K. stock exchange. It still operates today.

This should give you some background on why I loved the entire issue’s complimentary treatment of Vietnam and USAID from 1967 until today.

John H. Hoey

FSO, retired

Sarasota, Florida

Intentional Diplomacy in Vietnam

As I sit on my front porch in McLean, Virginia, smoking a cigar from leaf grown and rolled in the Dominican Republic, and watching yet another McMansion replace the 1959 split-level house that preceded it, I read with special interest and pride the April-May 2025 issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

I had the honor of working for or alongside most of the authors and the folks they mention. They were the best advertisement of the Foreign Service and the power of diplomacy vice military posturing one could imagine. Not that our military posture isn’t important—it’s just that diplomacy brings better returns.



My neighborhood in McLean is turning as Chinese as the region in which Vietnam is situated. In blessed retirement, I watch with not a little trepidation as many of these houses are purchased (in cash) by the Chinese who made their

fortunes off the liberal trading regime that I and many others enabled in the lead-up to China’s accession to the WTO. (We all got promoted for “single-handedly” bringing this about.)

Let me be clear: I am a “hawk” when it comes to Xi Jinping’s regime. Former Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, who died of a heart attack in Shanghai not too long ago—and whom all my Chinese neighbors quietly believe was allowed to die on orders from Chairman Xi—was Party Secretary in Liaoning Province when I was consul general in Shenyang from 2007 to 2010. Li was the kind of leader we could work with. I’m less sanguine about Xi.

I am the product of training in that renegade province, Taiwan, where I was a college junior studying abroad in 1973 and a consular officer at the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) from 1987 to 1989. At the time, AIT was a mildewing and molding leftover from our heyday during the Chiang Kai-shek period.

When I was assigned to Shenyang, everyone in the Foreign Service thought I was somehow being punished. I lasted three and one-half happy years during perhaps the apogee in U.S.-China relations.

We did not have perfect access in that conservative part of China, but it wasn’t all that bad. And many of us went on to stellar careers in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Vietnam is a perfect example of what can be accomplished by steady and

intentional diplomacy. My fear is that the current administration does not understand this.

Stephen Wickman
FSO, retired
McLean, Virginia

Moral Leadership

I just read the *FSJ* article “Lives Upended: The Impact of USAID’s Dismantling on Those Who Serve” in your April-May 2025 issue. Both the introductory note from the editors and the testimonials from affected individuals were powerful and offer a necessary and courageous resistance to the Trump administration’s cruel and thoughtless cuts.

Your refusal to be complicit in the travesties that are occurring is moral leadership at its best. Thank you for what you do.

Mary Ellen Weir
Belmont, North Carolina

Dereliction of Duty

In my decades of involvement in U.S. foreign and security policy, both in and out of government, I have never been so disheartened in reading the *FSJ* than with the April-May 2025 issue. Ironically, my concern was set off by the extraordinary record of the Foreign Service and others in developing relations with Vietnam over the last 50 years.

One quote from Amb. Ted Osius’ article (“Vietnam and the United States: The Way Ahead”) underscores the danger that U.S. foreign policy now faces: “By decimating the team of Foreign Service Asia experts—people who would have known about 11 centuries of enmity between Vietnam and China—[Sen. Joe] McCarthy left the State Department unprepared.” That history now risks being repeated—this time because of actions being mandated from within the building.

By killing USAID and decimating the State Department itself, both at home and abroad, the current administration has already ensured that State will not have sufficient talent, experience, and proper organization needed for U.S. foreign policy to prosper in the years ahead, or even for State to be able to provide critical help sometimes needed by Americans abroad.

Even if the Secretary of State immediately rescinded what has already been done, the time needed to get the State Department (and other parts of the U.S. foreign policy structure) back to needed levels would take months, if not years.

Already, America’s reputation in the world has taken its worst hit at least since Iraq in 2003 and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.

This is worse than sad or tragic. It is dereliction of duty to the people of the United States, who expect the State Department and other agencies to reflect the interests and values of our country abroad.

Robert E. Hunter
U.S. Ambassador to NATO, 1993-1998
Washington, D.C.

Too Many Losses

Like many of you, after my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer, I chose to remain in service to our country by joining the USAID Foreign Service. Unfortunately, the current administration is erasing all that I stood for. My lifetime of work has been reduced to ashes, not due to natural causes but because of cruel acts of misguided people.

I know I am not alone when I write that I am fed up. I worked for 10 years with the Peace Corps and 40 years with USAID and associated organizations. Now these U.S. organizations, which are themselves 63 years old,

are being hastily and carelessly dismantled by a small group of people, leaving thousands of American employees and their families—whose jobs focused on providing life-saving humanitarian aid and relieving poverty in some of the most desperate parts of the world—without their livelihoods.

The rapid evisceration of U.S. foreign aid programs also hurt thousands of locally employed (LE) staff (which we knew as Foreign Service Nationals or FSNs) working in their respective countries. FSNs were the institutional continuity and backbone of all U.S. overseas missions. They and their families were also deeply affected by the abrupt closure of their missions and their own sudden dismissals.

Moreover, the termination of foreign aid has left millions of impoverished people in some of the world’s poorest countries without sufficient food and health care. Is the United States now abandoning these people? Questions must be asked: How do we now plan to stop the worldwide spread of disease, including pandemics?

The loss of food markets for U.S. farmers also comes to mind. At least \$2 billion of food will not be purchased by USAID in 2025. The loss of this market is catastrophic for U.S. farmers, many of whom have already planted crops with this market in mind. Our foreign assistance represents only 1 percent of the federal budget, so how much money do we save by its total and rapid demise?

It is difficult for me to see how such actions by our government can be viewed in a positive light. There are many ways to reform our foreign aid programs, but reform must be done in a thoughtful manner rather



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than precipitously. And I wonder about the implications of this destruction for the future recruitment of Foreign Service officers.

I write this letter after spending several weeks agonizing over what an 80-year-old man like me could possibly do. I am writing this letter to express my pain and to call on others to join me in disagreeing with the actions of the current administration.

Nationwide protests show me that many people share my views. I believe that if we fight together, we can right this situation. We may have to buckle down for years to repair the damage already done, but we must remain steadfast in our determination to correct this unprecedented dire situation.

We must not lose hope that better days are ahead. I call on all of you to fight as long as it takes to right the democratic ship of State.

Mark G. Wentling
Senior FSO, retired
Lubbock, Texas

Did Khomeini Block a U.S. Visitor?

The letter by Ambassador John Limbert that was published in the March 2025 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal* suggests that the Iranian leader Khomeini blocked Amb. Bill Miller and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark from visiting Tehran in November 1979.

In fact, Ramsey, with whom I worked for about two decades, knew Khomeini well. The two had mutual respect for each other. According to Ramsey, it was the U.S. government that stopped him from visiting Tehran, not the Iranian government.

Several times Ramsey recounted to me that when he was stopped from continuing to Tehran after having already landed in Europe, he reached out to the

Iranian government to confirm that he was still welcomed and was told that he was. Nevertheless, the U.S. government refused to allow him to continue.

Curtis Doebbler
Research Professor of Law
University of Makeni
Makeni, Sierra Leone

Khomeini: The Author Responds

Professor Doebbler's (and Ramsey Clark's) account (above) is new to me. I suspect two possible explanations for the varying stories.

Khomeini was a master of telling people what they wanted to hear and assuring them he supported their position. In Paris in 1978-1979, for example, he convinced Western journalists and Iranian nationalists that he supported free speech, freedom of the press, women's rights, and had no interest in exercising political power. Once in Tehran, however, his actions were far different.

In November 1979, he issued a categorical statement forbidding contact with the Clark-Miller mission, and in June 1980, when Clark did come to Iran for a conference, the two did not meet, and Khomeini allowed the state media to attack Clark in the most vitriolic terms.

A second explanation is that someone in the Carter administration, for reasons of their own, was working to sabotage the mission. It seems far-fetched, but stranger things have happened.

John Limbert
FSO, retired
Long Island City, New York ■

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This is a great way to reconnect with Foreign Service colleagues,
especially those returning home from overseas service.



Diplomats Serve at the Tip of the Spear

BY JAMES G. FOGGO

Throughout my more than 40 years in uniform with the U.S. Navy serving at sea as a submarine officer, with the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, and in leadership positions in the European Command, I witnessed extraordinary civil-military cooperation between our uniformed Joint Forces at the tip of the spear and our expeditionary diplomats who live and work in the communities of our allies, partners, and, in some cases, our adversaries.

While in uniform, I served alongside civilians from the State Department and other organizations in some of the most dangerous, least-developed countries in the world, and I grew to respect the service and sacrifice of those who toiled alongside me. At a time when our rivals are exerting their global influence, we cannot risk a hollowing out of our civilian and military readiness, which could leave us exposed to danger and disaster in a world that grows more complex every day.

Going ashore at the Pentagon in 2003-2005, I was introduced to a world where military officers worked side by side with our civilian counterparts in the Department of Defense, the

Department of State, and the rest of the Interagency. Serving in Western Europe and the Balkans, I found that the most effective combatant and component commanders of four-star rank were the ones who collaborated with their civilian counterparts.

Some of the wisest commanders in the U.S. military taught me that U.S. ambassadors and their expert country teams were an essential ingredient in advancing the interests and national security of the United States of America.

When diplomacy falters, America's only remaining option is military force. Investing in diplomacy isn't just smart policy, it's how we keep American boots off foreign battlefields.



One of the most educational and exciting assignments of my career was to serve as executive assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, who served alongside Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Both Mullen and Gates understood that our diplomatic corps was an essential but underresourced part of government. Gates once quoted Mullen saying he would hand a part of his budget to the State Department "in a

heartbeat" assuming it was spent in the right place. Adm. Mullen himself used to say that he would give up an aircraft carrier—valued at \$14 billion—to buy more soft power through the institution of the Department of State.

In 2008-2009, I traveled with Adm. Mullen in support of U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the first Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP), throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Iraq. There I worked with our diplomats serving in some of the world's most dangerous places.

Mullen often used the phrase "Expeditionary Government" when referring to Foreign Service officers and other Interagency civilians on the front lines. Like Holbrooke, Mullen saw provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) populated by both civilians and military personnel as a pathway to peace and stability in these war-torn regions.

My experience as part of Holbrooke's team taught me that without a strong Foreign Service, America's security would be at risk. Career diplomats and development professionals are our first line of defense—preventing crises, protecting citizens abroad, and defusing global threats before they hit home.



I was already 20 years into my naval career when terrorists attacked New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. In that moment, everything changed. Sending



Admiral James G. Foggo, U.S. Navy (ret.), currently serves as dean of the Center for Maritime Strategy in Washington, D.C. This essay is adapted from his introduction to Boots and Suits: Historical Cases and Contemporary Lessons in Military Diplomacy, edited by Ambassador (ret.) Phillip S. Kosnett (Marine Corps University Press, 2023).

Some of the wisest commanders in the U.S. military taught me that U.S. ambassadors and their expert country teams were an essential ingredient in advancing the interests and national security of the United States of America.

our military forces overseas after these attacks was necessary, but it was by no means sufficient. Along with those forces, on the front lines and in the trenches, we relied on civilian members of many other federal agencies to serve as the ultimate force multiplier. Like sailors, soldiers, airmen, and Marines, our civilians from the State Department and other agencies operated by our side at the tip of the spear, assuming similar risks as we fought our common enemy.

This understanding was not lost on me when I assumed the duties of commander of the U.S. Sixth Fleet from 2014 to 2016 and later as the four-star commander of Naval Forces Europe and Africa and commander of Allied Joint Forces Command in Naples, Italy, from 2017 to 2020. I valued the contribution of our U.S. ambassadors and their country teams in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East in the areas of my responsibility.

I traveled frequently and always made it a priority to stop first at the U.S. embassy and pay a call on the ambassador or chargé d'affaires and meet with the U.S. country team. These visits were always enlightening. Whenever possible, I adjusted my schedule and my talking points to align with the subject matter experts in the diplomatic service of our nation.

Likewise, when I could not travel to the region, I set up a series of regional ambassadors conferences at my headquarters in Naples, coordinated by my State Department political adviser. The Black Sea, Balkans, and Southern Europe/North Africa ambassadors conferences brought together our U.S. ambassadors, U.S. defense attachés, and chiefs of navies from Allied and partner countries, who convened to discuss regional issues and pooled resources to solve difficult challenges in support of collective national interests. As a naval officer, I have always supported the position of Theodore Roosevelt, who once opined: "A good Navy is not a provocation of war. It is the surest guarantee of peace."

I will always value the U.S. Navy's contribution as an extended arm of diplomacy, and this principle guided me during my 11 years as a flag officer. My hat is off to those expeditionary diplomats who helped me during my many tours of duty in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Serving alongside them, I learned that diplomats do extraordinary things to save American lives. They, like our colleagues in uniform, are essential to our nation's security and prosperity.

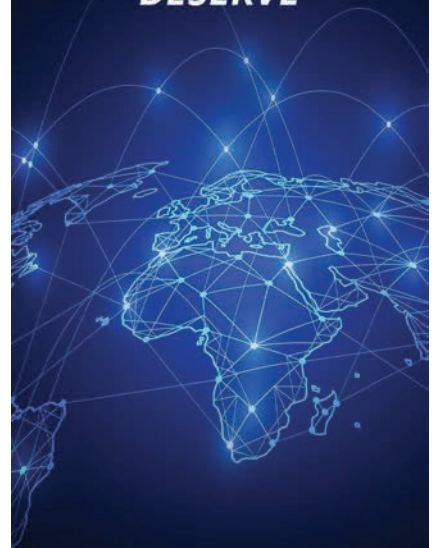
They have protected us for decades. Now it is our turn to protect them. ■



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State Department Unveils Reorganization Plan

On May 29, the State Department submitted its proposed reorganization plan to Congress through a congressional notification. The plan involves the largest realignment of departmental resources in recent years; approximately 300 bureaus and offices will be consolidated, streamlined, or eliminated, to “more closely align resources with core U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives” and to integrate programs formerly handled by USAID.

The ambitious timeline aims to complete the reorganization by July 1, with affected employees receiving notice by that date. According to the congressional notification, some 1,873 employees, in addition to 1,575 who have already retired this year, will be subject to reductions in force (RIFs).

Among the key changes: Each of the regional bureaus will be creating an Office of Assistance to coordinate aid programs in the absence of USAID. In the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA), the CARE office (handling Afghan refugees) and the Special Representative for Afghan Reconstruction will be folded into the Afghanistan Affairs Office.

Departmental budgeting, personnel, and asset management tasks will be consolidated into the M Bureau, where a new Bureau of Personnel and Training (PERT) will include the former Global Talent Management as well as the Foreign Service Institute, with the latter returning to its former name: the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

A new F under secretary will be responsible for foreign assistance coordination as well as some functions formerly a part of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Interna-

tional Religious Freedom Office, and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

Finally, the Bureau of Energy Resources will return to the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, where it will join the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy.

Secretary Rubio on the Hill

Secretary of State Marco Rubio spent about 10 hours on the Hill testifying before four Senate and House committees May 20 and 21 to discuss his proposed reorganization of the State Department and the president’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget request.

Republican members of Congress largely praised the Secretary, while exchanges with Democrats were generally more contentious, especially on foreign assistance.

The first day, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) and then before the Senate Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Secretary Rubio described his view of U.S. engagement in the world. He noted that it “isn’t about saving money; it is about ensuring that we are delivering to our people what they deserve: a foreign policy that makes America stronger, safer, and more prosperous.”

“We’re going to be doing foreign aid,” Rubio said. “We’re going to be doing all the things we’ve done before. ... The difference is it’s going to be coordinated out of the umbrella of the State Department, and it’s going to be part of a cohesive, coherent foreign policy, and it’s going to be driven by our embassies and our regional bureaus.”

He said that of streamlining the bureaucracy, “we need to be nimble

enough to make a decision, but we also have to make sure that these decisions are being made as close to the front lines as possible. What is the front line of diplomacy? It is our embassies. It is the men and women who are deployed abroad on the ground. ... And so that’s our number one goal. The number two goal is to have ... all the tools of foreign policy in the same toolbox. Foreign aid is a tool of our foreign policy. ... It has to be taken in conjunction with all of these other things that we do, and they have to be intertwined.”

He referred to the department as a “soft power entity” in response to a question from Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), explaining: “It’s a department of peace. The department of war is the Department of Defense. Our job is to try to prevent [wars].”

Watch the morning session at <https://bit.ly/FY26Morning> and the afternoon session at <https://bit.ly/FY26Afternoon>.

On May 21, Rubio returned to the Hill, spending the afternoon testifying before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on “FY26 State Department Posture: Protecting American Interests.”

In opening remarks, Representative Brian Mast (R-Fla.) said he looked forward to working with the Secretary to make sure that “every single dollar and diplomat that we authorize and send into the field puts America first.”

Rep. Tim Burchett (R-Tenn.) asked how Rubio plans to ensure “that the future of foreign assistance funding decisions are aligned with the president and are not co-opted or watered down by entrenched Foreign Service bureaucrats.”

The Secretary said: “I want to be fair here. I have found ... the professional Foreign Service officers ... to be very competent, professional, wanting to deliver

Heard on the Hill



The Right Thing to Do

When we are helping impoverished communities and nations treat diseases, when we are feeding starving children in conflict zones, and when we help ensure villages have drinkable water, we are using and gaining soft power. We do these things because they are the right thing to do. We also do these things because they are in our own interest. They build influence, a global standard, and strengthen our national security. When we retreat from the global stage, China and Russia fill in the gaps, and the world becomes a more dangerous place for Americans.

—Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), during a House Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs hearing on May 21.

Rapid Pace of Restructuring

I support your efforts, Mr. Secretary, to reorganize and streamline department operations, and better integrate programs with our diplomatic and strategic objectives. I'll note that the rapid pace of certain restructuring has caused some concerns and may require adjustments. Reforms must ensure meritorious programs are not lost, while also improving the benefits that they deliver. We recognize that being accountable and effective are not binary choices, and we should ensure that deployed instruments of power support our interests, deter our enemies, and deepen our strength on the world stage.

—Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), during a House Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs hearing on May 21.

Soft Power as National Security

If we eliminate some of these programs that create stability over there, the chaos will surely come here.

—Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), during a Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs hearing on May 20.

Fewer Soldiers in Body Bags

Investing in soft power means less spending on weapons of war and fewer brave soldiers coming home in body bags. USAID, our nation's premier development agency, has been central to this strategy. It has helped prevent violent extremism through education, stop deadly pandemics before they reach our shores, and delivered American-grown food to the world's most desperate corners.

—Rep. Lois Frankel (D-Fla.), during a House Subcommittee on National Security, State, and Related Programs hearing on May 21.

Throwing Out Programs

The concern is the wholesale throwing out of the foreign assistance programs for the 0.3 percent of grants that we agree maybe should never have been made.

—Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), during a Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs hearing on May 20.

A Kingdom of Ash

Mr. Secretary, I've known you for a while, and I respected very much Senator Rubio, even when we disagreed. ... Secretary Rubio is doing precisely what Senator Rubio feared: withholding congressionally appropriated funds, stonewalling oversight, and acting as if laws passed by this body are optional. Secretary Rubio has presided over the dismantling and destruction of everything Senator Rubio once defended. So, although you may be the Secretary of State, the acting head of USAID, the national security adviser, the archivist of America, the empire you have stumbled upon is not one of influence—it is a kingdom of ash. So I ask: Was it worth it?

—Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.), during a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on May 21.

on the mission, and to the extent they're frustrated, in many cases, it's that they feel impeded by bureaucracy, or by layers and layers of bureaucracy. People don't join the Foreign Service to get rich. They

know they're doing it for service, and it's rewarding. ... We can't do the work at the State Department without our professional Foreign Service officers."

Watch the full hearing at <https://bit.ly/>

FY26-full and the second May 21 budget hearing with the House Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs at <https://bit.ly/May-21-hearing>.

New Travel Ban Limits Entry from 19 Countries

On June 4, President Donald Trump issued a new proclamation restricting the entry of foreign nationals from 19 countries, citing national security and public safety concerns.

The order, building on Executive Order 14161, suspends entry for nationals of 12 countries—including Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen—and imposes partial restrictions on seven others, including Cuba, Laos, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela.

The administration cited deficiencies in identity management, information sharing, and visa overstay rates as key factors behind the restrictions. The State Department will coordinate with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies to review and update the list every 180 days.

As we go to press, implementation of the order and possible diplomatic responses are still unfolding.

Student Visas—Vetting Intensifying

In early June, U.S. embassies and consulates were ordered to pause scheduling new student and exchange visitor visa appointments while the Trump administration expands its vetting of applicants' social media activity, a policy shift first reported by *Politico* and confirmed by a U.S. official to the Associated Press.

Although previously scheduled interviews will proceed, the pause affects new appointments as consular officers prepare for expanded review protocols.

The expanded vetting specifically targets foreign students and academic institutions that have recently been much in the news.

On May 30, 2025, *Politico* reported that the State Department, under Rubio's direc-

Contemporary Quote

ee The bludgeoning of PEPFAR and USAID, one of the most eloquent expressions of American values ever created, might be America's most spectacular act of self-sabotage in generations. U.S. development assistance had its flaws, as its recipients often pointed out, but it was as close to poetry as policy gets. ”

—U2 singer Bono in a March 15 New York Times article titled “Musk Said No One Has Died Since Aid Was Cut. That Isn't True.”

tion, issued a cable ordering consular officers to immediately begin comprehensive online screenings of all nonimmigrant visa applicants affiliated with Harvard University. The new policy applies not only to prospective students but also to faculty, researchers, staff, and guest speakers.

The cable ordered a review of applicants' online presence for anti-Semitic content, adding that the Harvard review will serve as a “pilot for expanded screening and vetting of visa applicants” that is expected to extend to other universities.

According to the cable obtained by *Politico*, consular officers have been instructed to consider limited or private social media profiles as potential signs of evasiveness, allowing fraud prevention units to request applicants make their accounts public for further scrutiny.

The federal government has stripped Harvard of billions in research funding and temporarily suspended its ability to enroll international students, though that suspension was blocked by a federal judge. Instructions to the field on how and whether to implement new rules have been changing rapidly.

The administration has also targeted other academic communities. On May 28, Secretary Rubio stated that the administration would “aggressively revoke” visas of Chinese nationals connected to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in sensitive fields in the United States.

More than a million international students enrolled in U.S. institutions for the 2023-2024 academic year. Enrollment has already declined 11 percent over the past year, according to *TIME*, and experts suggest that the latest policies could further discourage qualified foreign applicants.

Rigas Confirmed as Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources

Michael J. Rigas was sworn in as deputy secretary of State for management and resources by Secretary of State Marco Rubio on May 29.

A Boston native, Rigas brings more than 30 years of experience in both the private and public sectors. He served as an associate administrator, senior adviser, and deputy administrator for the General Services Administration during the George W. Bush administration.

He served in the previous Trump administration as deputy director and acting director of the Office of Personnel Management from 2018 to 2021 as well as acting deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget and acting Federal Chief Information Officer of the U.S.

Prior to that, he was chief of staff at the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and earlier worked in Republican politics and at the Heritage Foundation.

He joined the America First Policy Institute as director of the organization's America First Transition Project in 2022, a project devoted to, in his words, "ensuring a bigger, more qualified, better trained, and loyal team to take control away from the administrative state on day one."

Deputy Secretary Rigas was confirmed by the Senate on May 14. In a message to staff on May 27, he expressed his commitment to public service and his appreciation for the work of State Department personnel.

Dismantling of USAGM Continues

The Trump administration's ongoing effort to dismantle the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), including Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), has prompted new appeals from lawmakers concerned about the safety of journalists from authoritarian countries.

On May 27, Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), both members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sent joint letters to Secretary Rubio and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem urging action to safeguard these journalists, *Axios* reported. They warned that terminating the employment of USAGM-affiliated personnel could result in their forced return to countries where they face potential persecution and imprisonment.

For decades, bipartisan support sustained USAGM's work to deliver independent news to audiences in developing and autocratic nations. Attempts to dismantle these broadcasting services during Trump's first term largely failed in court, but during the second Trump administration, the efforts have esca-

50 Years Ago

Political Appointments and the Foreign Service

A munificent political contribution does not qualify a person for the arduous diplomatic tasks of an ambassador any more than it qualifies him for a military command as a General or Admiral. The White House politicians should cease degrading the career diplomatic service by appointing political ambassadors.

—Letter to the editor by retired FSO Norman J. Bentley in the August 1975 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

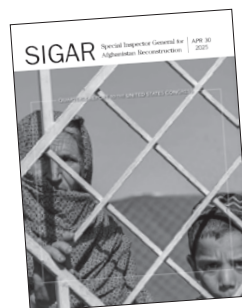


lated. This year the firing of hundreds of employees at USAGM networks has triggered a wave of lawsuits with mixed results so far.

A federal appellate court recently declined to intervene after temporarily pausing a ruling requiring the administration to reinstate workers. While the government reversed its termination of an RFE/RL grant, financial disputes forced the outlet to lay off most of its staff.

On June 3, USAGM submitted a congressional notification on personnel reductions, which would retain only about 80 positions agencywide. The anticipated layoffs follow Trump's March 14 executive order on "Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy" directing the elimination of USAGM "to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law."

USAGM Senior Adviser Kari Lake has overseen limited operations to maintain statutory requirements and announced in May that VOA would receive content from One America News Network, a far-right outlet known for promoting conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 and the 2020 election.



SIGAR Reports Termination of U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan

In its April 2025 quarterly report, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) detailed the near-total suspension of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan following a Trump administration review of foreign aid.

Under an executive order issued in January, USAID terminated more than \$1 billion in programs, retaining only two awards supporting Afghan students abroad. Humanitarian funding was also significantly reduced, including cuts to emergency food assistance and health care.

The reductions have forced widespread closure of health facilities and nutrition sites, with United Nations agencies warning that millions of Afghans could lose access to critical services. The World Food Program described the funding cuts as potentially catastrophic for vulnerable populations.

The report also highlights ongoing security concerns. ISIS-K remains the most significant external terrorist threat, while the Taliban continue to shelter al-Qaida affiliates and support groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Site of the Month: Devex



This month, we spotlight Devex, a leading platform for global development professionals. Serving as a hub for international development, global health, humanitarian, and sustainability work, Devex connects a worldwide community of experts, organizations, and donors with the latest news, funding opportunities, and career resources.

The site offers a blend of journalism, business intelligence, and a searchable database of projects and tenders. Users can stay informed on pressing global issues, follow trends in development financing, and access tailored career advice and job listings across the nonprofit, government, and private sectors.

Recent reporting on Devex has covered major shifts in U.S. foreign assistance policy, including the dismantling of USAID. Read more at www.devex.com.

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

The Taliban formally declared the 2020 Doha Agreement void in February and have continued consolidating power under strict sharia law.

Meanwhile, thousands of Afghan refugees face deportation from Pakistan, while the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program remains suspended under a separate executive order.

SIGAR, whose oversight mandate is set to end in early 2026, continues to monitor remaining obligations and investigations.

Senate Resolution Marks Foreign Service Day

On May 19, Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), co-founders of the bipartisan Senate Foreign Service Caucus, introduced a resolution recognizing May 2, 2025, as Foreign Service Day.

“America’s Foreign Service officers are tasked with promoting America’s interests, strengthening national security, and assisting U.S. citizens in the far corners of the globe, often with little fanfare or recognition,” said Sen. Sullivan.

“The work they do is essential to our national security and our standing on the world stage, and we are deeply grateful

for the sacrifice they and their families make,” Sen. Van Hollen added.

The Foreign Service Caucus, established in 2017, has worked to advance legislation supporting Foreign Service personnel and families, including the Foreign Service Families Act, which became law through the FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act.

Historical Advisory Committee Members Dismissed

In late April, President Trump dismissed all nine members of the State Department’s Historical Advisory Committee (HAC), which oversees the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series: the official historical record of U.S. foreign policy since 1861.

In a June 3 interview with NPR, now-former committee chair Professor James Goldgeier described the HAC’s work as essential for government transparency, noting that FRUS volumes publicly acknowledge sensitive historical covert actions, such as U.S. involvement in the 1973 overthrow of Chilean leader Salvador Allende.

“For a democracy, being transparent and accountable is hugely important,”

Goldgeier told NPR. “It’s a way ... to counter conspiracy theories and disinformation.”

The firings follow Trump’s broader push to reshape historical narratives in government institutions. In a March executive order, the president called for “restoring truth and sanity to American history” and criticized what he called historical revisionism that fosters “a sense of national shame.”

Critics warn that disbanding the congressionally mandated HAC risks undermining the nonpartisan oversight of official U.S. diplomatic history.

The State Department has stated that “there is a plan in place to maintain the committee,” though as of early June, all HAC positions remained vacant.

Analytic Outreach Program Shuttered

The State Department’s Office of Analytic Outreach, which connected government analysts with outside experts, has been closed as part of the Trump administration’s ongoing reorganization of the department. The office, housed within the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, held its final event on May 22, according to an internal email obtained by *The Guardian*.

The Office of Analytic Outreach has served as a bridge between government decision-makers and external experts from academia, think tanks, and research institutions.

Afrikaners Welcomed to U.S.

On May 12, a chartered plane carrying 59 white South Africans selected to settle in the U.S. as refugees through expedited processing arrived at Washington Dulles International Airport. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau greeted the group at the airport. He told assembled

reporters that they were selected to immigrate to the U.S. in part because they would be able to “easily assimilate” into the country.

The arrivals are part of a Trump administration program aimed at Afrikaners claiming to be victims of racial discrimination. The program follows lobbying by South African groups such as AfriForum, whose leaders visited Washington in 2018 to promote claims that white farmers were being targeted. Their message gained traction after coverage by Fox News, which prompted Trump to order a review of land seizures and violence in South Africa.

The issue resurfaced during South African President Cyril Ramaphosa’s May 21 visit to the White House. Trump presented Ramaphosa with video footage and documents he claimed proved anti-white violence. (Reuters and other outlets found that some of the images depicted scenes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, not South Africa.)

Ramaphosa responded that this was not government policy, that crime in South Africa affects all racial groups, and that his government opposes such rhetoric. “We have a multiparty democracy in South Africa that allows people to express themselves,” he said.

At the same time, the administration announced on May 12 that Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for thousands of Afghan nationals would be revoked, citing an “improved security situation.” Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem stated that conditions no longer met TPS criteria. Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas) urged caution, citing the Taliban’s known targeting of Afghans who supported U.S. operations. ■

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko, Lisa Heller, and Donna Gorman.

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Reimagining the Foreign Service EER

BY JASON RUBIN

The State Department's employee evaluation report (EER) fails to achieve two key objectives of any effective performance evaluation system: identifying candidates for promotion and providing constructive feedback to employees. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) is quickly undermining what little value our narrative-focused format provides, as the technology turns even benign accomplishments into compelling texts that algorithmically maximize scoring rubrics.

It is past time to imagine a more quantitative framework that reduces reliance on employee-written narratives, combats rating inflation through a weighted scoring system, and emphasizes core competencies over circumstantial accounts of achievements.

Recent calls from leadership to reform the department's recruiting, performance, and retention standards present a unique opportunity to design an evaluation system that fosters real leadership, enhances accountability, and recognizes employee potential.

Evaluating a Memoir

We often joke that the EER process is little more than a "writing contest," but that's a remarkably accurate description. Even in its ideal form, where supervisors determine the content for the rater and

reviewer sections, the narratives still frequently fail to distinguish candidates for promotion and provide zero constructive feedback to employees.

Problem 1: Failure to distinguish between candidates. Lacking discrete performance measures or context of an employee's relative performance, promotion boards must intuit how an employee's character, interpersonal skills, and intellect compare to peers based on wildly differing personal accounts. It goes beyond comparing apples to oranges: It's as if the board is comparing each fruit's taste and appearance based solely on the fruit seller's written account.

Because the department has identified core precepts that FSOs should demonstrate, we should skip the obfuscation step and simply rate each employee directly against those criteria.

This would not only eliminate the self-aggrandizing narratives that paint every FSO as a savior of American interests but would also force supervisors to take ownership of observing, mentoring, and shaping their employees' work—areas where too many of our leaders fall short.

Problem 2: Failure to provide meaningful feedback. The current narratives, often written by rated employees themselves, undermine a leader's ability (and responsibility) to provide constructive and actionable feedback to subordinates.

To avoid hurt feelings, we accept wildly exaggerated descriptions of accomplishments that paint even poor performers as heroes. This meaningless flattery diminishes the accomplishments of our top employees and, more importantly, fails to address problematic (yet often correctable) performance issues.

Instead of giving everyone a participation trophy and lauding every new spreadsheet as a "revolutionary tracking system," we should force leaders to provide honest and constructive feedback to employees on their strengths and weaknesses.

Problem 3: The emerging AI challenge. One might argue that with its rapid adoption, AI would level the playing field for mediocre writers who struggle to make their EERs stand out, but it will likely just shift the advantage from prolific writers to technically savvy prompt engineers who can optimize content for grading rubrics.

Regardless, as AI capabilities inevitably improve, promotion boards will find it even harder to meaningfully distinguish between candidates.

The Solution: A Quantitative Evaluation Framework

A proven solution to our dysfunctional EER already exists. Facing similar irrelevance of its performance evaluation system, the U.S. Marine Corps completely revamped its rating system in 1999, eliminating rampant grade inflation and bringing accountability to rating and reviewing officers.

Marines initially resisted the dramatic overhaul, doubting its ability to change



Jason Rubin is a management-coned FSO who has served in consular, management, and economic positions in Guangzhou, Yaoundé, and Beijing. He served 21 years in the Marine Corps prior to joining the Foreign Service in 2016. The views expressed in this article are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the Department of State.

Figure 1: Sample of a Scoring Block

JUDGMENT: The discretionary aspect of decision-making. Draws on core values, knowledge, and personal experience to make wise choices. Comprehends the consequences of contemplated courses of action. Effectively manages resources. Utilizes internal controls to prevent waste, fraud, and mismanagement. Takes action to mitigate risks.						
ADV	Majority of judgments are measured, circumspect, relevant, and correct.		Decisions are consistent and uniformly correct, tempered by consideration of their consequences. Able to identify, isolate, and assess relevant factors in the decision-making process. Opinions sought by others. Subordinates personal interests in favor of impartiality.		Decisions reflect exceptional insight and wisdom beyond the employee's experience. Counsel sought by all; often an arbiter. Consistent, superior judgment inspires the confidence of seniors.	
A □	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	6 □
JUSTIFICATION:						

Example of a rater scoring block for a precept element. "A" indicates adverse performance. A score of 1 represents the baseline for a high-functioning employee, followed by gradually increasing levels of performance. The criteria will guide raters toward an appropriate score and reduce grade inflation. Employees should meet all criteria in the example to achieve the score, so a grade of 6 would indicate exceeding all of grade 5 criteria, something akin to the top 0.01 percent of all peers in the department. Justification is required only for adverse or exceptionally high ratings. (Adapted from the U.S. Marine Corps performance evaluation form and existing State Department precept definitions.)

decades of entrenched attitudes and fearing the loss of their "pristine" evaluation records. However, it quickly reset the evaluation baseline and is now universally accepted as improving the fairness and accuracy of evaluations.

The department can easily adapt a similar framework to the unique demands of the Foreign Service.

Abandon the autobiography, embrace quantitative scoring. The new EER would adopt a discrete scoring system, organized by core precepts and key competency areas.

The form eliminates personal narratives, instead providing abbreviated comment sections to justify certain assessments. For each precept, raters only need to include justification text when assigning "adverse" or exceptionally high scores (4 or above).

Reviewers then rank staff against peers across the entire department to assess their suitability for promotion. This would standardize evaluation criteria, allowing boards to compare apples to apples and to focus promotion selection on com-

petencies that demonstrate an ability to perform at the next level.

It would also shift evaluation responsibility from the individual employee to the supervisor, forcing leaders to make objective assessments and acknowledge those best suited for promotion.

This would significantly reduce the writing required to prepare reports, avoiding the massive dip in productivity that occurs every spring while everyone is busy crafting complex narratives.

Establish a high-performance baseline. The design of the rating system recognizes that Foreign Service personnel are by and large highly qualified professionals. The descriptors for a baseline score of 1 match the performance of a dedicated, talented, and competent employee—what one might consider a B+ student.

By setting a high baseline and including descriptions of truly exceptional performance, we can push raters away from grade inflation so only the best qualified candidates stand out. This low-score weighting is further reinforced by

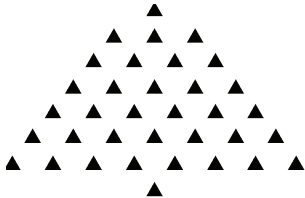
the third, and perhaps most important, element.

Weight scoring. What ties this system together is its pairing with a "grading curve" for each rater and reviewer to compensate for individual grading biases. Promotion boards would see a weighted relative value for each score based on the rater/reviewer's entire scoring history for a peer cohort.

For example: Supervisor A tends to inflate scores and rates FS-4 Jones as a 5 in leadership. Supervisor B tends to skew scores lower, rating FS-4 Smith as a 3 in leadership. If Supervisor A's historical average for all FS-4s is 4.5 and Supervisor B's historical average is 1.5, the weighted score shown to promotion boards would correctly indicate Smith's higher relative leadership score.

The Marine Corps' experience with this weighted system revealed that it not only normalized rating variances but also nudged raters/reviewers to score lower on the scale to preserve scoring space for true top performers. Combined with the high baseline, this encourages honest

Figure 2: Sample Reviewer Section

G. REVIEWING OFFICER ASSESSMENT					
COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT Provide a comparative assessment by selecting the appropriate group that represents the officer's performance and potential within the department. In selecting the comparison, consider all officers of this rank whose professional abilities are known to you personally.	DESCRIPTION			COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT 	
	The eminently qualified officer				
	One of the few exceptionally qualified officers				
	One of the many highly qualified professionals who form the majority of this rank				
	A qualified officer				
	Unsatisfactory				
PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant Problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Progressing	<input type="checkbox"/> Promotable	<input type="checkbox"/> Must Promote	<input type="checkbox"/> Promote Early
REVIEWING OFFICER COMMENTS: Amplify your comparative assessment mark; evaluate potential for continued professional development and promotion.					

An example of a reviewer section. The reviewer ranks the employee among all peers in the department by selecting the most appropriate description block. The “tree diagram” visually depicts the workforce distribution for each ranking option, nudging reviewers to assign more employees in the lower (yet highly qualified) blocks. The reviewer also assesses the employee’s suitability for promotion. (Adapted from two military branch forms.)

assessment while avoiding “hurt feelings” for leaders who still struggle with direct constructive feedback.

Structural Elements of the New System

While the department could copy and paste existing precepts into this proposed system, we have an opportunity to go one step further and refine our focus on an employee’s demonstrated characteristics and impact.

If framed properly, these criteria would be equally relevant to officers of all ranks, further eliminating wasted effort narrating the nuanced context of every position in the department.

Here (see box) is one vision of a framework that evaluates across 12 elements of four core precepts.

While these precepts represent just one view of evaluation criteria, our current EER’s failure to capture some of these characteristics indicates major gaps in how we think about what makes a quality leader and what employees need to succeed at higher levels.

Implementation Mechanics

A simplified rater scoring process. Accepting that the vast majority of employees perform their jobs well, scores between 1 and 3 do not require justification. Raters only need to write justification text for adverse scores or values above 3.

Instead of wasting effort building context and recounting a year’s worth of accomplishments in narrative form, these short text blocks substantiate why the employee’s performance falls outside the expected range (see Figure 1).

Reviewer’s verification and ranking. The reviewer section focuses on validating the rater’s assessment, serving as an accountability check against grade inflation from a more experienced leader with a broader perspective on organizational norms.

The reviewer also directly ranks the employee’s performance against department peers. A weighted formula is also applied here to correct raw rankings so they mirror the expected workforce distribution, with most employees in the mid-range and very few “unsatisfactory” and “eminently qualified” outliers (see Figure 2).

Accounting for small sample sizes. A combination of statistical adjustments, procedural safeguards, and training would be used to compensate for raters with limited rating histories. These tools are critical during the initial implementation phase when all raters/reviewers lack a historical record. Statistical tools like “shrinkage estimation” or Bayesian modeling can bias

A Possible Framework

1. Mission Accomplishment
Performance
Substantive and technical expertise
Initiative

2. Leadership
Leading others
Developing others
Effectiveness under stress

3. Management
Organizing projects and managing tasks
Accountability and integrity
Resource optimization
Intellect and wisdom

4. Communication
Decision-making ability
Judgment

new raters' scores to departmentwide means, gradually phasing out as a rater's sample size grows.

Promotion boards would see a rater/reviewer's record size, relative rankings, and cohort norms, helping them base promotion decisions on a comprehensive picture.

The reviewer's validation of a rater's score forces them to work directly with raters to align scores with organizational norms.

Most important, the department would provide practical training to reviewers, raters, promotion board members, and rated employees on grade expectations and organizational norms.

Promotion board review. The quantitative rating system is not designed to reduce promotion decisions to blindly selecting candidates with the highest "GPAs." Just like the Marine Corps' system,

the promotion board's subjective review of the "whole employee" remains critical to promoting the best candidates.

While job performance is integral to promotion decisions, boards should also consider breadth of experience, career progression, and job responsibilities over time.

Time for Change Is Now

Change is difficult, especially in an entrenched bureaucracy as large and old as the Department of State. However, organizations unwilling to adapt to real-world changes or reflect on their own shortfalls are doomed to stagnate and fail.

I have yet to meet an FSO of any rank who thought our EER system was a fair and accurate assessment of performance or potential—even among those who have clearly benefited from it. Facing emerging

technologies like AI and a major restructuring of how we conduct diplomacy, we must change how we recruit, promote, and retain our employees.

The proposed reforms would empower leaders to honestly evaluate and develop their subordinates, enable promotion boards to identify top performers across all posts and positions, and address the real challenges AI presents in undermining our already negligibly useful self-narrative framework.

While no perfect evaluation system exists, we can—and must—do better. By adopting a more quantitative framework, the department will create a fairer, more effective, resilient system that recognizes exceptional talent and puts leaders in a position to best lead and develop their staff. ■



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Putting America First by Stopping Outbreaks at Their Source

U.S. investment in global health security doesn't just save lives. Preventing diseases from entering our borders costs far less than responding to them when they come.

BY NIDHI BOURI

With an average of 45,000 flights taking off and landing in the U.S. each day, there are dozens of diseases—from dengue to novel influenza and mpox—that could have easily hit our shores. But because of American investments in global health security (namely, in efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to health threats around the world), these outbreaks were contained before they ever had a chance of coming to the U.S.

Since 2015, the U.S. government has invested more than \$2 billion in partnership with other countries to build national health security capacities that address deadly diseases. This includes strengthening disease surveillance and laboratory capacity, training health workers on how to identify and handle potential cases, and working with the agriculture sector to minimize the spillover of diseases from animals to humans.

To some, \$2 billion—even spread across a decade—probably sounds like a lot of money. The reality? Over 10 years and 165 million American taxpayers, these expenditures amount to about \$1.21 annually per taxpayer. What does that \$1.21 a year buy every American? This small investment stops disease outbreaks at their source, preventing illness and deaths, mitigating strain on health systems, reducing economic risks, and stopping deadly diseases from coming to the United States.

This is important because when outbreaks do happen, they come with a major cost. Americans already face health



Nidhi Bouri is the former deputy assistant administrator for global health at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where she oversaw the agency's work in global health security and health emergencies. She served on the National

Security Council staff from 2021 to 2023. Bouri has led response efforts to some of the largest and most deadly outbreaks, including COVID-19, Ebola, Marburg, and mpox. She is founder and director of the new strategic communications group Stand Up for AID.



Nidhi Bouri (front left) and a team from USAID tour a private mpox treatment facility, run by Médecins Sans Frontières, in Bujumbura, October 2024.

threats within our borders, like the current measles and bird flu outbreaks affecting our communities. An outbreak of measles in Washington state from 2018 to 2019 cost \$3.14 million, or \$47,479 per case. The ongoing bird flu outbreak has already cost \$1.4 billion. By the end of 2023, COVID-19 had cost the U.S. nearly \$14 trillion in economic losses.

Preventing additional diseases from entering U.S. borders costs less than responding to them when they come.

A Case Study: Investments in Ebola Response

In December 2013, Ebola began circulating in Guinea. At the time, Guinea did not have the capacity to detect and address diseases, and the U.S. government didn't have any health security investments in West Africa. By the time an Ebola outbreak was declared in March 2014, it had spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone, then to other countries in West Africa and beyond. In September 2014, a man traveled from Liberia to Texas. He sought medical attention for a fever and abdominal pain but was sent home. Two days later, he was diagnosed with Ebola, and it became clear he had been incorrectly diagnosed two days prior. Two clinicians contracted Ebola while treating him. One took a flight the day before showing symptoms, causing panic and resulting in financial costs to trace contacts.

Just like health systems thousands of miles away, our health system was not ready to manage Ebola cases. It cost the hospital in Dallas \$500,000 to treat that single case of Ebola, not including costs to the overall health system, and the original patient

ultimately died. Around the same time, an American physician treating Ebola patients in West Africa returned to New York, where he was diagnosed with and treated for Ebola. It cost the New York City Health Department \$4.3 million in response measures. The patient in New York and two clinicians in Dallas all recovered. Each hospital incurred significant financial costs to treat them, while also having to triage care of other patients.

At the time, the world lacked a viable Ebola vaccine, infections among health care professionals created workforce shortages, and health systems collapsed. By the time the West Africa Ebola outbreak ended in 2016, more than 11,300 people had died, and reduced commerce, travel, and trade had resulted in an estimated \$53 billion in economic losses globally. Following these losses, Congress provided a historic long-term investment to ensure that the U.S. never flew blind again. This funding created new global health security programs at USAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which, coupled with the Global Health Security Agenda, became signature initiatives for the Obama and Trump administrations alike and have successfully stopped or contained multiple outbreaks before they reached American shores.

In 2018 I deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to help lead the U.S. government's response to an Ebola outbreak there. The virus circulated for at least four months before it was detected, largely due to its spread in the conflict-stricken eastern part of the country. Recalling the costs



USAID/BURUNDI MISSION

The author (front center) with USAID colleagues Christine Jost (left) and Arlette Kamariza (right) visit a World Health Organization mpox testing site supported by USAID in Bujumbura.

to our health care system just a few years earlier and drawing on the lessons learned during the West Africa response, we rapidly mobilized to help contain the new Ebola outbreak. In partnership with the Congolese government, USAID trained community health workers to recognize and handle symptoms of the disease, while building trust with communities.

USAID and CDC worked together to improve lab testing, surveillance, and reporting, and distributed a new Ebola vaccine. CDC brought its expertise in epidemiology to support and train the DRC's Ministry of Health, while the National Institutes of Health (NIH) supported clinical trials and the State Department led diplomatic efforts to navigate security challenges. In June 2020, as COVID-19 spread, the Ebola outbreak, the largest in DRC's history, finally ended. The outbreak resulted in significant human capital loss (nearly 2,300 people died), as well as disruptions to the health care system, trade, and commerce in the DRC. Though still significant, the overall costs were not at the scale of the West Africa outbreak. No cases came to the U.S.

Leadership via Partnership

The U.S. government's investments to contain Ebola and strengthen the DRC health system's ability to handle health threats paid lasting dividends. Just two years later, when Ebola again hit eastern DRC, the virus was detected in 48 hours. Instead of thousands of deaths, there were five. And just like in 2018, no cases came to the U.S.

The story of Ebola outbreaks is one that demonstrates the promise of science, medicine, and public health. It's also a story

that illustrates the power of America's leadership model—one centered on partnerships.

This model was pioneered in 2016, following the West African Ebola outbreak, and cemented in the Trump administration's 2019 Global Health Security Strategy (GHSS). That strategy and the 2024 GHSS that updated it both reaffirm a U.S. commitment to assist 100 countries to be able to stop outbreaks at the source. The 2024 GHSS further reaffirmed the approach of leveraging partnerships and expertise across the federal government and evolving partnerships with countries to improve their readiness for health threats.

Specifically, the U.S. government committed to help 50 countries improve capabilities across critical health security areas, such as laboratory systems and surveillance. These 50 countries were identified through a consultative process across federal agencies and with U.S. embassies, considering factors such as analyses of country health systems, socioeconomic indicators, and connectivity to the U.S. including travel and trade linkages.

When a country becomes a global health security partner of the U.S. government, USAID and CDC work with counterparts in the partner government to select measurable targets in national health security plans. These targets inform what activities each agency invests in, so that U.S. support accelerates the ability of partner governments to achieve their priority targets. In the last few years, USAID and CDC teams began joint work plans at the country level—a detailed process that ensures no funding is duplicative and that it directly supports governments on a pathway to ownership, accountability, and sustainability.



USAID/BURUNDI MISSION

Nidhi Bouri (center, putting on gloves) joins USAID and CDC colleagues, alongside local hospital staff, to enter an mpox screening and testing site at a district hospital in Bujumbura, October 2024.

While this approach is built around having concrete ways to measure success, it has also strengthened a powerful tool for America that cannot be measured: trust. Through building relationships with other countries, U.S. diplomats and technical staff earn the trust of governments we aim to work with. That is why when a country's surveillance system shows something unusual, the first call their ministry of health makes is often to the CDC. It is why if an outbreak unfolds, and a country does not have the tools to get it under control, they will ask the U.S. for help.

Through these in-country partnerships, the U.S. gets early access to data and real-time information as diseases spread, informing how we prepare at home. And through the complementary, but distinctly different, strengths of experts across the State Department, CDC, NIH, USAID, Department of Defense, and other agencies, the U.S. government can mobilize quickly to stop diseases.

Twenty years ago, the government of Indonesia was reluctant to share information with the U.S. about avian influenza. Today, they are one of our strongest health security partners, inviting U.S. support for data analysis and partnership to promote antimicrobial stewardship. Ten years ago, Guinea's surveillance system could not detect Ebola. In 2021, in the midst of concurrently responding to COVID-19, Guinea detected and contained Ebola before it spread. Five years ago, the government of Nigeria needed support for health emergency management. But in 2023, when experiencing outbreaks of anthrax, the government exercised capabilities built with U.S. investment.

Nigeria activated national response mechanisms to coordinate efforts across the human and animal health sectors to reduce risks for further transmission.

Years of building relationships, working with nations as equals, and targeting investments to support their priorities have enabled America to be a partner of choice, stopped outbreaks before they crossed borders, and supported countries in taking ownership of their health security.

Maintain and Improve Health Security Capacity

As risk factors from globalization, climate change, and conflict increase, outbreaks, too, are on the rise. The Center for Global Development estimates there is a 47 to 57 percent probability that another pandemic will occur within the next 25 years. Even when health systems demonstrate they have the capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to health threats, they must *maintain* such capacities. Systems need to continuously evolve to address new threats and manage concurrent emergencies. If they don't, when the next pandemic hits, these systems will fail.

While institutions in the U.S. government may change, strategic functions and investments in research and public health capacities must continue. The U.S. government should prioritize these essential efforts going forward:

1. Continue measurable investments that accelerate country ownership. The U.S. government's approach to strengthening country capacities is working, and it should continue. By identifying targets within countries, and investing

in activities that support reaching those targets, the U.S. government is helping countries speed up and maintain core functions that mitigate hits to their health systems and ours. This approach of investing to support national plans allows governments to take accountability and ownership of how they ultimately maintain health security capacities in the future, strategically leveraging partnerships to fill tailored gaps.

2. Maintain robust technical expertise and diplomatic capacity across the federal workforce. Across federal agencies, the U.S. maintains world-renowned scientists, epidemiologists, logisticians, and emergency managers. While agencies go through restructuring or mergers, the U.S.'s ability to support countries in preventing and containing diseases, while also maintaining adequate readiness for our domestic health system, is centered on maintaining a well-equipped workforce. Ensuring technical experts and diplomats also maintain in-country presence across regions is critical to sustaining trust and reliability among partner governments.

3. Ensure robust U.S. government capabilities to support outbreak detection and response. In numerous outbreaks, the deployment of new tools, such as diagnostics and vaccines, significantly mitigate further transmission. These tools, often showcasing the ingenuity of American innovation and research, are critical to containing outbreaks and promoting partnerships with the American private sector. Similarly, the U.S. government has maintained global stockpiles of personal protective equipment, rostered public health and emergency response experts, and maintained accelerated grantmaking functions to rapidly respond to outbreaks when they occur. From research and development to deployment capabilities, it is in the interest of Americans for these investments to continue.

These efforts contain diseases before they come to the U.S., inform our own preparedness, and allow us to monitor and deploy tools to respond to health threats. Doing so makes the world a safer place and protects Americans at home and abroad. It helps us put America first. ■

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Why Continued U.S. Leadership on HIV Is Essential

The end of AIDS as a public health threat is within sight. Continued vigorous U.S. support is essential to reach that goal.

BY ANGELI ACHREKAR

For more than two decades, the United States has been the preeminent leader in the global response to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and America's critical partnerships with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United States has saved tens of millions of lives, enhanced global appreciation for U.S. leadership, and demonstrated the transformative power of American innovation and soft power on the global stage.

American leadership in the historic effort to end AIDS is not only a story of compassion—it is a matter of national security, economic interest, and strategic influence. In 2024 UNAIDS estimates that PEPFAR returned nearly \$20 in benefits for every \$1 invested in eastern and southern Africa, where PEPFAR has focused its work. U.S. investments through PEPFAR have also enhanced global health stability and security, increasing demographic growth and economic productivity in 55 of America's partners in low- and middle-income countries.



Angeli Achrekar, DrPH, is the deputy executive director for programmes at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UN assistant secretary general. Prior to joining UNAIDS, she served for more than 20 years in the U.S. government with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), including as acting U.S. global AIDS coordinator from 2020 to 2022.

Most significantly, we are now within reach of seeing the end of HIV as a public health threat by 2030. Even with continued support, this outcome is not guaranteed, but it is certain that withdrawing from these programs now will have devastating consequences.

Proven Results

UNAIDS is proud to work closely with the U.S. government on the global HIV response. While UNAIDS represents less than 1 percent of U.S. annual investments in the global HIV response, UNAIDS' unique country-level presence in PEPFAR-supported countries enables us to provide strategic, political, and technical support that strengthens PEPFAR's focus, delivery, and efficiency.

The data speak for themselves. Since the peak of the AIDS epidemic in 1995, new HIV infections worldwide have declined by 60 percent, and AIDS-related deaths by 69 percent. But in PEPFAR-supported countries, the impact is even more striking. From 2010 to 2023, new infections dropped by 52 percent—far above the global average of 39 percent. AIDS-related deaths fell by 59 percent in these countries, compared to 51 percent globally. These data reflect not just amazing progress but the invaluable impact of sustained U.S. leadership and engagement—across the whole of the U.S. government (e.g., State Department, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], Peace Corps, Department of Defense, Department of Treasury) and strategically with partner governments and communities.

Today, of the 31 million people around the world on HIV treatment, two-thirds receive life-saving treatment made possible by U.S. leadership through PEPFAR—more than 20 million individuals whose lives, communities, and countries have been transformed by U.S. support. This unprecedented scale-up of American-led HIV treatment has turned what was once considered an insurmountable health crisis into one of the greatest success stories in the history of global health.

Since its launch in 2003, PEPFAR has saved more than 26 million lives as documented in its annual reports to Congress. UNAIDS data and analysis confirm this figure. No other U.S. foreign assistance program has been able to deliver or document this number of lives saved. It has prevented economic and societal collapse in countries hardest hit by HIV, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. PEPFAR's bipartisan support from Congress—especially from important congressional leaders in foreign affairs and appropriations—has been critical to its

Since the peak of the AIDS epidemic in 1995, new HIV infections worldwide have declined by 60 percent, and AIDS-related deaths by 69 percent.

success in significantly reducing new HIV infections and deaths and strengthening health care systems.

A Turning Point

Today, the world is at an inflection point. For the first time in the 40-year history of the AIDS epidemic, the end of AIDS as a public health threat is within reach. At the same time, however, many Americans distrust foreign assistance, and the Trump administration is moving to curtail programs and outlays.

The HIV epidemic is dynamic—it either advances or recedes. UNAIDS data and modeling confirm that if the United States continues support for PEPFAR through 2029, even on a downward trajectory, the world can still reach the 2030 target to end AIDS. This would mark a consequential victory against AIDS that would also ensure America is safer and more secure.

A retreat from U.S. leadership at this juncture, however, would be catastrophic. UNAIDS estimates that the permanent discontinuation of PEPFAR treatment and prevention programs would result in 4 million additional AIDS-related deaths and 6 million new adult infections by 2029. The toll on children would be particularly devastating: up to a million new pediatric infections and nearly 500,000 child deaths from AIDS by 2030.

In contrast, continuing U.S. support ensures momentum toward self-reliance. PEPFAR partner countries are stepping up. In collaboration with UNAIDS, governments are developing HIV Response Sustainability Roadmaps to transition from foreign assistance to nationally financed and owned responses. Thirty-six countries are now implementing these road maps rapidly, underscoring a new era of shared responsibility.

American innovation is also helping lead the way. Long-acting HIV prevention tools—more than 95 percent effective—

UNAIDS estimates that the permanent discontinuation of PEPFAR treatment and prevention programs would result in 4 million additional AIDS-related deaths by 2029.

are changing the prevention landscape. Continued investment in HIV prevention ensures the rapid deployment of these game-changing technologies, halting new HIV infections and accelerating progress toward the end of AIDS.

As noted recently in Senate testimony by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the majority of the PEPFAR program is now back up and running. These programs and services, however, relate to components of PEPFAR that are covered under the “Emergency

Humanitarian Waiver” that was issued by Secretary Rubio on Jan. 28, 2025. The waiver does not cover the majority of PEPFAR’s HIV *prevention* programs, including pre-exposure prophylaxis, as well as support for community organizations, PEPFAR’s flagship program DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) for women and girls, and programs for orphans and vulnerable children.

Smart Policy

U.S. leadership in the global HIV response is one of the clearest examples of what American diplomacy, values, and strategic engagement can achieve. It is not only morally right—it is smart policy. PEPFAR strengthens America’s global standing, builds resilient partnerships, and promotes a safer, healthier, and more prosperous world.

The end of AIDS is possible by 2030. But it depends on continued bipartisan commitment, visionary leadership, and strategic investment. The world is watching—and the U.S. must continue to lead. ■




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From Atlanta to Côte d'Ivoire How the CDC Protects Americans Overseas

**A Q&A with Audrey Knutson
Luxenberg, CDC Côte d'Ivoire's
strategic information branch chief.**

Audrey Knutson Luxenberg is a public health adviser with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), serving since October 2020 as the strategic information branch chief in the Division of Global HIV and TB for CDC Côte d'Ivoire at U.S. Embassy Abidjan. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco from 2009 to 2011.



Everyone knows AFSA's six member agencies—State, USAID, FAS, FCS, APHIS, and USAGM—do much of their critical work at our embassies abroad. But not everyone knows that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has staff posted in 60 countries overseas working to safeguard Americans back at home. The *Journal* asked Audrey Knutson Luxenberg, a CDC expert currently assigned to Côte d'Ivoire, to tell us about the work she and her colleagues are doing to promote health and safety back home.

Luxenberg is a public health adviser with the CDC, serving since October 2020 as the strategic information branch chief in the Division of Global HIV and TB for Côte d'Ivoire at U.S. Embassy Abidjan. Prior to joining CDC, Luxenberg worked as a program analyst at Peace Corps headquarters and served as a youth development volunteer with the Peace Corps in Morocco from 2009 to 2011. She would like to thank Erin Sauber-Schatz and Laura Emmanuel of the CDC's Global Health program for their input as she worked to answer the questions below. Her answers have been lightly edited.

CDC's global staff often receive the first call from host country governments and learn about outbreaks before anyone else.

Foreign Service Journal: What is the role of typical CDC personnel at an embassy?

Audrey Knutson Luxenberg: CDC is the lead U.S. government agency dedicated to the health and safety of the American people and the lead technical global public health agency for the U.S. CDC works 24/7 worldwide to reduce morbidity and mortality and safeguard communities by addressing global health hazards that could threaten the United States and our interests.

The goal of CDC's global health work is to improve health outcomes and strengthen global health security by building the capacity of partner countries to detect diseases and stop health hazards. The earlier a disease threat is known, the sooner our response can begin to prevent spread to the United States and other countries.

CDC employs leadership, technical, and subject matter experts who serve in our overseas offices. These offices are led by country or regional directors dedicated to CDC's global mission: to protect people in the United States and around the world by preventing, detecting, and responding to disease threats—anytime and anywhere.

CDC's overseas offices implement our mission by:

- stopping health threats at their source before they spread to the United States and other countries;
- containing disruptive global disease outbreaks;
- using global data for disease prevention and mitigation programs in the United States and other countries; and
- saving lives and improving health globally.

Thanks to our extensive global presence and decades-long, government-to-government partnerships, CDC's global staff often receive the first call from host country governments and learn about outbreaks before anyone else. The Global Health Center (GHC)'s deep and long-term commitment to global health impact has saved millions of lives.

FSJ: Are CDC staff located at every U.S. embassy?

AKL: CDC has a network of country and regional offices in more than 60 countries. The number of CDC assignees per team



In November 2023, then State Department U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Senior Bureau Official for Global Health Security and Diplomacy Dr. John Nkengasong checks in on the CDC research station for Retrovirus Côte d'Ivoire (Retro-CI) in Abidjan, established in 1988 to address the HIV epidemic.

varies by location. In addition to our bilateral country offices, since 2020, CDC has established six regional offices, covering Eastern Europe/Central Asia, the Middle East/North Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, and East Asia/Pacific.

The two largest programs represented in our overseas offices involve global HIV/TB and global health security, but our country offices also include staff engaged in work focused on malaria, vaccine-preventable diseases, and more. CDC's global offices engage regularly with subject matter experts from CDC headquarters and coordinate closely with host governments and in-country partners to address health threats.

FSJ: What are the goals of the CDC at your post?

AKL: Our global health security goal is to be America's first line of defense against health threats that begin overseas and could potentially impact the United States. By preventing and containing outbreaks where they start, CDC makes Americans safer, reducing the risk of deadly diseases like measles, influenza, Ebola, TB, drug-resistant HIV, and other emerging threats from spreading into the U.S. We work toward this goal by improving our Ivorian partners' capacity to more quickly respond to health emergencies.

The goal of CDC Côte d'Ivoire's HIV & TB program is to support Côte d'Ivoire in achieving an HIV-free generation and in preventing the spread of TB among people living with HIV. We are working toward achieving 95-95-95 targets by 2030—this aims to ensure that 95 percent of people living with HIV know their status, that 95 percent of people who know their status are

on life-saving HIV treatment, and that 95 percent of people on treatment have a suppressed viral load. Maintaining viral suppression of HIV extends the lives of people living with HIV and prevents transmission to others, enabling HIV epidemic control.

We work closely with our Ivoirian counterparts through cooperative agreements with the Ministry of Health and other government partners, as well as with local and international organizations working in Côte d'Ivoire. The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supports life-saving HIV treatment for more than 300,000 Ivoirians at more than 500 clinics throughout Côte d'Ivoire.

FSJ: Any recent CDC victories at your post to share?

AKL: Côte d'Ivoire is making great progress toward the 95-95-95 targets. When I started supporting this CDC country office in 2018, Côte d'Ivoire was at 73-78-77, meaning that 73 percent of people living with HIV knew their status, 78 percent of those who knew their status were receiving HIV treatment, and 77 percent of people receiving treatment had reached viral suppression. These percentages have since increased to 82, 88, and 88 percent, respectively, as of 2023 estimates. The percentage of people aged 15 to 49 years who live with HIV in Côte d'Ivoire was at its highest at 7.4 percent in 1995 and has since dropped to 1.8 percent as of 2023 estimates, in large part because of PEPFAR's work to prevent and treat HIV.

CDC is supporting the Ministry of Health to conduct a national population-based HIV impact assessment (PHIA) in collaboration with the National Agency of Statistics and other partners. The survey is assessing key indicators such as HIV incidence, prevalence, viral load suppression, and risk behaviors.

My understanding from talking to Ivoirian colleagues is that HIV really felt like an ominous threat in the 1990s. According to a survey conducted seven years ago, only about 40 percent of adults living with HIV were virally suppressed. While we still have a long way to go, HIV is much more of a manageable issue now, and we expect that the most recent PHIA results will show improvement in these metrics. We will continue to use the survey results to guide Côte d'Ivoire in determining where remaining gaps can be addressed.

CDC also supported Côte d'Ivoire to conduct its first-ever "7-1-7 evaluation" to improve early and effective action to contain infectious disease outbreaks. The abbreviation, 7-1-7, stands for the goal of taking no more than seven days to detect a suspected infectious disease outbreak, one day to notify public health authorities to start an investigation, and seven days to complete an initial response. The evaluation measures how well the detec-

An estimated 7.8 million babies have been born HIV-free thanks to this uniquely American act of generosity.

tion and response system is working and helps countries determine what is working well and what needs to be improved.

In total, 58 human, animal, and environmental outbreaks occurring from 2021 to 2024 were included in the evaluation. In September 2024, bottlenecks and enablers for the 58 outbreaks were presented to the deputy director of health, representing the Ministry of Health, the National Institute of Public Hygiene executive board and staff; Regional Emergency Operations Center members; technical, financial, and implementing partners; and various partners from the human, animal, and environmental health sectors. Seeing the value of 7-1-7 for rapid performance improvement, Côte d'Ivoire has committed to beginning to use 7-1-7 for future outbreaks to continue to improve their global health security capacities.

FSJ: What do you wish Americans (ordinary Americans as well as FS members) knew about your work on behalf of the U.S. government overseas?

AKL: My experiences and conversations with Ivoirians highlight that the United States is a trusted partner. PEPFAR supports HIV testing and treatment that reaches farmers and laborers in Côte d'Ivoire who produce cocoa, cashews, coffee, and other products that Americans consume daily and that benefit our bilateral commerce.

Most Americans probably don't think about it now, but they have benefited from the continuous hard work to prevent and treat HIV—making HIV much less of a global issue than it was 20 years ago. In fact, PEPFAR has saved more than 26 million lives globally since its founding. An estimated 7.8 million babies have been born HIV-free thanks to this uniquely American act of generosity.

Even as cuts to global health funding make the news back home, our work in Côte d'Ivoire continues, making Americans safer by responding to emerging and infectious diseases around the world to stop their spread, before they reach American shores. ■



How to Prevent a Bacterial Pandemic in Central America

Antimicrobial resistance is not simply a medical problem; it is a diplomatic challenge.

BY JORGE A. HUETE-PÉREZ



Jorge A. Huete-Pérez is a professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service specializing in biotechnology and science policy. With a PhD in biological sciences, he has led research in molecular microbiology and served as founding president of the Academy of Sciences of Nicaragua. A former fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, he has expertise that extends to international research collaborations and science diplomacy, fostering cooperation in science, technology, and innovation.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has emerged as a global health crisis that threatens to reverse decades of medical progress. While COVID-19 highlighted viral threats, history demonstrates that bacterial pandemics have been devastating, and rising AMR now poses a silent crisis that could surpass viral outbreaks as treatments fail.

In Latin America, the burden of AMR is particularly severe, with projected mortality rates rising sharply by mid-century. Central America, a subregion with fragile health systems and inconsistent regulations, has experienced an alarming surge in antibiotic consumption. Between 2016 and 2023, the subregion became one of the fastest-growing consumers of antibiotics among upper-middle-income countries. This trend raises urgent concerns about overprescription, self-medication, and the proliferation of drug-resistant infections.

In the following, I propose a novel approach to the crisis, one that views AMR as a shared diplomatic challenge rather than simply a medical problem. This approach positions health diplomacy as the cornerstone of a regional AMR strategy. Fortunately, the Central American Integration System (SICA) offers an established framework through which to address this critical

health security threat that transcends national borders. But implementation of an effective regional AMR mitigation capability will depend on vigorous health diplomacy, where science meets foreign policy.

The time to act is now—before AMR renders essential medicines ineffective, overwhelms already strained health care systems, and deepens socioeconomic instability in a crisis that could have been prevented through decisive cooperation. A unified AMR strategy based in SICA will strengthen cross-border cooperation and policy alignment, positioning the region as a global leader in health security.

A Paradigm Shift

The proposed “Regional AMR Strategy” is a paradigm shift. Current AMR mitigation efforts in Central America remain fragmented: Surveillance is inconsistent, policies are uncoordinated, and cross-border collaboration is minimal. Immediate steps should include establishing a regional coordination mechanism and developing a comprehensive action plan through health diplomacy.

Establishing systematic mechanisms for joint research initiatives, harmonized policy development, and coordinated surveillance programs across SICA member states Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic will cement the coordination.

Unlike previous regional health efforts, this strategy deliberately integrates antimicrobial stewardship (i.e., actions to prevent, detect, and respond to AMR) into existing frameworks while, at the same time, accounting for the unique political complexities of the isthmus. To ensure effective implementation, the region’s diplomats and development professionals should actively support SICA, using their expertise to facilitate cross-border collaboration and secure resources for this critical initiative.

Despite lagging in formal health diplomacy compared to other parts of Latin America, recent advances in Costa Rica and Panama provide a foundation for this initiative. Both countries are active participants in the rapidly growing science diplomacy landscape of Latin America, employing strategies to better connect their scientific and foreign policy agendas.

Through strategic partnerships and focused health diplomacy, the subregion can overcome political and institutional barriers to effective AMR control. Shifting from ad-hoc collaborations to structured governance will enhance the management of antimicrobials and at the same time serve as a replicable model for other regions facing similar challenges.

COVID-19 accelerated resistance by overwhelming hospitals, reversing stewardship progress, and increasing unregulated antibiotic use.

The Escalating AMR Crisis

Despite growing awareness of AMR as a major public health threat, regional efforts remain insufficient. Several practices continue to fuel resistance throughout Central America. Unregulated antibiotic sales, self-medication, and widespread use in livestock fuel resistance, while weak antimicrobial stewardship programs allow these practices to persist. While Costa Rica has undertaken strong stewardship efforts, resource shortages and poor infection control exacerbate health care vulnerabilities in many other countries.

The evidence is clear. High AMR-related mortality rates, increasing carbapenemase-producing bacteria, and a 2021 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) alert on emerging resistant pathogens signal a worsening crisis. COVID-19 accelerated resistance by overwhelming hospitals, reversing stewardship progress, and increasing unregulated antibiotic use. Notably, in Nicaragua and Honduras, mass ivermectin distribution was carried out despite a lack of scientific support. Meanwhile, limited research and development (R&D) capacity throughout Central America creates additional challenges.

Political instability, particularly in Nicaragua, has further eroded scientific institutions, weakening evidence-based policy-making and regional collaboration. The closure of the Molecular Biology Center at the University of Central America in Managua, an important hub for AMR and COVID-19 research, in August 2023 has been a significant setback. Even Costa Rica’s selective engagement in regional cooperation, prioritizing economic cooperation and creating obstacles for fully unified initiatives, poses challenges for an effective approach under SICA.

The AMR crisis in Central America threatens regional stability, economic growth, and public health security, and this, in turn, affects U.S. interests. Drug-resistant infections undermine productivity, deepen poverty, and disrupt food security, while unchecked resistance could destabilize economies, worsen health inequities, and drive migration—intensifying challenges at the U.S. southern border.

Implementing a Regional AMR Strategy

Addressing AMR in Central America requires a comprehensive, coordinated strategy that integrates health diplomacy, scientific cooperation, and policy harmonization. As the region's primary governance mechanism, SICA is well placed to align policies, mobilize resources, and foster cross-sector collaboration. This strategy presents an opportunity to reshape how these nations tackle public health threats.

To succeed, strong political will, cooperation, community engagement, and key partnerships are essential. Establishing an AMR strategy within this framework would provide a structured, effective response to the crisis and contribute to building a more resilient and robust public health infrastructure.

We recommend the following seven priority actions for immediate implementation:

1. Establish a harmonized regional AMR surveillance system. Fragmented surveillance hinders the ability to track and respond to resistant pathogens. Addressing this requires diplomatic engagement and policy alignment. A regional strategy, supported by PAHO and the World Health Organization (WHO), should standardize data collection, establish shared protocols, and enable real-time information exchange for enhanced detection and response, even in security-compromised areas. A unified AMR database will strengthen monitoring and serve as a strategic tool for policymaking and international cooperation.

2. Strengthen antimicrobial stewardship across sectors. Reducing antibiotic misuse requires comprehensive stewardship programs that integrate health care, agriculture, and environmental policies. Key actions include enforcing prescription regulations, phasing out antibiotics as livestock growth promoters, and, crucially, raising community engagement and public awareness to promote responsible antibiotic use. Investing in rapid diagnostic tools will further curb unnecessary prescriptions by ensuring antibiotics are used only when medically necessary. Establishing laboratories and acquiring advanced diagnostic equipment, crucial for identifying emerging resistant bacteria, will likely require international financial and technical support.

3. Integrate AMR policies into broader strategies. SICA can powerfully address the intertwined crises of climate change and antimicrobial resistance by integrating AMR interventions into existing regional frameworks. By recognizing shared drivers like unsustainable agriculture and environmental degradation, SICA can leverage established programs such as the Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT) and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) to incorporate AMR objectives. Expanding frameworks like

climate-smart agriculture and the AFOLU 2040 plan to restore degraded land and ecosystems in SICA countries so that they include promotion of antibiotic stewardship can create synergies that simultaneously strengthen regional health initiatives and advance broader diplomatic goals.

4. Expand international cooperation on AMR. To effectively implement an AMR strategy, the subregion must expand international cooperation and health diplomacy. Collaboration with PAHO/WHO is crucial for capacity-building and policy development. Building on the recently announced partnership between PAHO and the Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP), a Swiss nonprofit, a focused subregional effort is essential to maximize its impact and ensure access to new antimicrobial treatments. A subregional strategy provides a more structured and sustainable framework than broader regional efforts.

5. Prioritize research and development for AMR solutions. Lasting AMR progress depends on strengthening R&D through funding for new treatments and diagnostics, reducing reliance on external markets, and driving innovation. Public-private partnerships, stronger academic institutions, and a decentralized research approach can overcome political constraints and expand regional capacity. Securing support from organizations such as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian government organization that promotes and funds research in developing countries worldwide, is crucial for strengthening scientific cooperation, workforce development, and research infrastructure.

6. Strengthen capacity through targeted training. Central America must enhance regional capacity to combat AMR effectively. This requires standardized AMR education across medical, veterinary, and agriculture sectors to optimize antibiotic use and infection control. Adopting proven global training models and integrating AMR curricula into university programs will efficiently build a skilled workforce. Supporting exchange programs and biomedical research fellowships will further strengthen expertise and collaboration.

7. Ensure financial sustainability and governance. For long-term success, Central America's AMR strategy must adopt a multistakeholder funding model. A dedicated fund within SICA can streamline resource allocation, while sustained global health investments can support research, monitoring, and policy innovation. Strengthening governance and addressing institutional weaknesses will be vital in overcoming past implementation challenges. This requires targeted capacity building, including training in advanced diagnostics and susceptibility testing; data analysis; coordination across human,

animal, and environmental health sectors; and health diplomacy skills to enhance cross-discipline awareness and access to scientific expertise.

Implementing these priority actions successfully will improve health and food systems, economic stability, scientific research, and population health.

Diplomatic Considerations

Diplomatic engagement is essential for implementing the “Regional AMR Strategy,” focusing on policy alignment, resource mobilization, and sustaining commitments. For example, establishing a harmonized surveillance system requires negotiating data-sharing agreements, aligning regulations, and mobilizing funding. To navigate political complexities, countries can establish a regional memorandum-of-understanding mechanism to enable data sharing and coordination, even amid diplomatic strains. This approach fosters technical collaboration, promotes trust, and generates momentum for broader cooperation.

Diplomatic coordination aligns AMR policies with existing frameworks, leveraging SICA’s governance to integrate interventions and foster cross-sector collaboration. Effective research cooperation depends on diplomacy to address intellectual property, funding access, and research harmonization across institutions.

Still, a health diplomacy approach to AMR is not without potential challenges—it may overshadow national initiatives, reinforce regional power imbalances, or marginalize nonstate actors critical to AMR efforts. Ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and accountability is the key to mitigating such risks. Evidence-based collaboration and shared governance will translate commitments into action and drive sustained progress despite regional complexities.

Because AMR’s impact on health care, agriculture, and trade is transnational, a governance-based strategy to contain it is essential. However, achieving this requires sustained diplomatic engagement to rebuild trust, restore collaboration, and overcome policy barriers. ■



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“Wherever the Wind Takes Us” — Poor Air Quality and Long-Term Foreign Service

One ESTH officer with access to an air quality monitor set out to discover how poor air quality at some posts might affect fellow Foreign Service officers and their family members.

BY MICHELLE ZJHRA WITH CLAIRE KIDWELL
AND LINDA GEISER



Michelle Zjhra, PhD, is a recently retired Foreign Service officer with the State Department. She thanks her co-authors, Claire Kidwell, a Department of State Virtual Student Federal Service intern and a master's candidate in public policy at Duke

University, and Linda Geiser, PhD, the Air Resource Management national program leader for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

I was having trouble breathing as I left the embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar, to return home from work. This was not an uncommon occurrence—the exhaust from cars mixing with cookstove smoke during peak commuting times often left the air clogged with fumes. And it was not the first time I experienced this during an overseas posting. In more than a decade of service with the Department of State, I have worked in countries with even worse air pollution than Antananarivo, where the very air itself takes on a pallid yellow hue. But at this moment, as my lungs struggled in the evening air, I started to wonder what the effect of breathing bad air over long periods of time had on me, my fellow Foreign Service members, and our families.

World Health Organization (WHO) data show that most people worldwide breathe air that “exceeds WHO guideline limits and contains high levels of pollutants, with low- and middle-income countries suffering from the highest exposures.” These pollutants are a major public health concern and include fine particulate matter, carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, and a chemical soup of volatile organic compounds, metals, and partial combustion products. Both outdoor and indoor air pollution cause respiratory and other high morbidity/high mortality diseases.

While we as members of the Foreign Service anticipate some



With our PAM air quality monitor tucked inside a car-topper (left), we measured five air pollutants and temperature every 10 seconds. Our phones connected to the monitor by Bluetooth, displaying and recording data in real time. We detected 41 ug/m³ of PM_{2.5}, unhealthy for sensitive groups, from the truck ahead (right). People in Madagascar, especially those walking, cycling, shopping, or selling at open markets and storefronts near busy roads, are routinely exposed to poor air quality.

risk associated with our positions, I worried what prolonged exposure was doing to our long-term health.

Getting the Data

Serving as the environment, science, technology, and health (ESTH) officer in Antananarivo, I was fortunate to have access to an air quality monitor located within the embassy compound. This beta-attenuation monitor (BAM) is certified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and measures levels of fine particulates in the air under 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM_{2.5}). PM_{2.5} levels are associated with health risks such as acute respiratory illnesses, asthma and other lung diseases, cardiovascular disease, and early mortality.

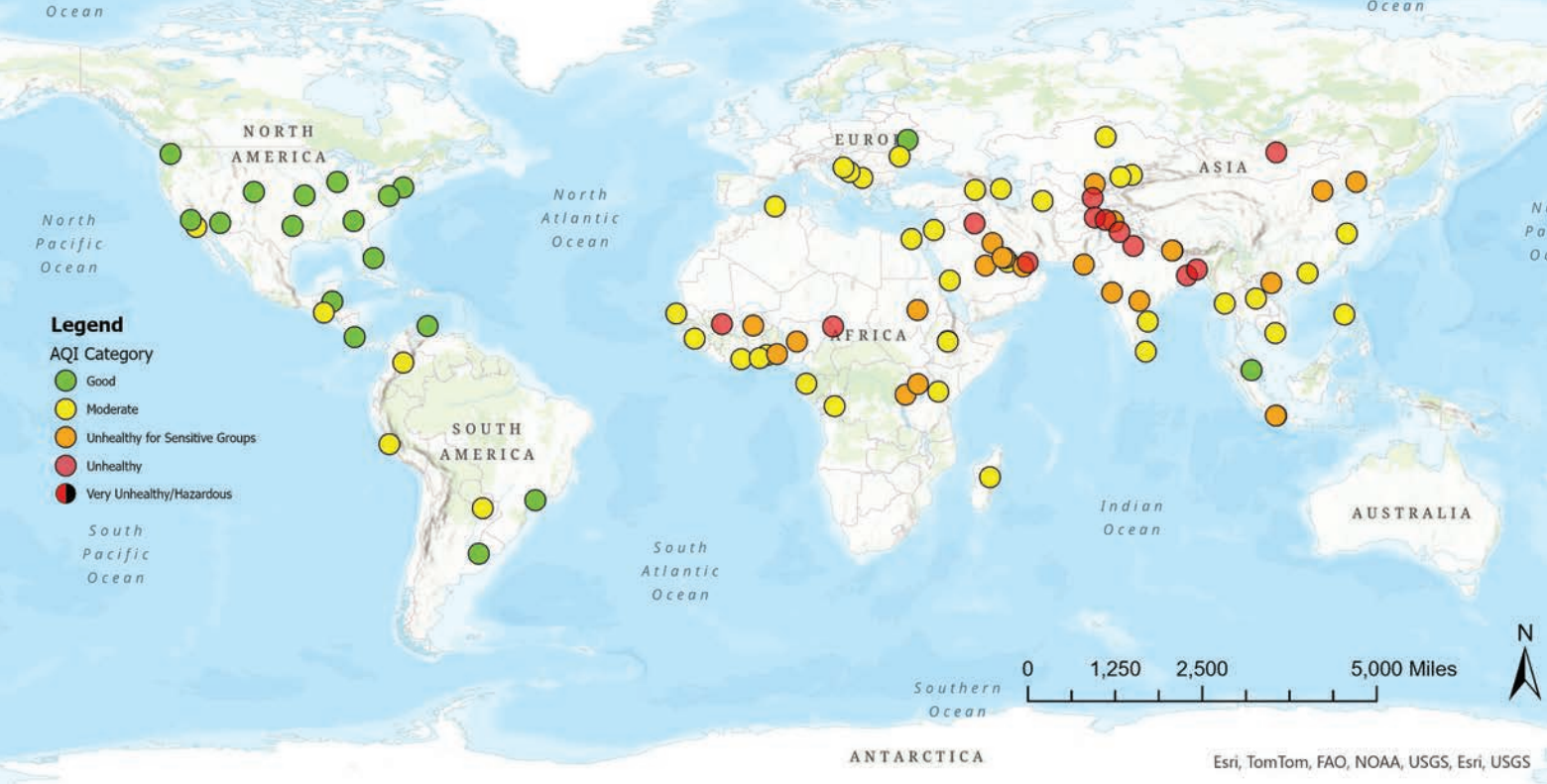
The BAM takes a reading every hour on the hour, but it only represents the air on the embassy compound, not the rest of Antananarivo or the rest of the country. I realized that if we could procure air quality measurements elsewhere in Madagascar, we would understand how air quality varies from place to place and learn where and how often Foreign Service members on the island were being exposed to poor air quality.

I could not do this alone. In 2022 I used a small grant from the State Department Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) to invite air quality expert Linda Geiser from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest

By mapping annual average PM_{2.5} data at U.S. embassy BAMs from 2021 to 2023, one can readily see that the worst air pollution is occurring in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Service to join local researchers on a tour of the country, gathering air quality data in major cities, villages, and nature reserves. We drove around the island with a 2BTechnologies Personal Air Quality Monitor (PAM) mounted on top of our car, taking readings as we traveled through bustling rural towns. We carried it by hand along foot trails in lush nature reserves and into buildings during indoor gatherings.

What we found was not reassuring. During the dry season, a layer of haze covers the country, including within Madagascar's major nature reserves. In Antananarivo, three years of BAM monitoring demonstrated that average daily air quality was best during the wet season and worst during the dry season. On an hourly basis, air quality was generally poorest in the early



Average annual PM2.5 levels in major U.S. cities and U.S. embassies measured by EPA-certified BAMs from 2021 to 2023. Colors reflect the pre-2024 EPA Air Quality Index classes that relate PM2.5 levels to evidence-based health impacts. U.S. cities include the greater metropolitan areas of Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas–Fort Worth, Denver, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. Data were retrieved by the authors from the EPA for U.S. embassies and EPA’s Air Quality System for U.S. cities. Map should not be used to assess compliance with U.S. air quality standards.

morning and late afternoon, coinciding with primary commuting times, when many embassy workers are ferrying kids to and from school, getting groceries, and bicycling or running between home and work. I wondered if there was a way to anticipate what the air would be like for the day.

I was discouraged to learn that although our BAM produced air quality data that is updated hourly on our embassy’s web page, few people seemed aware of it. When a day’s data is averaged, even during a “good” air day—that is, a day that meets the U.S. EPA 24-hour standard for PM2.5—the air quality is usually moderate to unhealthy during peak commute times. My concern increased when I determined that the State Department lacks standardized guidelines for its officers abroad to reduce their exposure to air pollution and protect themselves from unhealthy air. In discussing my data and conclusions with my colleagues at the embassy, one question continued to come up: What could we do about it?

Raising Awareness

In the United States, we have laws and regulations to protect air quality and communication tools to build air quality awareness among U.S. citizens. The Air Quality Index (AQI), initiated in 1976 by the EPA, was implemented to communicate air quality conditions and recommended precautions for citizens in plain language. The AQI divides PM2.5 readings into categories: good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, unhealthy, and hazardous. While WHO standards are stricter than the ones we

keep in the U.S., in 2024 the EPA strengthened the annual PM2.5 standard, presenting an opportunity for the State Department to strengthen and standardize its own air quality policies in tandem. The department could use EPA standards as a framework for acknowledging air quality health effects on Foreign Service members and their families who serve overseas, particularly those serving in moderate-to-poor air quality countries over the course of a career. Local BAM data can also be used to provide a ballpark assessment of increased risk of mortality from all causes, cardiopulmonary diseases, and lung cancer.

By mapping annual average PM2.5 data at U.S. embassy BAMs from 2021 to 2023, one can readily see that the worst air pollution is occurring in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Average air quality at U.S. posts in these areas is moderate to unhealthy depending on the city, whereas average air quality at posts in the Americas and Europe ranges from good to moderate. It is not uncommon to see hourly values in the hazardous range within U.S. embassy compounds in the most polluted cities. Foreign Service members and others can track hourly values for their posts on EPA’s Airnow.gov international page. [Note: In April 2025, this page was removed. Some Foreign Service members may still be able to track local hourly values from the BAM monitor at their post.]

The harmful effects of air pollution over a long period of time cannot be overstated. A recent study using satellite data in Madagascar found that from 2005 to 2018, nitrogen dioxide, which is linked to lung cancer and heart disease, increased significantly in

If we could procure air quality measurements elsewhere in Madagascar, we would understand how air quality varies from place to place and learn where and how often Foreign Service members on the island were being exposed to poor air quality.

Antananarivo. Worldwide, many low-income nations are experiencing rising air pollution and health impacts, especially in the most populous urban areas.

Madagascar relies on slash-and-burn agriculture; wood-burning stoves for cooking; and fossil fuels for cars, trucks, and buses that share the road with pedestrians. Typical sources of air pollution also include smoke from industrial facilities, brick and charcoal manufacturing, and forests, which are frequently burned to create agricultural land and charcoal. Many vehicles do not meet international emissions standards, burning diesel, leaded, or low-grade fuels that are not permitted in higher-income countries. Combined, these sources create troubling levels of emissions.

Special training for embassy health units on the effects of air quality on health would provide a consistent and well-informed response to this serious issue. ESTH officers like me could work with medical unit staff and health technicians at post to promote air quality awareness, perhaps with a week of social media, news briefings, events, and speakers—similar to EPA’s annual Air Quality Awareness Week in the United States.

Just as the military tracks health risks for those who serve, the Department of State should track long-term exposure to unhealthy air quality over the course of a career for Foreign

Service members. The department, perhaps through OES, could work with health experts and our counterparts at the EPA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to analyze the effects on vulnerable family members and share their findings. The State Department recognizes our service at hardship posts, but are the long-term detrimental effects of poor air over the course of our overseas service factored into this equation?

What We Can Do

Although we cannot control foreign government policies, the State Department does ensure new embassies are built with high-quality air circulation to provide clean air while at work. We have an opportunity to build on this department effort. For example, the EPA and the department could work together to create a threshold for air quality exposure by post and over the course of a career. As I learned in Madagascar, a yearly average masks seasonal and daily fluctuations to which we are exposed during our commute, our daily jog, and when our children play outdoors. Setting a threshold would help to inform and protect us and our families while we serve our great nation abroad.

But a threshold is not enough—we want to do everything we can to protect Foreign Service members and our families when they leave the embassy or consulate compound. Just as the EPA provides standards for emissions back home in the U.S., the State Department could provide air filters to every household that meets a threshold of pollution during any given day or season. We could work with embassy schools to purchase air filters and schedule outdoor sports and play during lower pollution times of the day. In this way, we could promote clean air both at work and at home, for ourselves and our loved ones.

With my Madagascar tour behind me, I find myself reflecting on the many Foreign Service members and their families serving in cities with high levels of air pollution. When serving our country abroad, we must also look after ourselves and our health. While the Department of State might send us wherever the wind can take us, we can all do our part to increase awareness and mitigate health risks to ensure that wind is safe to breathe. ■

Air Quality Monitor Program Paused

On March 4, 2025, the IoT Network, which is used to transmit data from the Air Quality Monitoring Program to the EPA’s AirNow and other websites, was paused due to funding issues. U.S. citizens abroad, including U.S. diplomats and their family members, have relied on this data in more than 80 cities globally to understand local air quality conditions and better assess their risks of both short- and long-term pollution-related illnesses.



MED Provider Portal

Modernizing the Foreign Service Health Care Experience

The Department of State's progress toward an electronic health record system can improve health care outcomes for Foreign Service members worldwide.

BY ALICE ABRAMS



Alice Abrams is a board-certified family nurse practitioner with nearly 30 years of experience in primary and women's health care who joined the Department of State as a medical provider in 2016. She has served in Malaysia, Zambia, Pakistan, and many other locations as a medical provider rover. She is currently based in Lisbon.

The Bureau of Medical Services (MED) provides expert medical care, advice, and support for U.S. government employees and their family members at almost every U.S. overseas post around the world. For the hundreds of medical providers and the tens of thousands of patients they serve, the MED Provider Portal (MPP) is a game changer. This proprietary, secure, and private electronic platform allows MED's team to maintain patient records electronically, marking a crucial first step toward a full electronic health record for the U.S. foreign affairs community.

Consider, for example, arriving at a post for a temporary assignment and realizing you forgot your new medication. The name escapes you. Your Health Unit provider at the temporary location can now use the MPP to see the details of your treatment plan and ensure you continue your care safely.

Imagine you're a medical provider, arranging a medical evacuation for an acutely ill patient, alone in an austere location. Before the MPP, clinical findings were scanned and sent—often faxed—to medevac centers for review with critical data spread

across documents, risking miscommunication. Now, providers on both ends can simultaneously use the MPP to coordinate the needed care.

MED launched the MPP in October 2024, and since then all encounters in Health Units have been documented electronically instead of on paper. This amounts to more than 100,000 patient encounters and counting. According to the Department of State's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ayan Ahmed Noor: "This is not just a technological upgrade; it's a transformative step that will improve patient safety and outcomes, streamline workflows, and provide better data to inform decision-making."

How Did We Get Here?

For decades, Foreign Service personnel and their families have carried hard-copy medical records from post to post to ensure their Health Unit had access to relevant medical information. Meanwhile, electronic health records have become the standard in the United States and across much of the world.

The unique and complex needs of the department and its workforce complicated previous efforts to establish an appropriate electronic system, but in October 2023, MED launched an intensive effort to create a comprehensive system that is fit-for-purpose, responsive to the needs of patients and providers, and built to safeguard the privacy of patient records. The result of that sustained effort is the MED Provider Portal—the MPP.

The first phase of the project—new digital tools for incoming Foreign Service members and families going through the medical clearance process—went live in January 2024. Since then, the project team has collaborated with providers from around the world to structure the MPP to meet the needs of the MED team and their unique patient community.

What Does This Mean for You?

The MPP means that your medical information will travel ahead of you, enabling Health Unit staff to see your medications, allergies, vaccination records, and health history whether you are traveling for temporary duty, emergency evacuation, or moving to a new assignment.

It also means that your medical provider at post will always see your most current records instead of sorting through reams of paper to identify your needs or the needs of your family members.

Moreover, MED's medical clearance staff can work within the MPP platform to expedite clearance approvals and quickly address any questions that could slow their decision-making.

Ultimately, better information means better care, and the MPP is a significant step forward in that regard.

Privacy and Security in the MPP Platform

Throughout the MPP development process, MED has prioritized the safety, security, and privacy of your health information, applying rigorous security technologies, including security features already in use by other federal agencies and major private health care providers.

These technologies include the use of the department's single-sign-on solution, Okta, for streamlined authentication, reducing the risk of password-related security breaches. The electronic health record also features role-based access control and specialized permissions to ensure that users only have access to the functions and data necessary for their roles, minimizing the risk of unauthorized access.

In addition, the new electronic health record system is continuously monitored to ensure patient data and health records remain safe and secure.

Coming Soon: The End of Paper Records

Although the launch of the MPP does not mark the immediate demise of paper records, that day is coming. Development and deployment of a patient-facing portal is well underway.

This portal, called myMED, will allow the foreign affairs community to engage directly, seamlessly, and digitally with MED. Capabilities will include uploading medical clearances, scheduling appointments, tracking prescriptions, and more. Together, the MPP and myMED will serve as the department's official electronic health system and will mark the end of hard-copy medical records.

As part of this process, MED welcomes feedback from the patient community and employs that feedback to make continuous improvements. As you engage with your medical provider and see the MPP in use, please take a moment to register your thoughts through the MED Feedback tool found on the bureau's SharePoint page. ■

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

WHEN USAID DISAPPEARS

America's first line of defense—the professional, nonpartisan U.S. Foreign Service—is under threat. Career diplomats and development experts are being fired or sidelined, and the value of public service questioned and politicized.

AFSA launched the Service Disrupted public awareness campaign in May to help illustrate the work of the Foreign Service and why it matters. We've been collecting testimonials from members to help illustrate the critical work of diplomacy and development and what is lost when the work is halted.

We published the first set of Service Disrupted stories in the April-May *FSJ*, "Lives Upended: The Impact of USAID's Dismantling on Those Who Serve." The second set, "What We've Lost: Firsthand Accounts from the Field," was published in the June *FSJ*. Here we share the third installment. The stories have been lightly edited for clarity. Two are printed anonymously, but the authors are known to us.

Please consider sharing your own story or that of a colleague. What is important about the work you do, and what will be (or has been) lost without you in the field? What does America lose as the result of your program and/or position being shuttered? What do you want Americans to better understand about the work of diplomacy and development and why it matters?

We will continue to share your stories in the *Journal* and on AFSA social media channels. Send submissions of up to 500 words to us at humans-of-fs@afsa.org.

—The Editors

USAID Is Vanishing

BY JIM BEVER

For almost eight decades, USAID employees and other professionals in international development worked to implement the vision of General George Marshall, President Harry S. Truman, and every U.S. president since, fostering freedom and stability throughout the world. But in the first 100 days of the second Trump administration this proven tool of U.S. foreign policy was targeted for almost complete elimination—without a national security strategy to explain or justify it.

The Marshall Plan

After World War II ended with the defeat of Nazism, President Truman's Secretary of State, former five-star General George C. Marshall, initiated the European Recovery Act—now remembered as the Marshall Plan. As the prospect of yet another war with the Soviets and the specter of communism's spread grew in southern Europe, Marshall laid out the Truman administration's vision to protect the continent, saying the plan would be directed "against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the

emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist." Marshall concluded: "The only way human beings can win a war is to prevent it."

The Marshall Plan was not a government handout. As Foreign Service Officer (ret.) Steven Hendrix wrote in the *Diplomatic Courier*: "It was a geopolitical strategy backed by infrastructure, know-how, and American pragmatism. And it worked. It established a model: development assistance could be both altruistic and in the national interest."

As more young nations broke free of their colonial masters over the ensuing 15 years (India, Pakistan, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia), the Cold War competition for hearts and minds in these new struggling republics grew, and various U.S. government implementing entities (such as USAID's predecessor, the International Cooperation Administration) worked to meet the demand for assistance.

In 1961, in response to the increasing needs of people overseas and with the desire to ensure newly created countries would stay on the U.S. side of the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy pulled together disparate assistance programs to establish USAID. In his inaugural address he stated: "To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe ... we pledge our best

efforts to help them help themselves." Kennedy boldly challenged Americans in that inaugural address more than three generations ago to fight "against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war." He continued with one of his most famous lines: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

That last line was a clarion call to Americans, especially its baby-boom generation. Thousands of Americans joined the Peace Corps, usually for two years, and thousands also joined the new Agency for International Development, living full careers serving the American people overseas, often in dangerous and unstable countries.

As the Vietnam War expanded, so too did USAID. At its peak, the agency had thousands of Foreign Service officers in Vietnam alone. Some did not return home: The Wall of Honor that until recently stood at the entrance to USAID headquarters in Washington, D.C., offers tribute to the more than 100 AID FSOs (and countless more Foreign Service Nationals) who died in the line of duty, half of them in Vietnam.



President John F. Kennedy delivers remarks at the White House to a group of USAID mission directors on June 8, 1962, shortly after the agency was established. He told them, "There will not be farewell parades to you as you leave or parades when you come back."

On Oct. 7, 2016, USAID members and service members from Joint Task Force Matthew delivered relief supplies to areas affected by Hurricane Matthew to Jeremie, Haiti. JTF Matthew delivered more than 10,000 pounds of supplies on its first day of operations.



CAPT. TYLER HOPKINS/U.S. NAVY

That famous Kennedy line was followed immediately by one not as famous, but equally important: “My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.” This idea—that we are all in this challenge together—is symbolized by the famous handshake at the center of AID’s original logo, based on George C. Marshall’s own hand-drawing and emphasizing the partnership implied.

Programmatic Carnage

And now here we are in 2025. By the end of this summer, almost all of the more than 8,000 USAID staff—Foreign Service, Civil Service, and Foreign Service Nationals—are set to be fired, subject to reductions in force (RIFs). While the administration says it plans to at least retain funding for food aid, transition initiatives, and lethal infectious disease prevention and its directly related health sector strengthening, the balance of foreign assistance funding for what is known as “development assistance” is being whited out.

Some 200 single-spaced pages list tens of billions of dollars of cuts to such development assistance, eliminating technical assistance, policy reform, institutional strengthening programs, training, equipment, matériel, and infrastructure funding in 100 developing countries. These investments in development that took person-centuries of professional effort—and taxpayer money already spent or committed to scope out, compete, and implement—have been torn asunder at the start or even in midstream.

In the aftermath of this programmatic carnage, the United States and the world have both lost. We all lose.

Five-time USAID Mission Director Jonathan Addleton wrote recently in the Pakistan daily newspaper *The Nation*: “As a former US Ambassador, it is difficult to imagine a world in which development assistance is not part of the diplomatic toolkit available for engaging with other countries ... as a development partnership setting the stage for exponential economic growth that ultimately benefits both countries.”

Yet that is the world in which we are all now living.

Former CIA Officer Brian O’Neill pointed to this “strategic inversion” in an op-ed in the April 29, 2025, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, writing that our adversaries are “re-calibrating based on our weakness” and “reallocating resources and rethinking their posture.”

The damage to our country’s safety and security is impossible to overstate. Senator Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) discussed the importance of USAID in an April 28, 2025, interview in *The New York Times*, saying: “You can spend a little bit of money on trying to solve these problems, like famine in places like Sudan or Afghanistan or other countries, or you can buy more bullets. There’s somebody that might be complaining about foreign aid today, and tomorrow, or five years from now, they’re sending their kid overseas to fight in a war that wouldn’t have otherwise happened.”

As of this writing, President Trump has no new National Security Strategy to explain to Congress and to the American people the rationale for his destruction of U.S. foreign assistance. The most recent National Security Strategy was published by President Joe Biden in October 2022. Americans need to know: What national interests are at play? What are the threats? The opportunities? The risks and assumptions? Are the resources proposed adequate? What are the trade-offs?

In the Balance

The president hasn't zeroed out aid to prevent lethal infectious disease from hitting our own people. But let's look at the balance of foreign assistance beyond that. There appears to be no commitment to sustain the incredible improvements—due to USAID's long-term interventions—in the following areas:

- reducing infant mortality, child mortality, maternal mortality in childbirth; and deaths and lifelong injury from malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, diarrheal disease, and polio;
- preventing and mitigating conflicts that lead to out-migration;
- providing rural development and agricultural technical assistance to prevent crop disease or develop new crop varieties in the face of world food price shocks, war-induced scarcity, and weather changes that lead to famine and out-migration;
- protecting the environment: reducing industrial, air, and water pollution; protecting coastal fisheries, wildlife, and minerals resources in the face of exploitation that contributes to poverty, dislocation, and out-migration;
- offering technical or infrastructure assistance for energy development, efficiency, and diversification of supply, the lack of which leads to instability in aspiring economies;
- providing technical and policy assistance for national macroeconomic, fiscal, financial, and trade reforms, private enterprise development, business policy reform, and sanctity of contract—all of which benefit U.S. companies, aid job growth, and enhance stability;
- providing technical or infrastructure assistance to education, from pre-K to graduate level to help create self-reliance and sustainability (USAID's work in this sector has been a success from the beginning—for example, in the early 1960s in India, the agency helped more than 10,000 students to earn PhDs and master's degrees, changing the face of India today); and
- supporting democracy and accountable, representative governance—not just free and fair elections support but party strengthening, women in government, and access to justice.

A Proven Capability in Jeopardy

Finally, it's not just USAID's systems and practices that have assured accountability for both spending and results. It is the development professionals, the people of USAID, who matter the most. In addition to RIF'ing almost 2,000 Civil Service staff



AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

The USAID memorial wall was moved next to the State Department Memorial Plaques ahead of the Foreign Service Day plaque ceremony on May 2, 2025.

at HQ, we are pushing out almost all of the 2,000 USAID FSOs. These FSOs have advanced degrees in professional fields of international development and decades of experience serving exclusively in the developing world—often in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Lebanon, and West Bank/Gaza. These experienced officers serve on the ambassador's Country Team at every post, interact with host governments, businesses, and civil society at all levels, and support congressional delegations. Equally in danger of being RIF'ed are the 4,500 Foreign Service National staff, most of them equally technically skilled, seasoned professionals with decades of experience at our embassies overseas.

The administration's 2026 budget request for USAID is only 15 percent of the previous budget, eliminating most programs and staff. Those of us who have served our country through careers at USAID have been blessed to make a positive difference in the world while protecting and enhancing America's security, prosperity, and values.

Absent a congressional miracle, we're gone.



James A. Bever is a Senior Foreign Service officer who retired in 2017 with the personal rank of Career Minister after 35 years with USAID. He served in Pakistan, Indonesia, India, Afghanistan, West Bank/Gaza, Egypt, Ghana, and Washington, D.C.

During his career he served as a USAID mission director four times and in leadership positions at USAID headquarters, including as acting assistant administrator. He is a recipient of the Presidential Distinguished Service Award and the Administrator's Distinguished Career Service Award.

When Engineers Stop Working

As a USAID Foreign Service engineer, I've had the unique privilege of supporting infrastructure projects and programs that improve lives, advance local economies, and embody American generosity. My work has ranged from building latrines in Angola and modernizing health facilities in Namibia to establishing an infrastructure delivery team within Angola's Ministry of Transit. What ties it all together is a deep commitment to working alongside our stakeholders—not just to build things but to build rapport and long-term partnerships.

When American engineers are in the field, we're not just managing projects, we're mitigating risks, promoting U.S. quality, and ensuring that every taxpayer dollar is spent wisely. We hold contractors accountable. We mentor local engineers. We bridge the gap between infrastructure and diplomacy to deliver results that matter. Our presence is irreplaceable.

Since the suspension of U.S. foreign assistance, dismantling of USAID, and the subsequent elimination of its engineering staff, we've already seen critical programs delayed, downsized, or completely halted. Clinics in South Africa have been

shuttered, high schools in Mozambique left unfinished, and partially repaired municipal water systems in Jordan have been abandoned. These open pits and shells of buildings still bear USAID branding and the American flag. We are literally advertising failure while undermining the very goals of U.S. assistance.

This loss affects American credibility. When we deliver smart infrastructure, we show up as a reliable partner. When we don't, we leave a vacuum that other global powers are eager to fill. Engineering is quiet diplomacy, and our tools are trust, quality, and results.

I want Americans to know that the work we do in USAID engineering is not just technical, it's strategic. It's nation-building in the best sense: helping build resilient communities while reinforcing the U.S. commitment to shared prosperity and global stability. Losing that presence isn't just a staffing or resource issue, it's a retreat from our leadership role in the world.

—USAID FSO

Build Anyway

I am a USAID Foreign Service officer from New York and have served for 13 years in Ecuador, Haiti, India, and Washington, D.C. I managed people, budgets, and programs. I built partnerships with local governments, large and small businesses, communities, and other donors. I wrote memos, articles, and reports so that Washington, the ambassador, our local partners, Congress, and the American people knew what we were doing and why. Always working as a team, we sought to solve problems like malnutrition and air pollution, illegal poaching, lack of electricity and water, or the difficulty of getting a loan to start a business.

We attacked these issues because we believed that all people should be able to attain a decent standard of living. In a world with billionaires and unthinkable luxury for the very few, is access to clean drinking water or safe classrooms an unreasonable hope?

I recently worked on a large contract supporting trade and investment across Africa. The abrupt halt of foreign assistance and termination of the contract meant that the small African businesses we'd agreed to invest in were unable to complete their expansion plans and were left with inputs they could no longer afford. These are mortal blows for entrepreneurs operating in highly challenging environments. Our goal was to build the economic base of multiple countries so that they no longer required outside assistance. This path to self-reliance is a long-held, bipartisan development approach that we are suddenly undermining like secret saboteurs.

In an earlier assignment, I worked to increase regional cooperation among the countries of South Asia (including India,

Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan) through energy trade and infrastructure. Bangladesh has long been one of the poorest countries in the world and has witnessed explosions of violent extremism in the recent past. Bangladesh is not only on the verge of "graduating" to a lower-middle-income country (a huge development success), it is also undergoing a democratic transition.

USAID partnered with Bangladesh for decades to support democratic institutions and improve working conditions within garment factories. But now, at this moment of immense change, when transformation for good is so possible but the potential for a collapse into factionalism and corruption hangs like a sword over the future, USAID's support has suddenly disappeared as the U.S. announced major tariffs on Bangladesh's leading export industry. I am reminded of Mother Teresa's observation: What you spend years building someone can destroy overnight. Her conclusion? Build anyway.

In USAID's Foreign Service I worked for the American people, with resources provided by the American people. Foreign assistance asks our country to invest in others so that we can reap the benefits of a more stable and prosperous world. Without it, we will need to increase spending on defense, immigration, pandemics, and disaster response. We will face a devastating human toll from abandoning the generosity and compassion we once championed.

USAID's destruction was quick and deceptively easy. The rebuilding, which is sure to come as the pendulum swings, will be long, arduous, and costly. Build anyway.

—USAID FSO ■

Honoring the Fallen



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, joined by Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, presides over the 51st Annual Memorial Plaque Ceremony on Foreign Service Day on May 2. The solemn event paid tribute to the 321 members of the Foreign Service who gave their lives in service abroad. See full story on page 60.

Double Your Impact

On June 18, a retired Foreign Service officer offered to match all donations made to AFSA up to \$100,000. This anonymous donor's generous challenge grant will run until Aug. 31, 2025. During this time, any donation you make to AFSA will automatically be doubled, increasing our ability to support and fight for our members.

Members will soon receive this donation request in their inboxes, and we hope that you will accept the challenge to ensure AFSA's ongoing operations during this challenging period. ■

Hundreds Rally in D.C. to Stand Up for Service

On Friday, May 9, 2025, more than 200 members of the Foreign Service community and supporters gathered in Washington, D.C., to launch AFSA's Service Disrupted campaign with a resounding show of unity.

Undeterred by rain, participants joined AFSA leadership, staff, and volunteers on two separate "solidarity walks" through the city, proudly chanting "stand up for service!" as they passed landmarks like the Washington Monument.

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Foreign Service supporters assemble at AFSA headquarters on May 9 before setting off on the Service Disrupted solidarity walk through rainy downtown Washington, D.C.



A Foreign Service for the People, by the People

Serving as your AFSA State vice president the past two years has opened my eyes to the people of the Foreign Service who joined forces as a community to advocate for our institution.

I am so proud of the talented and dedicated career professionals serving our country and building up the Foreign Service.

As we speak up about work-life balance issues such as emergency backup care, mental health, professional development, promotions and assignments, or security clearance-related issues, I have seen the triumphs of generalists, specialists, LNAs (limited non-career appointments), and EFMs (eligible family members) rolling up their sleeves, thinking outside the box, and building partnerships to get things done. Confronting the administration's demands for budget cuts to both personnel and programs, we must continue to make strides to care for our institution and its people. Here are a few ways:

Review and Promote Our Own. If you have served on a previous promotion or tenure board or will serve on one in the near future, you already know reviewing and promoting our own ranks is a uniquely meaningful and vitally important function. Everyone serving on these boards supports colleagues by reviewing their files and making recommenda-

tions about their tenure or promotions, as well as helping to decide who will be mid-ranked and low-ranked. Those serving also learn about writing better evaluations for themselves and their teams.

The abrupt May dismissal of the 132 originally selected Foreign Service Selection Board members caused confusion and uncertainty. But I urge everyone to take part in this important process if the opportunity arises.

Please take this responsibility seriously and step up whenever you can and apply for exemptions for those who cannot. AFSA continues to call for a fair and transparent selection board process.

"Clear" Each Other's Documents. Anyone serving at Main State or in a large overseas mission knows about the process of sending policy memos and cables for clearances.

Colleagues often complain about the sometimes onerous, bureaucratic processes to get upward of 15-20 offices to "clear" a paper before it can be sent to a bureau or mission front office. However, I have also learned over the past 15 years that relationships are built during these clearance processes, and policy formulations and implementation can be developed when controversial recommendations or positions are weighed across the various offices and stakeholders.

Let's all work together to make communication across the department more efficient.

With the advent of shared documents and the use of StateChat AI to provide initial drafts, every office across State has likely experienced an increase in efficiency and a reduction in redundancy.

I am a fan of cutting down on clearances—both lateral and vertical. For example, a working-level officer in the Bureau of Global Talent Management processing reform ideas or information requests from AFSA should be able to reach the right office and generate a prompt response without layers of clearances.

State Department leadership should be consistent in their approach to simplify and cut down on the clearance processes, and ensure these cuts are happening at the working levels across the regional and functional bureaus, including the 6th and 7th floors.

Let's all work together to make communication across the department more efficient.

Continue Using Internal Constructive Dissent. Whether it concerns U.S. policy on Russia-Ukraine or Israel-Gaza, or some lesser-known issue, our Foreign Service has a time-honored tradition of constructive dis-

sent through the Secretary's Policy Planning Staff (S/P).

AFSA takes the department's constructive dissent channel seriously, hosting panels about its history and offering guidance on protecting the identities of authors and their content.

I strongly believe this channel must continue to be protected and that our workforce be allowed to use it internally to voice their disagreements without fear of retribution.

We are a stronger and more resilient Foreign Service when we protect constructive dissent. AFSA gives annual constructive dissent awards at senior, mid-, and entry levels to both generalists and specialists. See extensive coverage of dissent in the FSJ Archive at <https://afsa.org/fsj-special-collections#disent>.

As I pass the AFSA State VP baton to my successor, Ro Nepal, I want to thank you all for your dedication and service. You make the Foreign Service shine and give it meaning. I appreciate your efforts and struggles, and you can count on Ro to partner with you to continue the work of institution-building and workforce-strengthening in the Foreign Service. ■

**What I've Learned****One-on-One Discussions with 90% of Our Officer Corps**

During my first overseas tour, I had the pleasure of visiting the hot springs of Pamukkale, Türkiye. Over the course of millennia, lukewarm turquoise water has mineralized and calcified stone into small pools on a cliff overlooking the countryside below.

It's a dreamlike landscape. It was here that Greek philosopher Epictetus lived more than 2,000 years ago. As a fan of the Stoics, I've often recalled one quote of his: "We have two ears and one mouth so that we may listen twice as much as we speak."

In my final column as the VP for FCS, I reflect on that vital, and often underutilized, diplomatic skill: listening.

While I never had a goal of connecting with so many of our officers, I soon learned that to get a true understanding of our organization and its challenges, I needed to speak to officers individually. Having connected one-on-one with more than 90 percent of our officer corps in the past two years, I have heard about a lot of issues. Surveys and data can be powerful tools to influence management, but valuable input is often lost. The best way to learn is to listen, intently, without an agenda.

Complaints that can turn to grievances or litigation often dissipate when someone just listens.

I have heard about and witnessed the agency deploy tactics of questionable legality and outright retaliation against its employees, including forging electronic signatures by agency officials, removing emails from members' archives, mistranslating correspondence to make it fit the agency narrative, failing to provide office space for senior officers, directing the assignments of officers, changing policies based on political whims, overcharging for fines and fees, intentionally delaying the completion of investigations and inquiries, baselessly removing security clearances, failing to safeguard sensitive personal employee data, and many other actions unaligned with the values of the Commerce Department.

While we deliver amazing results for our nation, FCS also punches well above its weight when it comes to organizational dysfunction.

I ran for the AFSA FCS VP position to collaborate with the agency on policy, operational, and cultural workplace reforms. One of my primary goals was to ensure the agency adhered to its own policies and to the mandates of the Foreign Service Act.

The agency continues to skirt the law by not implementing a dissent policy. All

The best way to learn is to listen, intently, without an agenda.

too frequently, management makes inadvertent clerical errors that cost employees thousands of dollars. Pay, assignments, and promotion delays continue to plague our system, and Senior Foreign Service promotions regularly face unacceptable attestation backlogs. Performance awards remain distributed inconsistently, exposing the agency to further potential litigation.

When the agency changes its assignment policy without notice, as in 2024 and several other prior years, employees and their families are negatively affected. Children are prematurely separated from their schools, spouses are unable to find gainful employment, and employees are distracted by the uncertainty of where they will live, making them less effective at advancing and defending U.S. commercial interests.

Officers frequently work 60- to 70-plus hours per week but are ordered by superiors to only record 40 hours, and mandatory leave is often delayed or denied due to mounting workloads.

Like many of my colleagues, I have come to believe that some in our

agency do not want their Foreign Service to succeed. Officers prevail despite repeated organizational and cultural misconduct. Our people are dedicated to our mission and, without question, love what they do. But far too often, our own agency prevents us from fulfilling our service to the American people.

Since change is in the air, I remain hopeful that our culture and operations can also evolve to allow our officers and our Service the opportunity to thrive.

Personally, this was an exceptionally rewarding, yet fatiguing, tour. I feel a bit like Sisyphus—continuously rolling the stone to the top of the hill. I will soon take a long break from our agency to recharge, and hopefully, I'll have the chance to soak in hot springs with the wisdom of the Stoics in hand.

Thank you for the opportunity and your support; I hope that I have served you well. ■



Parting Advice

After eight years, this is my final column as your retiree vice president. Drawing on my earlier experience as the director of the Department of State's Office of Retirement, most of my columns focused on the nuts and bolts of Foreign Service retirement rules and procedures.

I wrote these columns because, when it comes to federal retirement benefits, what you don't know *can* hurt you. Lack of knowledge of long-standing or newly implemented policies can result in a benefit being denied, to the

financial detriment of you or your survivors.

I will have a final bite at the apple in the September-October *Foreign Service Journal*, which is scheduled to print my article "Twelve Retirement Pitfalls to Avoid."

After that, I defer to AFSA's knowledgeable retirement services team to keep you updated via content in this journal, the AFSA website, the bimonthly AFSA Retirement Newsletter, and the front section of each annual AFSA Directory of Retired Members.

When it comes to federal retirement benefits, what you don't know *can* hurt you.

As I step down, my bottom-line advice is to take ownership of your retirement financial plan. Pay attention to AFSA updates on retirement issues. Monitor your Thrift Savings Plan account and any other investments to ensure that stocks-versus-bonds balance is appropriate for your

investment timeline and risk tolerance.

Maintain your AFSA membership to help fund the salaries of staff members who keep you updated on retirement issues and defend your earned retirement benefits on Capitol Hill.

I wish you a long, happy retirement. ■

AFSA Defends the Foreign Service in Court

Since January 2025, AFSA has taken decisive legal action to defend the Foreign Service, protect its members, and preserve the institutions that enable the United States to lead with influence rather than force.

In *AFGE et al. v. Trump*, filed in District Court of Washington, D.C., on February 6, AFSA is challenging the unlawful dismantling of USAID. After a temporary initial restraining order paused administrative leave and evacuations, the judge denied the union's request case for a preliminary injunction, and both sides filed a motion for a summary judgment asking the judge to rule in their favor based on the pleadings filed in the case.

In *Widakuswara et al. v. Lake*, filed in the Southern District of New York on March 21, and later moved to the District Court in Washington, D.C., AFSA joined other unions and journalists to challenge the shuttering of USAGM and removal of staff without due process. A preliminary injunction ordered the restoration of employee status and grant funding. While parts of the order were stayed on appeal, critical protections remain in place following recent rulings.

AFSA also filed suit in *AFSA v. Trump et al.* in the District Court of Washington, D.C., on April 7, to block an

AFSA remains committed to protecting the Foreign Service and upholding democratic principles.

executive order that stripped union rights from Foreign Service members at the State Department and USAID. On May 14, the U.S. District Court granted AFSA's motion for a preliminary injunction, finding the executive order unlawful as applied to agencies with AFSA-represented employees.

On May 16, however, a three-judge panel on the D.C. Circuit stayed a similar injunction in a related National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) case, allowing the administration to resume its campaign to revoke union rights allegedly based on national security grounds. While AFSA's case is distinct, a future appeal may test the limits of this ruling.

AFSA remains committed to protecting the Foreign Service and upholding democratic principles.

For full, detailed updates on AFSA's lawsuits, please visit <https://afsa.org/afsa-lawsuit-tracker>. ■

Participants rally outside the Ronald Reagan Building, former home to USAID.



Stand Up for Service
Continued from page 53

the White House, the Commerce Department, the State Department, and the Ronald Reagan Building (former home of USAID headquarters).

The event kicked off with remarks from AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, VOA correspondent (and former AFSA Governing Board member) Steve Herman, USAID FSO, and AFSA Communications Director Nikki Gamer. All spoke to the urgency of defending the integrity and role of the Foreign Service amid sweeping federal workforce cuts and reorganization efforts.

After the walks, attendees gathered at AFSA headquarters for refreshments and an opportunity to reflect, connect, offer testimonials, and write thank you notes to their colleagues overseas.

As part of the campaign, AFSA launched a new website featuring a video message from Ambassador Bill Burns, former Deputy Secretary of State and CIA director. In the video, viewed more than 5,600 times the first month after it was released, Burns warned of the acute threats posed by



Walkers stop for photos in front of the Washington Monument.

the erosion of America's diplomatic institutions, saying: "A weakened Foreign Service means a weakened America."

Foreign Service supporters outside Washington also joined the movement by sending photos with #StandUpForService signs.

The Service Disrupted campaign aims to educate the public about the critical contributions of the Foreign Service and to resist efforts that would undermine its effectiveness at a time of growing global instability.

To watch the Bill Burns video in support of diplomacy and learn more about AFSA's Service Disrupted campaign, visit servicedisrupted.org. ■



USAGM FSO Steve Herman delivers opening remarks at AFSA headquarters.



Solidarity walkers showing their support for the Foreign Service.



Participants pause outside the White House.

AFSA Marks 60th Foreign Service Day

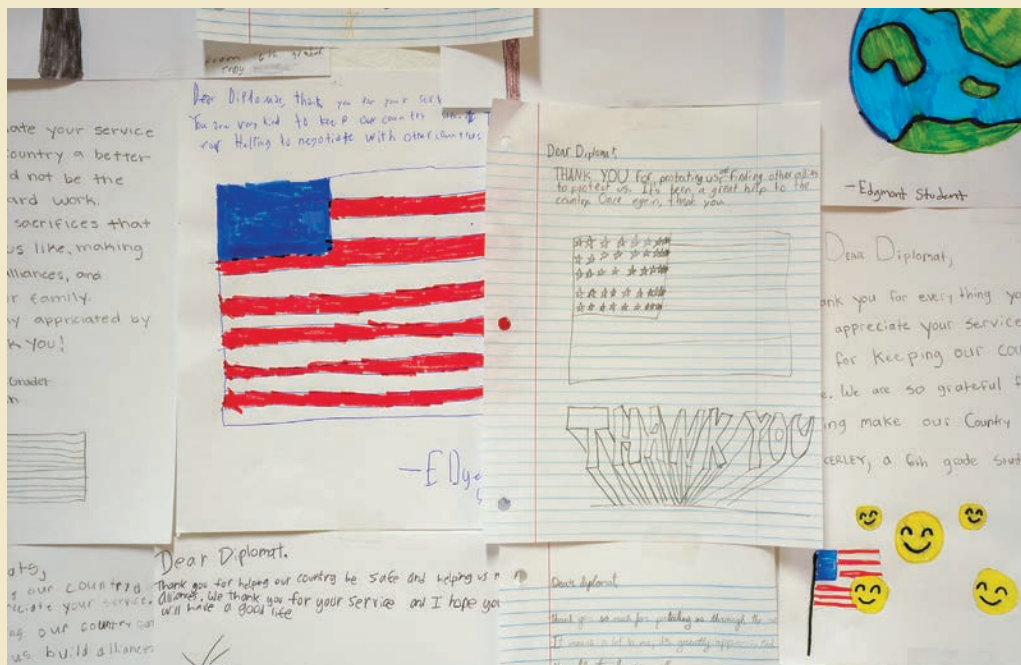
This May marked the 60th anniversary of Foreign Service Day. AFSA welcomed more than 150 members to headquarters on May 1, for its annual open house honoring the Foreign Service community.

Throughout the afternoon, the AFSA team greeted active-duty and retired personnel for a day of connection and community. Attendees had the opportunity to sit for professional headshots and enjoy complimentary treats from a Ben and Jerry's ice cream stand outside.

AFSA staff were on hand to answer questions and share information about membership benefits, retirement resources, and advocacy initiatives. Copies of *The Foreign Service Journal* and AFSA books were available, and members engaged in conversations about current priorities and challenges facing the Foreign Service.

Following the open house, Foreign Service Day continued at a reception at DACOR Bacon House, where more than 100 attendees gathered for an evening reception. AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and DACOR President Angela Dickey offered remarks reflecting on the occasion and the enduring contributions of the Foreign Service.

The next day, the official Foreign Service Day, DACOR



Handwritten letters and drawings from students thanking U.S. diplomats for their service on display at AFSA HQ.



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi (center) and DACOR President Angela Dickey (left) deliver remarks at DACOR's Foreign Service Day reception.



Retired and active-duty diplomats gather at AFSA headquarters during the annual Foreign Service Day open house.



AFSA's publications table offered attendees the chance to browse and take copies of recent editions of *The Foreign Service Journal* and copies of *Inside a U.S. Embassy*.



AFSA staff gather on the steps of the DACOR Bacon House wearing #StandUpForService shirts on May 8.

hosted the presentation of the 2025 Foreign Service Cup to Ambassador R. Nicholas Burns, honoring his distinguished career in diplomacy and his continued service to the Foreign Service community. The presentation of the award was moved out of the State Department award ceremony the day before, without explanation.

Accepting the award, Ambassador Burns reflected on the strength and purpose of the institution: "We should really be proud today of what we've contributed. ... The history of the Foreign Service and of the work that all of you did individually and cumulatively—that can't be erased from a website. And what we stand for can't be cast aside.

"It's the nonpartisanship explicit in the Hatch Act and implicit in the oath that we all take to the Constitution when we begin to serve. Like you, I would never have asked and never did ask a Foreign Service colleague: what party do you belong to? Are you red, or are you blue? It would've been wrong to ask such a

question—it still is—and it would've been contrary to what is embedded deep in our Foreign Service DNA. We work for both parties and we work for whomever the American people elect."

A video of the ceremony is available at <https://bit.ly/FS-Cup>. ■

AFSA Hosts 51st Annual Memorial Plaque Ceremony



The U.S. Armed Services Color Guard presents the colors in tribute to fallen members of the Foreign Service.

On Foreign Service Day, May 2, AFSA held its 51st annual Memorial Plaque Ceremony in the C Street lobby of the Department of State, honoring members of the Foreign Service who lost their lives while serving their country overseas. Since the unveiling of the original plaques in 1933, AFSA has served as steward of this solemn tradition. Thankfully, no new names were added to the memorial plaques this year.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi presided over the ceremony and offered moving remarks reflecting on the courage, professionalism, and sacrifice of the 321 colleagues whose names are etched in the marble panels. “Each name represents a story of commitment, bravery, and sacrifice,” Yazdgerdi said. “Today we pause to honor those who gave their lives in service to our nation—men and women

who upheld their oath to the Constitution and helped shape America’s role in the world through quiet courage and daily sacrifice.”

Yazdgerdi also recognized the inclusion of the USAID memorial wall in this year’s ceremony, calling for its permanent placement in a location of honor within the State Department. “We honor our USAID colleagues whose names are etched here—over 100 individu-

als who gave their lives advancing America’s mission abroad,” he said.

Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, speaking on behalf of the Secretary, reflected on his personal ties to the Foreign Service, recalling childhood visits to the building when his father served as country director for Spain and Portugal.

Landau paid special tribute to three fallen USAID colleagues whose names will soon be added to the USAID memorial wall. Michael Dempsey (died 2013), a senior field program officer, was 33 years old and is survived by his parents and sister. Jacob Toukhy (died 2024), age 50, served as a democracy and governance officer in the West Bank/Gaza mission and had been with USAID for 24 years; he is survived by his mother, two daughters, and many family members. Edward Winant (died 2022),



Staff of U.S. Embassy Beirut join the Rolling Moment of Silence.



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau bow their heads during the wreath-laying ceremony.

Global Rolling Moment of Silence at U.S. Embassy Abidjan (top right) and at U.S. Embassy Paris (bottom right).

a Foreign Service engineering officer, was 54 years old and is survived by his wife and young daughter.

Landau promised the audience that the department would place the USAID memorial wall in a location of dignity and visibility, stating: “I will make sure with every breath in my body that this plaque gets put in a place of honor and distinction in this State Department building.”

Following the presentation of the colors by the United States Armed Services Color Guard, attendees observed a 20-second moment of silence—part of

a rolling tribute joined by U.S. embassies and consulates around the world, from Ouagadougou to Sydney, from Paris to Paramaribo. The ceremony concluded with the laying of a wreath at the memorial wall and a performance of the national anthem.

In closing, Yazdgerdi thanked all in attendance for honoring their colleagues: “Your presence speaks to the strength of our Foreign Service family, and to the profound impact of a life dedicated to diplomacy and peace.” ■



U.S. EMBASSY ABIDJAN



U.S. EMBASSY PARIS

AFSA Welcomes April Orientation Class

On May 5, the American Foreign Service Association welcomed the April 2025 Orientation Class with a celebratory lunch at AFSA headquarters. The event offered a warm introduction to the association and an opportunity for incoming Foreign Service professionals to connect with colleagues and AFSA staff.

This diverse class of approximately 105 specialists (and no generalists) includes Diplomatic Security agents, diplomatic technology officers, medical professionals, office management specialists, and more, bring-

ing a wealth of experience from federal service, the private sector, and beyond. Many members of the class speak multiple languages and have backgrounds ranging from the military and Peace Corps to aviation, education, and even the music industry.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi offered brief remarks about AFSA's role in advocating for Foreign Service members and supporting them throughout their careers.

AFSA is honored to be part of their first steps into service. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meeting March 19, 2025

President Tom Yazdgerdi welcomed retired FSO Lisa Heller as the new director of professional policy issues.

The board agreed on the winner of the 2025 Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy award.

The board agreed to grant blanket authorization to the Office of the General Counsel to decline assistance to members seeking to grieve department regulations that were negotiated by AFSA.

The board agreed that “Foreign Service Alumni” is an acceptable alternative name for the Retiree category.

The board ratified authorization of an appropriation of up to \$100,000 from the Legal Defense Fund.

The board agreed to appropriate up to \$33,000 from the Legal Defense Fund to support a request for a temporary restraining order regarding USAGM.

The board agreed to request an increased liability limit of up to \$3 million for director and officer (D&O) insurance. ■



2023-2025 AFSA Governing Board Term Report



Some of the 2023-2025 AFSA Governing Board.

AFSA/MARK PARKHOMENKO

As we do every two years, we present to you the term report of the outgoing AFSA Governing Board. This document outlines the priorities, highlights, lowlights, challenges, and successes that AFSA has had in the past two years. This report is part of AFSA's commitment to transparency.

The report covers two eventful years, which included both the centennial of AFSA and the Foreign Service, as well as recent efforts to dismantle Foreign Service agencies, remove collective bargaining, and downsize the federal workforce, including the Foreign Service. We do our best to capture these momentous events, and everything in between, in the following pages.

—Ásgeir Sigfússon, Executive Director

President's Message

Let me start by thanking all our members for supporting AFSA during this 2023-2025 Governing Board term. Without your dues, donations to the Legal Defense Fund, and willingness to volunteer, AFSA would not have been able to survive. We have used these funds to fight the dismantling of USAID and USAGM, two of our member agencies, and the executive order on eliminating collective bargaining rights. It truly has been one of the most trying times in the history of our organization. Job One remains to defend our members and AFSA as we go forward. I am proud that, with your help and the work of our great staff, we have met this existential moment and will continue to fight for you and the nonpartisan, professional Foreign Service that we know and love.

We started our term in office knowing that with tight budgets and a divided Congress, we would need to look for low- or no-cost ways to improve the lives of our members and strengthen the Foreign Service. We got Fly America Act exemptions if U.S. airlines could not or would not allow your pets to travel with you. And we got the CDC to open more ports of entry in the U.S. and labs overseas to make rabies regulations easier to comply with for our members.

AFSA also celebrated the 100th anniversary of both the Foreign Service and our great organization by leveraging this milestone to get the word out about the important work that we do. Thanks to everyone, including our retirees, for participating in this effort by writing op-eds for their hometown newspapers and other media outlets. We raised funds to celebrate in style, hosting a gala in the State Department Diplomatic Reception Rooms, featuring then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken as keynote speaker, and a subsequent party for our members on the roof of the Watergate Hotel.

The second year of our term started out well. While building on the success of the Foreign Service Families Act, we received an unprecedented 10-year authorization for overseas comparability pay (OCP). Now AFSA has the space and time to work to make this authorization permanent and advocate for the last one-third tranche of OCP. We also got bipartisan support for per diem for local Foreign Service hires—something that we had been



Tom Yazdgerdi



pushing for many years. The January 2025 FS orientation class was the first to receive this benefit, and as a local FS hire myself, I am exceedingly glad that this injustice has been righted after decades.

With the advent of the new administration, we are dealing with a new set of issues that, as mentioned above, represents an existential challenge to our members, AFSA, and the Foreign Service. One of our priorities is to help our members who are near retirement but not quite there by pushing for Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) that would lower the age and years of

service so they can retire in dignity, if they choose.

AFSA will also fight against any effort to politicize the Foreign Service, including any changes to how new members are brought into the Service and the ambassadorial nomination process for our career diplomats.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you—first as AFSA State vice president for two terms and then president. I will do my utmost to ensure that incoming President John Dinkelman and members of the new Governing Board are fully briefed and ready to take up their duties on July 15.

Executive Director's Report

The board term that is coming to an end this summer has been truly eventful. AFSA has experienced great highs and unexpected challenges that have focused all parts of the organization to achieve specific goals, always with a view to supporting our members.

This Governing Board came in at an auspicious time. We were well established in our post-pandemic work routines and dove into plans for the centennials of AFSA and the Foreign Service in 2024. In fact, much of the first year of this board was focused on that important celebratory occasion.

You will see many of the centennial-related successes detailed in the following pages, but we were all tremendously proud of the main event: A centennial gala dinner in the Ben Franklin Diplomatic Reception Rooms at State, featuring then-Secretary of State Blinken, then-CIA Director Bill Burns, and hundreds of Foreign Service members representing all six foreign affairs agencies. It was a truly memorable evening honoring a century of service and excellence. We followed that with a birthday happy hour for our members, which took place on the roof of the Watergate Hotel on a beautiful May evening.

The second half of this board term coincided with some historic challenges for our workforce. Again, many of the details will be enumerated in the rest of this report. Suffice to say, AFSA was forced to be more “out there” than we have ever been, raising our collective voice to defend our members. This is why AFSA exists, and we are all resolved to keep doing everything we can to stand up for your rights.

But of course, AFSA's day-to-day work continues. We are always looking to refine our operations, being mindful of safeguarding our resources. From updating investment principles to further expanding employee parental leave to match that of the federal government, we work hard to ensure that AFSA is well placed to be the strongest possible advocate of the Foreign Service while holding on to our ability to recruit and retain the most talented staff we can.

This has been a tumultuous time, and we foresee that the challenges will not end in the short term. AFSA will continue to find ways to be your voice and advocate, representing you individually and as a whole. We appreciate your membership and your support. We could not do any of our work without you.

One plea at the end: Please encourage your friends and colleagues to join AFSA if they have not yet done so. This applies particularly to our retirees, whose membership often lapses inadvertently upon retirement. Ask your friends if they are receiving the media digest, the *FSJ*, and other AFSA communications. If not, they are almost certainly not members. We need everyone right now. The more members we have, the stronger our collective voice.

Thank you.



Ásgeir Sigfússon



Finance

In the past two years, AFSA has seen a 20 percent increase in revenue from \$6.08 million to \$7.3 million. This increase is mostly the result of successful membership recruitment. Dues revenue has increased by 17 percent, which comes to about \$800,000 a year. Advertising revenue continues to maintain a revenue flow of about \$550,000 annually.

Our \$17.3 million investment portfolio continues to maintain growth. AFSA's financial reserves at the end of 2024 were as follows:

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

AFSA's total operating expenses increased by 17 percent from \$6.5 million to \$7.5 million. The Finance Committee is reviewing our current situation and plans to react as necessary and suggest possible adjustments to the incoming board.

Office of the General Counsel

In 2024 AFSA's Office of Labor Management changed its name to the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) to better reflect the breadth of issues it handles. The 10 staff members of OGC provide support to the AFSA president, vice presidents, and representatives of the six foreign affairs agencies we represent as well as to our approximately 18,000 members on myriad issues relating to conditions of Foreign Service employment.

During this term, the Foreign Service Grievance Board (FSGB) ruled in AFSA's favor in two implementation disputes. In FSGB No. 2020-049, the FSGB agreed with AFSA that the U.S. Agency for International Development violated a 2017 memorandum of understanding relating to Foreign Service Limited (FSL) appointments when it failed to respond to AFSA's comments and questions regarding certain appointments. The

FSGB also found that USAID violated the collectively bargained provisions of ADS 414 pertaining to the criteria for FSL appointments. The board ordered the agency, among other things, to adhere to the terms in ADS 414 in future appointments and to issue an agency notice announcing that it failed to consistently adhere to ADS 414 in 2019 and 2020.

In FSGB No. 2023-020, the FSGB found that the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) and AFSA had negotiated a uniform procedure for filling all Foreign Service vacancies, including positions that the agency alleged were outside the bargaining unit. The FSGB found the agency violated a 2021 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) when it implemented a special bidding opportunity (SBO) process for certain headquarters positions, including deputy assistant secretary (DAS) and executive director (ED) positions.

The agency claimed the positions were outside the bargaining unit, and therefore it had no duty to bargain with AFSA. The FSGB ordered FCS to issue a declaration, via agency notice, that the SBO process contravened the 2021 MOU and to comply with the 2021 MOU. The agency filed an appeal with the Foreign Service Labor Relations Board, which was denied. In a related case, AFSA filed a request for clarification of the bargaining unit with the Federal Labor Relations Authority, arguing the DAS and ED positions did not meet the statutory criteria to be excluded from the bargaining unit. The case was settled with the agency conceding that, based on the incumbents' current duties, the positions were in the bargaining unit.

During this Governing Board's term, the foreign affairs agencies agreed to pay AFSA more than \$100,000 in attorney fees for work performed by AFSA attorneys in the above cases in addition to a case where AFSA assisted a member who prevailed in her grievance. This money was put into the Legal Defense Fund.

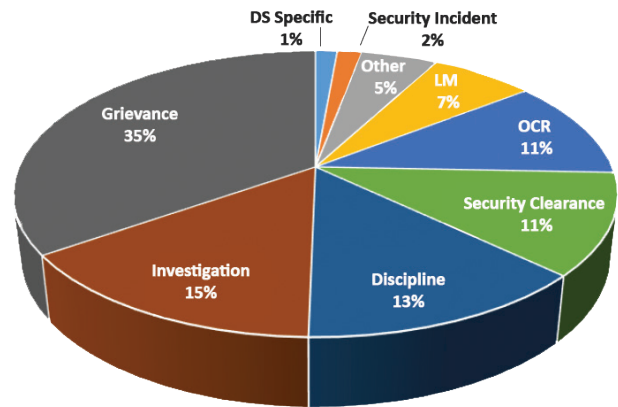
On Dec. 4, 2024, AFSA filed a class action lawsuit based on the State Department's denial of Havana Act (HA) benefits on behalf of some members impacted by anomalous health incidents (AHI) who suffered traumatic brain injuries. We are challenging the department's interpretation of "other incidents" under the HA to deny these employees benefits on the basis that their injuries were not connected to qualifying incidents, even though these employees were recognized by the department as AHI cases, received medical treatment at Walter Reed and other Centers of Excellence, and successfully filed worker's compensation claims based on their injuries.



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Prior to the change in administration, AFSA and the various foreign affairs agencies extended their collective bargaining agreements to ensure, among other things, the continuation of government-provided office space and 100 percent official time for AFSA's full-time president, vice presidents, and State representative dedicated to specialist issues. (At press time, the government had ended all union rights for AFSA at the Department of State and USAID, pending the outcome of AFSA's lawsuits.)

As of press time, AFSA is a plaintiff in three lawsuits against the administration: two cases challenge the dismantling of USAID and USAGM and a third case challenges the executive order stripping Foreign Service members of their right to have a union. AFSA has also retained private counsel to represent USAID employees who have received reduction-in-force notices in a class action Merit Systems Protection Board appeal.



The AFSA Office of the General Counsel is typically contacted more than 2,000 times per year for assistance in some form. The most common questions that come in are related to finances, security-related matters, career counseling, and assignments. Of the number of that become longer-term cases (usually about a third of those contacts), the breakdown consistently follows the chart above.

Membership

In coordination with each agency, we are fortunate to welcome new Foreign Service orientation classes to AFSA headquarters for lunch and the chance to hear how AFSA supports them throughout their careers and into retirement. This historically adds up to approximately 20 luncheons a year hosting upward of 1,000 new colleagues. For some agencies, this introduction is done virtually. Although a hiring freeze was put in place in January 2025, we were able to host a USAID class and two State classes of new hires. These recruitment events are made even more successful by our cadre of table hosts who volunteer their time to meet new members of the Foreign Service and share their experience.

AFSA membership has remained consistent at just over 17,000 members, climbing to more than 18,000 members in early 2025. More than 80 percent of active-duty members choose to join AFSA. Our retiree membership has steadily increased and continues to be the second-largest membership constituency.

Our 2024 centennial year saw some new member events, including sending "Party in a Box" packages to participating posts to recognize the Foreign Service centennial on May 24, 2024. We also hosted a member appreciation event at the rooftop of the Watergate Hotel for members in the D.C. area. Each May, we commemo-

rate Foreign Service Day with a series of activities. This includes a rolling moment of silence at embassies and consulates around the world in coordination with our memorial plaque ceremony at the State Department as part of the official Foreign Service Day activities. We also take the opportunity to invite members to an open house at AFSA HQ to meet with staff, connect with colleagues, enjoy refreshments, and get free professional headshots taken.

In addition to other in-person member events such as our quarterly happy hours and annual Foreign Service Night at Nationals Park, we continue to offer a robust set of webinars on a range of topics. We hosted more than 20 webinars during this period on topics such as managing retirement benefits, financial and retirement planning, preparing for Open Season, and AFSA's congressional advocacy. We also host virtual town halls and speaker series featuring authors or emerging topics in our Inside Diplomacy series. We've had more than 9,000 attendees for our virtual programs during the 2023-2025 Governing Board term.

The membership portion of the AFSA website was overhauled, resulting in upgraded functionality and improved usability. Members can update their profiles, membership status, and contact information by logging into their account at <https://afsa.org>.



Advocacy

The 2023-2025 board term presented AFSA with new challenges in Congress. Narrow partisan margins in both chambers and the buildup to a presidential election slowed legislative action and limited lawmakers' time in Washington. AFSA found opportunities to push the organization's advocacy priorities and adapt to a more constrained budget environment over the past two years.

In response to current and expected further federal reductions in force in early 2025, AFSA's Governing Board agreed to seek a time-limited Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) option for members of the Foreign Service. This would ensure those at FS-2 and below, or those not yet eligible for voluntary retirement benefits, are given a compassionate transition out of the Foreign Service. This option needs to be authorized by Congress, and AFSA continued to push for this option into spring 2025. AFSA's advocacy also focused on playing defense to protect earned benefits for members of the Foreign Service during the reconciliation process.

During this board's term, AFSA saw Congress pass its third and fourth comprehensive State Department Authorization Acts in a row. Through this vehicle, AFSA helped push through priorities meant to ease life in the Foreign Service and better accommodate the mobile lifestyle. AFSA put forward priorities key to recruitment and retention in the Foreign Service, focusing on those that were no- and low-cost to ensure bipartisan support.

AFSA successfully fought to protect the existing authority for overseas comparability pay (OCP) and see it extend through Dec. 31, 2034—the longest extension in its history. Previously, AFSA relied on appropriators to keep OCP in its funding bills and reauthorize it each year. Now, OCP authority is part of the authorization process.

AFSA continues to fight for the third tranche of OCP, or full D.C. locality pay, and funding for it with the threat of authority expiration behind us.

AFSA's advocacy work also built on and expanded past wins. For example, Congress expanded the provision allowing Foreign Service members to break residential and vehicles leases, as well as telephone service contracts, without financial penalties when given orders to serve domestically. This builds on the Foreign Service Families Act, which provided this protection to those given orders to serve overseas.

AFSA's advocacy sought to ensure newer benefits apply to Foreign Service members in all foreign affairs agencies as well. All those under chief of mission authority now have a Fly America Act exception when relocating with pets when no certified United States air carrier is willing or able to do so. This was previously only a benefit for State Department employees.

AFSA also significantly increased our state and local advocacy reach over the past two years. AFSA advocated for protecting Foreign Service members' voting rights in South Dakota, addressing concerns about voter registration denials for overseas personnel. AFSA advanced existing work on issues ranging from pension tax exemptions to homestead protections and school enrollment policies for Foreign Service families. Our geographic expansion, now reaching six states across four regions, demonstrates AFSA's growing influence in addressing the unique challenges faced by Foreign Service members at the state level.

Finally, in relation to the AFSA and Foreign Service centennial in 2024, our team worked to receive formal recognition of the Foreign Service centennial through resolutions from Congress, the state legislature of Virginia, and the D.C. City Council.

Communications and Outreach

Over the past two years, AFSA has transformed its communications and outreach efforts, balancing the celebration of our centennial with the urgent need to defend the Foreign Service amid unprecedented workforce disruptions.

AFSA's centennial year honored our 100-year legacy

while raising the Foreign Service's public's profile. We organized a centennial gala at the State Department, held events at presidential libraries, and launched a social media campaign that increased engagement across our channels by 1,500 percent. Our op-ed initiative placed Foreign Service voices in more than 15 media outlets, including *The Hill* and *The Arizona*



Daily Star. For the first time, AFSA also introduced diplomacy-themed merchandise, generating funding to support outreach initiatives.

Since our centennial year, the American political landscape has shifted dramatically, requiring AFSA's communications and outreach priorities to shift with it. Crisis communications are now central to our efforts. We've built an infrastructure for rapid response communications, ensuring that AFSA can quickly react to policy shifts and workforce disruptions. In the first few months of the new administration alone, AFSA sent more than 20 member messages on workforce changes; launched an online resource hub with real-time guidance; and increased our social media audience by more than 30 percent through breaking news responses.

To sharpen our messaging, we conducted an in-house strategic messaging workshop, equipping AFSA leadership with the tools to communicate effectively in an evolving policy landscape. We also launched *Service Disrupted*, a public relations campaign exposing the erosion of the Foreign Service workforce, particularly at USAID. Storytelling has been key to these efforts, with AFSA using social media to document the real-world effects of these losses. As a result, AFSA has surpassed peer organizations like USGLC in LinkedIn followers and is now second only to the State Department among similar groups. Our results speak for themselves—from January through March of this year, we reached a record 1.7 million users with our content.

AFSA has also expanded its national media presence. Over the past two years, we have been featured on *60 Minutes*, *NPR*, *The New York Times*, Fox News, and countless other national news outlets. Through our "Hometown Voices" initiative, we've mobilized retired Foreign Service members for interviews and op-eds in regional and local newspapers, ensuring that Foreign Service stories are being told far beyond the Capital Beltway.

Meanwhile, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi has taken our outreach on the road, visiting California, Florida, and South Carolina to meet with local leaders, universities, and community organizations. These trips have helped build grassroots support for the Foreign Service.

Additionally, we've sustained our long-standing educational efforts through our high school essay contest; our Inside Diplomacy webinar series; and our Road Scholar and Chautauqua programs, reinforcing the importance of diplomacy and development to those who otherwise might not understand how this work impacts U.S. national security. To support our expanded outreach and communications efforts, we updated our website, making it easier for members to access timely updates, digital campaigns, and advocacy tools.

Through it all, AFSA has met the moment. Through crisis communications and strategic storytelling, we have ensured the Foreign Service's voice is being heard.

Professional Policy Issues

During this term, professional policy issues staff, often working with our advocacy team, have prioritized keeping AFSA members fully informed about AFSA's advocacy agenda. One of the principal ways we have done this has been to publish an advocacy update approximately once a quarter. The update essentially serves as a one-stop shop for AFSA members, since it includes status reports on AFSA's advocacy priorities for each agency, plus our retiree-centered advocacy. We have conceptually combined the advocacy update with periodic town halls to create a continuous stream of information to our members, and their questions and advocacy recommendations back to us. This practice has created a rich feedback loop with our constituencies.

Added to these publications and events are the surveys AFSA has created. During this term, AFSA sent out various general and specific surveys such as a survey on overseas road safety in the Foreign Service, the professional development program (PDP) survey for State Department FS generalists and specialists, and the cost-of-living survey.

Due to the outsized impact of house and general price inflation on Foreign Service families who relocate to Washington and other destinations, senior leadership at State requested that AFSA share with them the cost-of-living survey results as soon as they were completed, demonstrating the power and import of AFSA's work in pushing ahead an evidence-based, relevant advocacy agenda.

As in previous board terms, PPI took the lead in organizing the Governing Board retreat, which outlines



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the tentative advocacy agenda for the year ahead, and the advocacy midterm review for the Governing Board. In preparing the events' agendas, PPI consulted board members, reviewed member survey feedback, and gathered background information from past meetings with agency principals. PPI also closely worked with the advocacy director to guide the choice of agenda items in the direction of clear congressional interest, so that if AFSA pursued reform solutions legislatively, there would be at least a fair chance of congressional support. PPI continued to refresh AFSA's advocacy priorities via feedback from a continuing series of town halls, first- and second-tour (FAST) employee brown bags, employee group meetings, and engagement with agency management.

Our state-level advocacy is a growing field within our larger advocacy portfolio. In Virginia, the issue of Foreign Service families' experiences with school enrollment upon returning to Washington has just been successfully resolved. Virginia has required that any student coming from overseas (except those from military families) meet a physical residency requirement and overseas academic credits have often not been recognized—even programs like the International Baccalaureate that have internationally recognized curricula. With bipartisan support in the legislature, AFSA successfully advocated for Foreign Service families to benefit from an exemp-

tion similar to the military carve-out. This will ensure a smoother transition when they return to Virginia from overseas. Governor Glenn Youngkin signed this bill in April 2025.

The first chaotic few months of the second Trump administration have led to a focus on nearly constant messaging to our members in response to destructive actions taken by political leadership. PPI has participated actively in crisis communications meetings and message preparation including weekly and special updates. During this period, our collaboration with the Office of the General Counsel deepened as we strove to provide accurate and comprehensive answers to our members on AFSA's policy and legal advocacy. In general, AFSA is filling an information void left by foreign affairs agencies, which has required us to develop some expertise on previously unfamiliar issues and broadened AFSA's ability to supply our members with relevant information critical to their Foreign Service careers.

At the same time, in the wake of the executive order on union activity that cut off most direct contact with State's Bureau of Global Talent Management, we've had to pivot to sending written messages to State leadership on key workforce issues including the treatment of USAID staff and proposed State human resource changes.

Scholarships, Awards, and Plaques

The AFSA Scholarship Program awarded \$811,000 to the children of AFSA members during the 2023-2025 AFSA Governing Board term. This includes \$300,000 provided for merit scholarships, which are awarded for academic, art, and community service achievement, and \$511,000 in financial aid scholarships. Most of these funds came from the AFSA Scholarship Fund, with additional funding from DACOR, the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW), and several long-standing privately endowed funds.

No AFSA member dues are used in the AFSA scholarship program, which has distributed more than \$6.2 million to more than 3,000 youths. We rely on the help of upward of 40 members to serve as volunteer judges. AFSA merit scholarship winners are honored at the annual youth awards ceremony each summer hosted by the Foreign Service Youth Foundation.

AFSA's annual awards ceremony, held each year in October, honors constructive dissent and exemplary performance within the Foreign Service. Up to 12 awards are presented each year recognizing dissent and performance of our active-duty colleagues in addition to awards for family member volunteer initiatives, AFSA post representatives, and contributions to AFSA. Each year our Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy award recognizes an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to the Foreign Service. The lifetime award recipients during this board term were Ambassadors (ret.) John Tefft (2023) and Marc Grossman (2024).

AFSA maintains the memorial plaques in the C Street Lobby of the State Department honoring 321 individuals who died in service abroad. These names are commemorated each year during our memorial plaque ceremony held on Foreign Service Day, the first Friday in May.



The Foreign Service Journal and FS Books

During the 2023-2025 Governing Board term, *The Foreign Service Journal* covered a broad set of pivotal moments in Foreign Service history—from Cold War-era public diplomacy efforts to the AFSA and Foreign Service centennials, to evolving issues affecting the diplomacy field, such as artificial intelligence, climate diplomacy, and workplace well-being. With a print run of 14,000 and an online readership of some 36,000, the *Journal* reaches every member of Congress and is distributed to every U.S. embassy and consulate worldwide.

Awards. The May 2024 *Journal* received the silver 2025 Trendy Award for best monthly professional society magazine for its focus on the AFSA and Foreign



Award-winning *FSJ* issues include the May 2024 edition, the May 2023 edition, and the December 2023 edition.

told America's story across the Soviet Union from 1951 to 1991. The December 2023 *FSJ* feature article, "Operation Nica Welcome," by FSO Kate Applegate also earned a Tabbie honorable mention in 2024.

Centennial Celebration. Our May 2024 special centennial edition featured essays from then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken, former Secretaries of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and James Baker, and then-USAID Administrator Samantha Power. The *Journal* featured a "100 Words for 100 Years" essay collection and received dozens of responses for its writing competition on the future of the Foreign Service. Additionally, in every edition of the centennial year, the *FSJ* featured a different AFSA member benefit program in its "AFSA Works" column. Many advertisers provided special centennial messages congratulating the Foreign Service and AFSA.

FS Books: New, Updated Voice of the Foreign

Service Edition. Published in time for AFSA's centennial commemorative events in May 2024, *The Voice of the Foreign Service: A History of the American Foreign Service Association at 100* is the second edition of AFSA's history book, which traces the evolution of the Foreign Service and the association into the 21st century. Author and former diplomat Harry Kopp chronicles the events that shaped AFSA into what it is today—the professional association and union for the U.S. Foreign Service.

Praise for the new edition includes:

"Marking the centennial of AFSA and the Foreign Service, *The Voice of the Foreign Service* is a must read for those who want to learn more about both. ... It turns bureaucratic battles and legislative maneuvers into chapters that entertain and enlighten. It's a smooth read from beginning to end."

—Ambassador Marie "Masha" Yovanovitch, author of *Lessons from the Edge: A Memoir*



FSJ publications team during the 2024 Foreign Service Day reception at AFSA headquarters. (Not pictured: Susan Maitra and Molly Long; and Caryn Suko Smith and Jay Mason of Driven By Design.) From left: Associate Editor Mark Parkhomenko, Deputy Editor Donna Gorman, Editor in Chief and Director of Publications Shawn Dorman, Publications Coordinator and Content Strategist Hannah Harari, and Managing Editor Kathryn Owens.

Service centennials. The May 2023 *FSJ* edition, focused on "Public Diplomacy: Cold War and Beyond," received multiple honors: a silver Trendy Award for best monthly professional society magazine, a Tabbie honorable mention for best single issue from Trade and Business Publications International, and an APEX (Awards for Publication Excellence) honorable mention for excellence in magazine publishing. This edition showcased the work of U.S. Information Agency exhibit guides who



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“Anyone concerned with reform of the State Department or American diplomacy needs to read this history of AFSA. It is an important and well-written story. ... The struggle to improve the quality, professionalism, and effectiveness of American diplomacy remains ongoing. It will be waged better nested in an understanding of the past.”

—Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann, president of the American Academy of Diplomacy

FS Book Market, Revisited and Revised. In November 2024, the Publications Department hosted a book market (the first since 2017) featuring Foreign Service authors alongside a panel of publishing industry experts. AFSA members gathered at headquarters to purchase and discuss books from a dozen of the latest “In Their Own Write” collection authors before hearing from four professionals about how to approach the publishing process. The panel conversation covered a range of topics for aspiring authors, from finding an agent to creating effective proposals. Authors, panelists, and attendees expressed appreciation for the chance to connect with other members of the global affairs writing community.

State

Tina Wong, State vice president for the 2023-2025 Governing Board, partnering with the AFSA State representatives and AFSA staff, helped secure protections for Foreign Service members and their families and prioritized building FS community.

AFSA came into 2025 with 18 months of AFSA legislative and policy wins that are helping improve the lives of Foreign Service members. We negotiated cross-functional competency into our promotions and performance evaluations, family togetherness in bidding, the clarification of antinepotism rules, the reduction of transition pain points for Limited Noncareer Consular Fellows, and recruitment points for those with relevant LNA experiences overseas.

We also supported bringing talent back into the department and building our own talent pool with the onboarding of more Foreign Service members through a fully virtual Foreign Service Officer Assessment (FSOA), the reappointments process to fill mid-level position deficits, and a training float to include China watchers in our multilateral organizations, and details to enhance the department’s AI and emerging technology expertise.

FSJ Digital Reach. The FSJ’s LinkedIn page and “Insider” newsletter continue to gain new followers and subscribers weekly. Since April 2023, LinkedIn followers have more than doubled—reaching 4,650 as of the beginning of March 2025. In 2024 the *Journal* team also started to explore new channels and mediums for sharing content in collaboration with the AFSA communications team, producing a new series of Instagram “reels” introducing FSJ editions monthly.

Author Engagement. *Journal* staff and Editorial Board members spoke with graduate students at Georgetown University about the “how-tos” of writing and editing for diplomats. They engaged with leaders at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies about the submission process and upcoming issues of interest. They judged AFSA’s centennial writing contest and published the top three articles. They served as judges for AFSA’s annual high school essay contest. They attended conferences to increase awareness of AFSA and its publications. They also met with employee organizations and others to outline publication requirements and encourage article submissions.

Our advocacy led to congressional authorization and most recently Department of State implementation of per diem for local hires joining the Foreign Service, correcting a longtime financial disparity between local hires and those hired outside 50 miles of the D.C. metro area.

We also supported salary matching for our security engineering officers (SEOs) and others and successfully advocated for extended health care options for individual FS employees taking leave without pay (LWOP). We conducted targeted surveys of the mid-ranks about the career development plan (CDP) and the professional development plan (PDP), leading to a series of educational webinars and improvements to this year’s senior threshold process.

For members who called for more transparency into the department’s security clearance processes, we negotiated new appeals procedures for all employees who face assignment restrictions and assignment review denials, giving members the opportunity to bring their case before a senior panel of non-DS officials. We continue to push for ways to share these best practices across the foreign affairs agencies.



Most recently, as the State Department sought to comply with all the new Trump administration executive orders to return to in-office work and to prepare for major budget cuts, AFSA focused our advocacy on protecting domestic employees teleworking overseas (DETO) options for our FS tandems and began our advocacy on expanding Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) for the Foreign Service. We are continuing to do everything possible to hold the department accountable, including to the rules within the Foreign Affairs Manual on reductions in force (RIF).

AFSA's work delivered positive results for Foreign Service families. We are proud to work together with employees to improve and expand emergency visitation travel for our FS families needing to care for loved ones. We worked closely with department leadership and with the CDC to find a positive path that clarified the dog import restrictions rules and a waiver period to allow for dogs to get fully vaccinated and certified for their return to the United States. For more than a year, we pushed and finally won reinstatement of the State Department emergency backup care (EBUC) program offering every employee up to five days of reimbursable backup childcare, eldercare, and self-care a year following the NDAA FY 2023 authorization of a \$2 million

program. Many years of advocacy culminated last year with new MED clearance procedures that simplify the bidding process for those with special needs education children and put overseas special education decisions into parents' hands.

Our advocacy extended to the greater FS community, too. Throughout the Israel-Hamas conflict and other global emergencies, we listened to first- and second-tour officers and FS families on the ground, and we met with various employee organizations to advocate for mental health and other community support. We partnered with Bureau of Global Talent Management and the Foreign Service Institute to promote career-long learning and continuous employee feedback through the FSI leadership courses and the newly launched "Journey to Unleash Manager Potential" (JUMP Initiative). We even joined forces with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings and Operations on a global education campaign that gave FS families life-saving road safety tips as we all observed the November 17 World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

These accomplishments showcase AFSA as the effective voice of the Foreign Service. Our small but mighty team is maximizing our efforts to support our members, and this legacy of wins will continue to drive our advocacy beyond 2025 as we face many new challenges ahead.

Retiree Services

During the past two years, AFSA's retirement services team continued to assist and advocate for current and future Foreign Service retirees and provide them with information and guidance to make the most of their retirement benefits.

The online, print, and video resources developed by AFSA's retirement services team in recent years served as crucial resources to active-duty employees in the wake of moves by the Trump administration to downsize the foreign affairs agencies. AFSA augmented the more than 100 documents and links already on its retirement resources webpage with new written guidance and new webinars—including a series of expert presentations developed in conjunction with veteran Foreign Service Institute staff on finances and career transition, especially tailored for members being forced out of the Service.

AFSA's staff and Governing Board members fielded hundreds of inquiries from members asking about retire-

ment rules and played a critical role in liaising with State Department offices to clarify relatively obscure retirement regulations for the benefit of our members.

Foreign Service retirees also found AFSA's online resources to be vital after the State Department removed most of the content from its RNet website. AFSA also played a key role in notifying retirees of cyber threats bearing on the Employee/Annuitant Express website, as department offices do not have the capacity to notify all retirees. As always, updates and guidance on federal benefits also continued to be featured in AFSA's bimonthly retirement e-newsletter, in single-issue AFSA-net emails alerting members to important developments, and in the annual retiree directory, which, along with contact information for fellow retirees, includes 25 pages of benefits guidance.

Even prior to the surge in member inquiries in early 2025, AFSA Counselor for Retirees Dolores Brown (herself an FS retiree) worked one on one with hundreds of retirees and active-duty employees to answer



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their benefits questions and, when necessary, contact State Department retirement officials on their behalf to resolve bureaucratic glitches. In one case, she assisted a retiree in getting reimbursement of more than \$450,000 that had been incorrectly deducted from his annuity. In another case, she secured the reimbursement of more than \$50,000 in Federal Employees Group Life Insurance excess premiums that had been deducted from a retiree's annuity over many years.

The AFSA retirement services team also met on a regular basis with senior managers in the Office of Retirement and the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services to discuss issues affecting all Foreign Service retirees.

To protect our earned retirement benefits, AFSA continued to work with other members of the Federal Postal Coalition—a group of 30 organizations representing 2.7 million federal employees and 2.6 million federal

retirees. The coalition sends letters to Congress, with AFSA as co-signer, and holds monthly meetings, with AFSA participation, to plan advocacy efforts. In late 2024, that advocacy achieved the repeal of two long-standing laws—the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset—that had reduced Social Security benefits for some retirees in the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System. In early 2025, the Coalition increased efforts to oppose legislative proposals to cut federal retirement benefits.

At the state level, AFSA expanded its advocacy to urge states that provide tax exemptions to uniformed military pensions to extend similar treatment for Foreign Service annuities. Bills are pending in Virginia, Maryland, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Rhode Island.

These multifaceted efforts to provide members with value for their dues produced a rise in AFSA retiree membership to its highest level in at least 10 years.

U.S. Agency for International Development

Prior to Jan. 20, 2025, relations between AFSA and agency leadership were solid and increasingly close. A concerted effort over the past two years to improve linkages had yielded several promising results, such as increasing AFSA's presence with front office decision-makers and successful engagements on reorganizations and operational policy (ADS) updates. Additional efforts included outreach to Foreign Service Limited officers, continued focus on recruiting career candidates to join AFSA, and outreach and support to employee resource groups (ERG). Finally, AFSA along with our counterparts at AFGE and Employee Labor Relations (ELR) negotiated and signed a labor management forum agreement that provided an avenue for discussion on common issues and preparing joint solutions.

Notably, in January 2024, AFSA met with Deputy Administrator Paloma Adams-Allan to discuss how best to capture diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) as part of USAID's multisource ratings (MSR) survey. Prior to the meeting, AFSA and the performance management team had successfully negotiated meaningful changes to the MSRs to properly capture and rate FSOs on DEIA.

Additionally, starting in September 2023 and continuing through the summer of 2024, AFSA and the USAID Counselor worked in partnership to develop a mental health strategy for USAID staff. This major initiative included an AFSA-sponsored mental health service sur-

vey, USAID sponsored working groups, the development of a mental health strategy, and the co-authoring of an article in the July-August *FSJ* focus on mental health.

Further, working with counterparts on the USAID performance management team, several changes were agreed to regarding submission frequency of promotion materials for FS-1s not eligible for promotion to the Senior Foreign Service. These changes would result in time and cost savings for the FSOs, their raters, and the promotion boards.

During this time, more than 10 ADS policies were discussed, negotiated, and amended. These included important changes to policies covering performance management, appointments, tenure, disciplinary actions, and DETOs/remote work/telework.

Since August 2023, the AFSA VP for USAID, AFSA president, USAID board representative, and other AFSA staff met with incoming classes of career candidates as part of their orientation. These outreach efforts were very successful in recruiting new AFSA members.

USAID Board Representative Chris Saenger held multiple outreach meetings with all USAID ERGs during this time. These efforts were particularly successful in building trust with the gender and sexual minority ERG.

Unfortunately, since Jan. 20, 2025, relations between AFSA and the agency have soured to the point where the agency no longer engages in any dialogue with AFSA. Requests for meetings with new leadership have



been ignored, ongoing meetings with working-level counterparts have been canceled, and Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM) staff have been told to not engage with AFSA or other unions at USAID. Senior government officials are currently pushing to have USAID absorbed into the State Department as a quasi-independent agency, with an estimated 300 U.S. direct-hire (USDH) staff (Civil and Foreign Service) transferring to the State Department. USAID has effectively been canceled and unconstitutionally eliminated.

As this report is written, in February, nearly all FSOs and FSLs have been placed on administrative leave, overseas FSOs have been told they will be “voluntarily recalled” to the U.S., a majority of domestic FSOs and an unknown number of overseas FSOs have received reduction-in-force (RIF) notices, and there is an expectation that the remaining FSOs will receive RIF notices soon.

AFSA has been waging a massive counteroffensive. This includes filing a lawsuit to prevent the shuttering of USAID; filing multiple unfair labor practice actions and

implementation disputes with appropriate authorities; press interviews by the AFSA president and USAID VP; a social media campaign; securing legal services in anticipation of a cohort filing to the Merit Systems Protection Board; and providing support and guidance to FSOs filing individual grievances to counter agency actions.

As AFSA's USAID VP Randy Chester told his agency's leadership: “You may not believe, or be unwilling to understand, the sacrifices made by FSOs, the high level of integrity FSOs demonstrate every day, our commitment to serving the American taxpayer, or that at the end of the day we are American patriots who believe in the good that the U.S. has to offer.” America is less safe without USAID, and our ability to influence the world is severely diminished.

Chester's message to the USAID workforce remains: “I know how important our work at USAID is, how great the sacrifices of our FSOs have been, and I will continue to tell everyone about you, my heroic colleagues. I remain in awe of the work we have done and our continued efforts in the face of this storm.”

Foreign Commercial Service

A FSA's Vice President for FCS Joshua Burke had three clear intentions when he ran for the board: to support the well-being of FCS officers, to collaborate with (and to confront when needed) management on issues that affect their lives and mission, and to tell their story to the Hill to finally get the appropriations they deserve. Over the past two years, that mission has taken the form of officer coaching, internal policy battles, workforce advocacy, and relentless efforts to elevate FCS' role within AFSA, Commerce, and the interagency.

A major focus was ensuring that FCS simply complied with its own rules and policies. One of the earliest fights was challenging unilateral changes to the special bidding opportunity (SBO) process. After a nearly 18-month effort, the Foreign Service Grievance Board decision forced the agency to return to previously negotiated and published policy. Unfortunately, the last administration again violated our assignments policy by direct assigning several officers; litigation on this remains ongoing.

After another long battle, the agency finally capitulated by confirming that all deputy assistant secretaries and executive directors are in fact a part of AFSA's col-

lective bargaining unit. While not yet across the goal line, we pushed for the agency to ensure compliance with the 1980 Foreign Service Act by implementing a constructive dissent policy. As of the writing of this report, AFSA and the agency are very close to an agreement on realigning the TIC/TIS and CSA policies to ensure clarity and alignment with the interagency.

Beyond internal policies, advocacy on the Hill was a key pillar during this term. We worked to ensure that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and key congressional staff understood the critical role FCS plays in advancing U.S. economic security. We sent letters to FCS appropriators, making the case for doubling the FCS budget by explaining that our officers return more than \$400 for every \$1 invested in taxpayer appropriations. It became increasingly clear that despite our undeniable return on investment, the FCS budget is not keeping pace with the rising demands placed on its officers. Unfortunately, it's become clear that the challenge for budget lies with Commerce leadership, not with the Hill.

We launched several workforce surveys to quantify the impact of budget and organizational constraints. The results were staggering: Locally employed (LE) staff had



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been cut by more than 30 percent in some markets, while demand for services had more than doubled. Officers reported routinely working 50 to 70 hours per week, with home leaves and R&Rs delayed due to operational demands. Pay, assignments, and promotion delays remain a persistent issue, with Senior Foreign Service promotions experiencing unacceptable attestation backlogs. Performance awards are also inconsistently distributed, further eroding morale.

FCS VP Joshua Burke has communicated openly and frequently to keep members informed of our successes and remaining obstacles. Several AFSA leaders and alumni joined FCS webinars and town halls, providing critical career insights for officers.

During this term, AFSA's role as a forceful advocate for FCS officers was apparent. The FCS profile was elevated within Commerce and on the Hill, ensuring their story was heard. And, most important, AFSA created momentum for the continued fight—because the reality is, this work isn't done. The road ahead appears challenging for FCS: It may become a leaner organization with an updated mission and scope but will likely not become more efficient.

On March 27, 2025, the administration issued a sweeping executive order designed to decertify unions from agencies on the basis of national security. The detrimental impact of this order on AFSA cannot be overstated. Men-

tioned in section 2 of the EO was the International Trade Administration (ITA), Department of Commerce. While AFSA is the only union at ITA, the EO excluded the agency from section 3, which focuses on the Foreign Service. Whether intentional or oversight, the way the EO was written means that ITA/FCS retains its CBA and all memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with AFSA for the time being.

The week after the union-busting EO dropped, the FCS deputy director general sent a lengthy email to all employees regarding a dire budget situation. Not included in the fiscal year 2025 continuing resolution was a \$200 million emergency funding package for Commerce, \$50 million of which was requested by ITA. After tremendous infighting, FCS has been forced to absorb approximately \$30 million in cuts. All options are being explored to reduce costs, and with the DDG's email, there will be no PCSs and no language training for FY25 and likely part of FY26. Officers and their families are expected to remain in place and will be administratively extended for one year. It remains unclear what financial impact this will have on officers currently in language training. By all accounts, this is the worst budget situation FCS has faced in its 45-year history and could result in further downsizing of our organization.

Together with AFSA, the FCS VP has spent this term fighting for colleagues and friends, for the mission, and for the recognition FCS officers deserve.

Foreign Agricultural Service

The 2023-2025 period was a joint effort between Lisa Ahramjian and Evan Mangino, both of whom brought an East Coast flavor of advocacy and diplomacy to the honor of representing the Foreign Agricultural Service. This period included the most substantive negotiation of the AFSA-FAS collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in more than a generation as well as the relocation of the AFSA office in the USDA south building from the Independence Street basement and up to sunnier accommodations. Across this span, Lisa and Evan continued to engage with and support our small but mighty cadre of Foreign Service officers and Foreign Service administrative assistants, ensuring their voices were heard and their challenges acknowledged.

Early in 2025, the FAS VP signed a five-year CBA extension, solidifying the ground rules for labor-management engagement. AFSA maintains a strong interest

in good faith negotiations to modernize FAS Foreign Service conditions of employment to better reflect 21st-century realities. When FAS management is ready to engage in meaningful negotiations to improve performance management, the assignment process, and other critically important issues, AFSA will be ready to pick up where earlier teams left off.

Extending the CBA ensured the FAS VP was available to represent FAS members full-time as the new administration launched a barrage of destabilizing measures to drastically reduce the federal government in size and scope. Throughout the tumult of early 2025, the FAS VP played a vital role in communicating with members overseas, disseminating guidance, analysis, and affirmation. The FAS VP ensured members had the necessary knowledge and context to assess the "Fork in the Road," the "Five Bullets" exercise, and the prospect of significant reductions in personnel strength.



AFSA educated FAS management on provisions related to creditable service, domestic employees teleworking overseas (DETO) arrangements, and severance pay as well as Foreign Service retirement benefits and available resources, improving conditions and outcomes for FAS Foreign Service members.

Prior to the tumult, AFSA provided more routine but no less valuable advocacy on behalf of the FAS Foreign Service. Sustained AFSA engagement brought clarity, transparency, and parity to the FAS Senior Foreign Service (SFS) pay policy, addressing a long-standing discrepancy between SFS and Senior Executive Service colleagues. The FAS VP conducted a retirement experience survey and developed a 17-point plan to improve agency retirement services.

The FAS VP resolved a more than 10-year-old issue by providing access to AFSA resources for first-tour Foreign Service officers *before* they depart for their first assignment. This knowledge has helped first-tour officers sever leases, better appraise their state tax options, and plan ahead for retirement.

The FAS VP closed out a long list of long-running payroll and benefit issues that plagued Foreign Service members for years, which led—in part—to FAS launch-

ing a Human Capital Management Service Desk and improved accountability for human capital services. The FAS VP secured a waiver that ended collection efforts against FSOs for incorrect pay withholdings. And the FAS VP helped hold AFSA to account for its handling of the possible lapse in overseas comparability pay that, thankfully, did not come to pass.

FAS VPs advanced and initiated efforts to change FAS' internal culture regarding grievances, parental leave, dissent, premium pay, knowledge management, and the persistent divide between Civil and Foreign Service communities. AFSA advocated strongly against changes to the process for approving R&R travel, against changing the new officer intake process, in favor of Foreign Service–designated positions in Washington, and in favor of expanding a Fly America Act waiver for four-legged family members to FAS FSOs.

The AFSA team stands ready to continue defending the interests of FAS Foreign Service officers, aggregating the perspectives and knowledge of our officer corps, and advocating on behalf of AFSA members as FAS serves U.S. farmers, ranchers, growers, producers, and processors by growing U.S. agricultural exports.

U.S. Agency for Global Media

In 2024 AFSA worked closely with USAGM leadership to represent and advocate for Foreign Service staff during a period of transition and restructuring. This included addressing the closure of key transmission sites, including the legacy shortwave stations in São Tomé and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and preparing for workforce impacts and operational handovers at these locations.

AFSA USAGM Representative Gunter Schwabe, who has overseen multiple overseas USAGM transmitting stations, led efforts to ensure that the perspectives of field-based engineers, transmission experts, and correspondents were considered during strategic planning. He advocated for stronger support mechanisms for personnel working in isolated and logistically challenging environments and pushed for clarity and transparency in workforce decisions affecting the Foreign Service corps.

AFSA continued its dialogue with USAGM leadership regarding the status and future of VOA Foreign Service correspondents, reaffirming their nonpartisan and independent journalistic role. This followed earlier concerns

over perceived confusion between Foreign Service membership and State Department influence—misconceptions that AFSA continues to challenge in support of career journalists' integrity and mission.

Additionally, AFSA emphasized the need for better coordination and integration of USAGM Foreign Service professionals within broader interagency career development and assignment planning, particularly as the agency shifts toward more digital-forward and regionally distributed operations.

This was written before the March 14 executive order on reducing the federal bureaucracy called for the elimination of most USAGM functions. Since that time, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) imposed a 30-day total freeze on funding to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network, with plans to make the cuts permanent. On March 15, journalists from VOA, RFE/RL, and other U.S.-funded outlets were placed on administrative leave. For more on the latest developments, go to page 19. ■

2024 Annual Report: Legal Defense Fund

The AFSA Legal Defense Fund supported two requests for assistance in 2024 totaling \$35,000.

In the first request, the LDF Committee voted unanimously to approve \$15,000 to defray a portion of a member's legal expenses to pursue disability benefits relating to an anomalous health incident (AHI).

The committee noted that this member petitioned the fund in 2022 and was awarded \$10,000 to offset some of the costs incurred litigating a worker's compensation case before the Department of Labor (DOL). The member was forced to appeal the case to the DOL because the State Department had denied the claim. The member was subsequently successful at the DOL.

In the second request, also AHI-related, the committee voted unanimously to approve \$20,000 to support a lawsuit challenging the State Department's denial of benefits under the Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks Act (HAVANA Act). Congress passed the HAVANA Act in 2021, authorizing one-time payments for individuals with qualifying brain injuries.

The department, however, has denied benefits to some employees, arguing that their injuries were not connected to qualifying incidents. Attorneys from two law firms experienced in such matters will represent the plaintiffs at a significantly reduced flat fee of \$20,000. AFSA itself is one of the plaintiffs.

The fund ended calendar year 2024 with \$410,691. Member dues are not used for the LDF. It is funded through donations and, occasionally, through attorney fees paid by the agencies when AFSA prevails in a case before the Foreign Service Grievance Board.

In 2024, \$4,561 was raised through donations from members and supporters. The foreign affairs agencies paid a total of \$124,012.50 in attorney fees into the fund in 2024.

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

process, fundamental fairness, or, as noted above, the employee's performance of his or her official duties.

The LDF enables members to retain private attorneys with expertise in a particular area of law, such as federal workers' compensation law or litigation before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that AFSA attorneys do not have.

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

For additional information about the LDF Fund, please visit <https://afsa.org/donate>.

—Jay Carreiro,

LDF Committee Chair ■

DACOR Memorial Day Service

Per its yearly tradition, DACOR held a Memorial Day service on May 26 at Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Established in 1964 as a civilian complement to Arlington National Cemetery, DACOR's dedicated memorial section at the cemetery preserves the memory of more than 1,100 Foreign Service officers and their families.

AFSA State Vice President Tina Wong, DACOR President

Angela Dickey, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) President Susan Johnson, and DACOR member Lucy Melbourne gave remarks about the enduring legacy of those buried in the Memorial Section.

This year, said Wong in her remarks, the Foreign Service lost trailblazers including Ambassadors Ruth Davis and Lino Gutiérrez. Wong reminded attendees of their collective strength in the face



Diplomatic community members gather at DACOR's Memorial Day ceremony.

of adversity and the community's critical need to care for one another.

The event brought together dozens of active duty, retiree, and family members in solemn memory of

loved ones in the Foreign Service and in solidarity with all those who continue to serve and shape our institution.

A recording of the event is available at <https://bit.ly/MemorialDayDACOR>. ■

■ **Michael Hayden Armacost**, 87, a retired Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died on March 8, 2025, at his home near San Francisco, Calif.

Mr. Armacost was born on April 15, 1937, in Cleveland, Ohio. He was the son of George H. Armacost and Verda Gay Armacost.

He earned a bachelor's degree in international relations from Carleton College in 1958 and went on to receive a master's in 1961 and a PhD in 1965 from Columbia University.

Before joining the State Department, Mr. Armacost taught government at Pomona College from 1962 to 1968. He served as a visiting professor of international relations at the International Christian University in Tokyo from 1968 to 1969, later lecturing at Johns Hopkins University and Georgetown University.

In 1969 Mr. Armacost became a White House fellow and began his career in public service. He held a range of senior roles shaping U.S. policy in Asia, including with the Department of State's Policy Planning Staff (1969-1972, 1974-1977), as special assistant to the ambassador in Tokyo (1972-1974), member of the National Security Council (1977-1978), deputy assistant secretary of Defense (1978-1980), and deputy assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (1980-1982).

In 1982 President Ronald Reagan appointed him as U.S. ambassador to the Philippines, where he negotiated a five-year extension of the Military Bases Agreement. Ambassador Armacost then served as under secretary of State for political affairs from 1984 to 1989 under Secretary George Shultz.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush appointed him to be U.S. ambassador to Japan. His service earned him the President's Distinguished Service Award, the Defense Department's Distinguished

Civilian Service Award, and the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award. In 2007 Japan honored him with the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun.

After retiring from diplomatic service, Amb. Armacost served as president of the Brookings Institution from 1995 to 2002. He later joined Stanford University's Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center as a fellow.

Amb. Armacost served on several corporate boards, including TRW Inc., AFLAC Inc., Applied Materials Inc., USEC Inc., and Cargill Inc., and on a number of nonprofit boards. He chaired the boards of Carleton College and the Asia Foundation and was an active member of the Council on Foreign Relations for 48 years. He also authored four books.

Amb. Armacost is remembered by his family and friends as kind, humble, and devoted to his loved ones. He was known for his wit, intellect, and curiosity.

Amb. Armacost is survived by his wife of 66 years, Roberta "Bonny" Armacost; their three children, Scott (and spouse Miho), Tim (and spouse Niki), and Chris (and spouse Becky); six grandchildren, Samantha, Zachary, Grace, Colson, Audrey, and Lily; and his siblings, Peter Armacost (and spouse Mary Linda), Samuel Armacost (and spouse Mary Jane), and Mary Hulst (and spouse Jack).

■ **Gary Steven Basek**, 84, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on April 6, 2025, in Bethesda, Md.

Mr. Basek was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, to Vladimir O. Basek and Tilda (Schick) Basek, and grew up in Prague, London, and Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

After graduating from Yale University in 1963, including a gap year at the Sorbonne, Mr. Basek served as an officer in the U.S. Army Transportation Corps until 1965. He went on to complete a master's

degree in political science at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and began his federal career with the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Basek joined the U.S. Foreign Service with an initial assignment in Madagascar, followed by 25 years of service in Vietnam, Brussels (NATO), Stockholm, Bern/Geneva, and Montreal, with the latter three posts focused primarily on consular work.

Following his retirement in 1993, Mr. Basek continued to support U.S. missions abroad for another 10 years, backstopping embassies and consulates in China, Latvia, Senegal, and, most often, the Czech Republic. Mr. Basek was fluent in French, Czech, and German.

Mr. Basek was a dedicated cinephile and took his love of film wherever he was stationed. While in Madagascar, he organized the first-ever Madagascar Film Festival with assistance from the U.S. Information Agency (USIA).

Mr. Basek repeated this success in subsequent postings, supporting the Montreal Film Festival and helping organize several festivals in Prague after the fall of communism.

While serving in Saigon in the early 1970s, Mr. Basek housed more than two dozen Vietnamese orphans, helping place each in adoptive homes around the world. Many of them stayed in touch with him well into adulthood.

Friends and family remember Mr. Basek as a good man with a deep intellect and a lively sense of humor.

He is survived by his sister, Miriam Worthing, of Rockville, Md., and brother John Basek of Memphis, Tenn.

■ **Joanne Elizabeth Bradford**, 98, spouse of the late retired Foreign Service officer and former Ambassador William G. Bradford, died peacefully on

March 31, 2025, in her hometown of Middletown, Conn.

Ms. Bradford was born on Nov. 10, 1926, in Sioux City, Iowa, to Clarence Eugene Schwarz and Doris Lichtenstiger.

She graduated in 1948 from the University of Indiana with a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering. It was there that she met her husband, William G. Bradford.

They were married on March 25, 1950, and began their Foreign Service journey in 1953. Together, they lived and served in Germany, Italy, Washington, D.C., Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone. Their final posting was in Chad, where Mr. Bradford served as the U.S. ambassador before retiring in 1979.

Following retirement, the Bradfords settled in McLean, Va., where they lived until September 2023. In retirement, Ms. Bradford ran a successful import-export business specializing in couture buttons and trims.

Ms. Bradford was predeceased by her husband in 2008. She is survived by their three children, Deborah Hornbake, Kate Fiala, and Bruce Bradford; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Donations can be made to the Dementia Society of America at <https://dementiasociety.org>.

■ **Ruth A. Davis**, 81, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died on May 3, 2025, in Washington, D.C., from pneumonia.

Ms. Davis was born on May 28, 1943, to Anderson and Edith Mallet Davis in Phoenix, Ariz., where her father was on military assignment. She grew up in Atlanta, Ga., and graduated with honors from Booker T. Washington High School and summa cum laude from Spelman College.

At Spelman, she was awarded the Merrill Scholarship, which financed 15 months

of study and travel abroad in Europe. She earned a master's degree in social welfare from the University of California, Berkeley, and held honorary doctorates from Spelman and Middlebury colleges.

Ms. Davis entered the U.S. Foreign Service in 1969 and retired in 2009. She specialized in American citizen services and visa issues, serving in Kinshasa, Nairobi, Tokyo, Naples, and in Barcelona, where she was U.S. consul general.

She later served as U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Benin, from 1992 to 1995, where she championed girls' education and helped develop democratic institutions.

Ambassador Davis achieved a long list of firsts during her 40-year career. She was the first Black person to serve as director of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), where she founded the School of Leadership and Management. FSI later named the director's conference room in her honor.

She was also the first Black senior watch officer in the Operations Center and the first Black woman Director General of the Foreign Service, overseeing a global workforce of more than 40,000. She was promoted to Career Ambassador and was the highest-ranking U.S. Foreign Service officer at the time of her retirement.

Amb. Davis was widely known for her dedication to mentoring and for her leadership in diversity and inclusion initiatives. She was recognized as a compelling speaker and for her role in helping Atlanta secure the 1996 Olympic Games.

After retirement from the Foreign Service in 2009, Amb. Davis was the first African American to receive the AFSA Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy.

She remained active in women's empowerment issues as chair of the International Women's Entrepreneurial Challenge (IWECC); global co-chair of

ACE Health Foundation's ACE Global Leaders of Excellence Network; chair of the International Mission of Mercy USA (IMMUSA); and vice president of the Association of Black American Ambassadors (ABAA).

She also served on the Board of Visitors of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif.; on the Board of the Diplomacy Center Foundation; and was a member of the 16th and Decatur Church of Christ in Washington, D.C.

Amb. Davis is survived by her sister, Dr. Eugenia Davis; her niece, Malaika Billups; her husband, Kenneth III; grandnieces Ava and Ivy Billups; her nephew, Austin Clements, his wife, Crystal, and their son, Chase; her aunt, Ida B. McCullough; several cousins; and many friends around the world.

■ **Lino Gutiérrez**, 74, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died on May 3, 2025, in Alexandria, Va.

He was born on March 26, 1951, in Havana, Cuba, and came to the United States with his parents in 1962 at the age of 11. His family settled in Tuscaloosa, Ala., where his father was offered a professorship at the University of Alabama. Mr. Gutiérrez grew up a die-hard Alabama football fan and later attended both the University of Miami and the University of Alabama, where he received a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in Latin American studies.

Mr. Gutiérrez began his career as a social studies teacher for the Dade County School System and the Urban League in Miami, Fla., before joining the State Department in 1977. Over the course of his 30-year diplomatic career, he served in Latin America and Europe, and in Washington, D.C., at the State Department and the National War College.

From November 1996 to July 1999, Mr. Gutiérrez served as the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua. He held several important positions, including principal deputy assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the State Department from 1999 to 2001 and acting assistant secretary from 2001 to 2002. In 2003 he was appointed as the U.S. ambassador to Argentina, a post in which he served until his retirement in 2006.

After retiring, Ambassador Gutiérrez served as executive director of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation and taught as an adjunct professor at The George Washington University and Johns Hopkins University. He loved teaching and took great joy in mentoring the next generation of public servants.

Amb. Gutiérrez was cherished by friends, family, students, and colleagues for his warmth, humor, and wit.

He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Miriam Messina; his daughters, Alicia (and spouse James), Diana (and spouse Jim), and Susie; and his six grandchildren, Nico, Isa, Silvia, JJ, Luca, and Hugo.

The family is grateful to the staff at the Schar Cancer Institute, including Dr. Adam Cohen, PA Catherine Wood, and Neuro-Oncology Nurse Hohyung; Dr. Farrah Daly, Alexandria Hospital ICU; and his longtime caregivers, Yenekal, Nardos, and Addis.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the National Brain Tumor Society.

■ **James Robert Keith**, 67, a retired Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died on April 8, 2025, at his home in Reston, Va., of metastatic melanoma.

Mr. Keith was born in Roanoke, Va., on June 20, 1957. His parents, Robert and Lillian Keith, hailed from Marietta, Ga., and Sanford, Fla., but the family's roots go back to Clan Keith in Scotland.

He grew up in Asia and Northern Virginia, graduating from Taipei American School in 1975 and from the College of William and Mary in 1979.

He met his future wife, Jan Elaine Carter, in 1974, at the Taipei American School in Taiwan. They were married March 4, 1978, at the Washington Navy Yard Chapel and joined the Catholic Church together in 1987.

They had six children: Jason, John, Scott, Emily, Andrew, and Elizabeth. The family adopted John, who suffered from cerebral palsy and a seizure disorder, while stationed in Korea.

Mr. Keith joined the Foreign Service in 1980, with assignments in Indonesia, China, and South Korea. He served as consul general in Hong Kong, assistant chief of mission in Afghanistan, deputy assistant secretary of State for China, and director for China at the National Security Council's Asia Directorate. In 2007 he was appointed U.S. ambassador to Malaysia.

Ambassador Keith retired from the Department of State in 2011 and subsequently worked as a business consultant, leading the China practice and then the Asia practice at McLarty Associates in Washington, D.C., until 2019. He devoted his professional efforts to promoting cultural, academic, and social exchanges between the United States and Asia to further mutual understanding.

Despite a global career spanning the decades from 1980 to 2020, Ambassador Keith and his wife gave priority to their family, church, and community in Reston, Va.

The couple enjoyed hiking, swimming, biking, and dog-walking together. Ms. Keith was his partner in every sense, supportive as a spouse, co-parent, and spiritual companion. Amb. Keith's beloved dog Tessa, a whippet, was a great comfort to him in his waning months.

Amb. Keith is survived by his loving wife of 47 years, Jan; children Jason Keith (and spouse Annie), Scott Keith (and spouse Barbara), Emily Fried (and spouse Spencer), Andrew Keith (and spouse Kate), and Elizabeth Lainhart (and spouse Levi); sister Sherry McPhee; cousins Michael and Marci Keener-Eck, Mindy Eck, and Amy Edwards; and grandchildren Lily, Madeline, Landon, Jacqueline, Alexander, Isabella, Marie, Liam, Elliot, Jackson, and Lincoln.

■ **Robert MacCallum**, 81, a retired Foreign Service officer with the rank of Minister Counselor, died peacefully at home in Charlottesville, Va., on Oct. 19, 2024.

Mr. MacCallum was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., on Aug. 24, 1943. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Wabash College in 1965 and a master's in systems analysis from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1971.

Inspired by John F. Kennedy's immortal words—"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"—he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. Early in his career, Mr. MacCallum served as vice consul in Nagoya, area development officer in Cu Chi and Bien Hoa, political-military officer and personnel officer at the State Department, and administrative officer in Vientiane.

In 1977, after 18 months of Japanese language training, he served at U.S. Embassy Tokyo as political-military officer, deputy chief of the Mutual Defense Assistance Office, and general services officer.

From 1981 to 1982, Mr. MacCallum took leave from the Foreign Service to work as director for the Asia/Pacific region at CPT Corporation in Minneapolis. He returned to the Foreign Service in 1982 as supervisory general services officer in Manila, later serving as administrative counselor of the U.S. Mission to the

United Nations, executive director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and counselor for administration and security in both Manila and Tokyo.

His final posting was Hong Kong, where he led operations at the consulate general in the face of massive staff turnover with the reversion of Hong Kong to China. Mr. MacCallum also contributed to the opening of U.S. embassies in Port Moresby, Bandar Seri Begawan, Dili, and the Amman support center for Mission Iraq.

After retiring to Charlottesville, Va., in 1998, he continued to support the State Department, most notably managing support services for U.S. delegations at five APEC conferences across the Pacific Rim from 1999 to 2006.

He and his wife of 54 years, Alice, were avid travelers, including bucket list trips to Kenya, Machu Picchu, Norwegian fjords, and the Panama Canal. They also enjoyed countless theater, music, and live sporting events together, especially Pittsburgh sports, as Mr. MacCallum was a lifelong fan.

His daughters remember how, even while living far from extended family, he instilled in them a strong connection to family and a deep appreciation for America's national parks. They recall his example of listening without judgment, solving problems creatively, and leading a life dedicated to public service.

Mr. MacCallum is survived by his wife, Alice MacCallum; daughters Margaret and Elizabeth; granddaughter Adelina; and sisters Heather, Laurie, and Tracy.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to DACOR, AFSA, or the American Cancer Society.

■ **Mary Pellegrini**, 61, a former Foreign Service officer, passed away peacefully on Jan. 19, 2025, in Kensington, Md., from cancer.

Ms. Pellegrini was born on Oct. 20, 1963, to Charles and Elaine (Dargie) Pellegrini in Franklin, N.H. She was among the first students to attend Paul Smith Elementary School in Franklin.

In 1981 she graduated from Bishop Brady High School in Concord, N.H., before attending LIU Post, formally the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, a private university in Brookville, N.Y.

In 1982 she joined the U.S. Air Force as a Russian cryptologic linguist.

She served in the military for 21 years at Iraklion Air Station, Greece; Fort Meade in Laurel, Md.; and Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu, Hawaii; and two tours of duty at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

During her initial training at Lackland Air Force Base, Ms. Pellegrini met her husband, Daniel Wilkinson Jr. They welcomed a son, Daniel Michael Wilkinson III, in 1985. They stayed together as a family for 17 years, living in Crete, Hawaii, and San Antonio, Texas.

Following a distinguished military career, Ms. Pellegrini continued her service to her country as a private contractor specializing in communications, spending three years in Baghdad during Operation Desert Storm.

In 2013 Ms. Pellegrini was admitted to the U.S. Foreign Service. Her postings included Bogotá, Lahore, Sydney, Karachi, and Vladivostok. Her treasured Siberian cat, Vlad, is named after her last post.

She paused her career to be a caregiver for her brother, Matthew, before his premature death from ALS at age 39.

In 2020 Ms. Pellegrini retired from the Foreign Service and moved to Maryland to help care for her mother, Elaine, in her later years.

Wherever life took her, Ms. Pellegrini always returned home to Webster Lake, Mass., where she enjoyed happy times

with family and friends. She was a highly accomplished quilter and writer. She also enjoyed running, rug shopping, skiing, kayaking, and hiking.

Ms. Pellegrini shared many adventures with her son, Danny, and her daughter-in-law, Danielle (Dani). Together, they traveled the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Other adventures included being stranded on a remote island during a tsunami, getting left at sea during a dive trip in Indonesia, and traveling New Zealand in an RV.

Her travels ended in late 2024, when her treatments no longer slowed the growth of her cancer. Ms. Pellegrini's personal essays on striving to balance gratitude for her life with her battle against cancer honor the bravery and strength of women with this illness.

Ms. Pellegrini was predeceased by her brother, Matthew Pellegrini, and her mother, Elaine Pellegrini.

She is survived by her son, Daniel Wilkinson III, and daughter-in-law, Danielle Hollander; her father, Charles Pellegrini; her sister and brother-in-law, Martha and John Marrapese, and their two children; her brother and sister-in-law, Mark Pellegrini and Ellen O'Donnell, and their four children; her brother and sister-in-law, Miles and Shelley Pellegrini, and their two children; godchildren Jackson, Isabel, Myles, and Chloe; and her sister-in-law, Judy Albanese.

Donations in her memory can be made to the Walter Reed Society, which assists service members being treated at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where Ms. Pellegrini volunteered. ■

If you would like us to include an obituary in *In Memory*, please send text to journal@afsa.org.

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, as well as details of the individual's Foreign Service career.

How Experts Prevailed

Strengthening International Regimes: The Case of Radiation Protection

*Daniel Serwer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024,
\$129.99/hardcover, e-book available,
431 pages.*

REVIEWED BY HARRY KOPP

Advances in science and medicine invariably present risks to society as well as benefits. In some cases, international understandings or normative regimes arise that mitigate risks while preserving benefits; in others, such regimes are weak or nonexistent, and societal risks are correspondingly greater. In this book, an elaboration of his doctoral thesis written at Princeton in 1975-1976, retired Foreign Service Officer Daniel Serwer looks behind the results of norm-setting efforts to explore what forces separate success from failure.

The book is a work of extraordinary scholarship and surprising optimism. At the center of the discussion is the concept of the “epistemic community,” which Serwer defines as “a network of professionals with policy-relevant expertise who share normative and causal beliefs, notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise.”

The case study identified in the title is the development of norms governing exposure to and protection from certain dangerous forms of radiation, X-rays and atomic radiation in particular.

At the turn of the 20th century, X-rays and radium were medical and scientific sensations whose properties were explored without regard to side effects. Physicians and their patients, physicists and others working with radioactive materials (including the women who painted watch dials with radium for the glow-in-the-dark effect) were soon found



in increasing numbers to suffer skin cancers, often severe and sometimes fatal.

The dangers of exposure (and the danger of lawsuits) made clear the need for standards of measurement and protection that practitioners and the public could rely on.

Although nationalist sentiment after World War I remained quite high for many years, the radiological communities in Britain and France engaged with counterparts in Germany. By 1928 they had formed an International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), a “self-selected and self-perpetuating epistemic community of physicists, physicians, engineers, biologists” that exists to this day, outside the control of any government and with no powers of enforcement.

The results, Serwer says, have been good: We continue to enjoy the benefits of radiation with low levels of risk.

For most readers, the introduction and the first and last two chapters of this nine-chapter book will hold the greatest appeal. In these provocative sections, Serwer deepens the discussion of epistemic communities and explores why some issues, such as depletion of the ozone layer, yield to their regulation, while others, like pollution from toxic chemicals, do not.

He contrasts the success of epistemic communities in creating cooperative normative regimes with adversarial

**At the turn of the 20th century,
X-rays and radium were medical
and scientific sensations.**

processes, including litigation, that are “ill-adapted to knowledge-rich issues and more suited to stop or prohibit than to protect and balance.”

Epistemic communities have yet to arise to address some of the most critical scientific and technological problems of our time, which remain without broadly accepted norms to minimize risk while securing benefits. These include many environmental threats, editing of the human genome, artificial intelligence, neurotechnology, and the development and deployment of new vaccines.

Further afield, Serwer, a former vice president of the United States Institute of Peace, teases the notion that “epistemic communities of global experts might also help to improve state performance with regard to parameters like democracy, rule of law, governance and peace.”

Even skeptics and congenital grouches will be drawn in and cheered by this analysis, which one can only hope will prove prophetic.

Harry W. Kopp, a Foreign Service officer from 1967 to 1985, was deputy assistant secretary of State for international trade policy in the Carter and Reagan administrations. He is the author of The Voice of the Foreign Service: A History of the American Foreign Service Association at 100 (2nd edition, 2024) and co-author with John K. Naland of Career Diplomacy: Life and Work in the US Foreign Service (4th edition, 2021).

A Rookie in Africa

Wisdom and the Baobab Tree

Edward McMahon, Dewart Imprints, 2024, \$15.99/paperback, e-book available, 300 pages.

REVIEWED BY NIELS MARQUARDT

In his gripping first novel, *Wisdom and the Baobab Tree*, Edward McMahon—a professor at the University of Vermont, international development consultant, former Foreign Service officer, and, full disclosure, longtime friend of mine since our days together in 1980s Brazzaville—reminds us of the now quaint notion of America promoting democracy abroad, especially in Africa.

McMahon builds his plot on the foundation of his years of experience as a practitioner of democracy promotion, first as an FSO and later with groups like the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Carter Center, to give *Baobab* real credibility. Reading it is a pleasurable way to learn in some detail how these and other organizations developed and practiced their particular tradecraft over many decades.

The current moment is a particularly appropriate time to remind ourselves of this valuable American expertise so that we might cherish and protect it from the depredations of those now trying to kill Voice of America and USAID.

McMahon's main protagonist, Adam Edwards, is an idealistic young American fresh out of Dartmouth who improbably lands a job overseas—a job for which he is very enthusiastic and well intended, but not particularly qualified. He leaves the United States to start up country operations for an NDI-like organization in a thinly disguised West African nation called Kombonia.

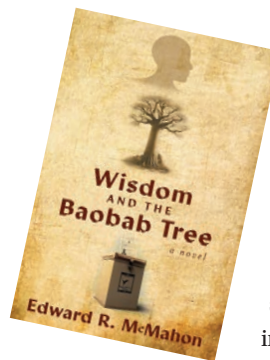
Adam's new home is experiencing real democratic growing pains and accompanying strife, and we soon meet a cast of colorful local characters, some keen to move smartly ahead toward more inclusive governance, others determined to preserve the status quo and their own power.

Kombonia has the distinct air of 1990s Africa, after a tsunami of democracy triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall swept the continent, with mixed results in the many countries it struck. Indeed, I was transported back to my own experiences in Africa, and to many of the characters that made those times so interesting.

Adam makes all the rookie mistakes one might imagine, drawing the ire of seasoned diplomats like the “old Africa hand,” a USAID mission director whose budget is funding much of Adam's work. There are the usual tensions between headquarters and the field as Adam struggles to decide the best way forward for his nascent program, feeling the pressure of expectations, deadlines, budgets, and impatience from Washington.

Eager to experience the finer points of local culture, he bonds with a seductive Kombonian woman, only to find out that her main role is to keep a sharp eye on him and to report on his activities to a powerful political leader. Let's just say that their liaison ends badly. Adam also tries to navigate the complexities of tribal rivalries within a mosaic of different languages and cultures, and of course falls far short in that difficult task as well.

The main African characters in the novel come off well, showing their savvy in manipulating outsiders' admirable intentions to improve their country and its political structure. The reader senses the delicate balance one must maintain to promote the growth of democracy while



navigating the complex hierarchical structures in which they operate.

McMahon shows a deep grasp of African sensibilities as he describes the interpersonal forces at work among his main African char-

acters. His depiction of the inner thinking of Kombonia's embattled president, who hails from a minority tribe and thus sits precariously atop a political powder keg, is particularly insightful.

When Adam connects with an American woman working with the Peace Corps in Kombonia, she dispassionately schools him in the realities of his situation and mission. This love interest creates some believable complexity as Adam tries to chart a path forward for both his personal and professional life.

Baobab, which at times seems headed toward a cynically negative ending, concludes delightfully on a hopeful note, mainly because of the African characters' unsuspected skill at managing their own affairs.

This is somewhat at odds with the actual experience in the 1990s in many African countries that initially embraced the democratic wave of that era, but in 2025 it's probably much closer to what we all would like to read.

This is a book that manages to instruct while also entertaining. Whether you have spent years in Africa yourself and want to relive those days or just want to know what it might feel like to live and work there, this novel is for you. ■

Niels Marquardt is a retired Senior FSO and former ambassador to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (concurrent), and Madagascar and the Comoros (concurrent). He has been diplomat in residence for Lewis and Clark College, his alma mater, since 2019.



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Effective Public Diplomacy During NATO Enlargement

BY GORDON DUGUID

NATO's enlargement is one of the many public excuses the Kremlin made for its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The premise is that NATO took advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union by absorbing former Warsaw Pact countries to threaten and intimidate Moscow. This argument seems to have some tactical merit, but only in hindsight: It does not align with what NATO officials and strategists were planning in 1992.

As the information officer at the U.S. mission to NATO from 1996 to 2000, I witnessed the “first” NATO enlargement, when Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined the Alliance. I conducted the NATO Tour program through which our mission supported U.S. and NATO policy by educating target audiences from Russia and former Warsaw Pact countries about NATO and its mission.

What NATO Allies were actually working on during my time at NATO was conditioning the entry of new countries to the Alliance until they could meet all political, economic, and military requirements. Under U.S. leadership, the Allies created the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) in 1994 to “enable partici-

Putin's much-quoted offer to Lord Robinson that Russia join NATO is mythical or, at best, ironic.

pants to develop an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation, and the level and pace of progress.” In other words, NATO's policy was to slow things down, rather than expand too hastily.

From my engagement with Russian officials, I know any claim by the Kremlin that they believed NATO's policy of welcoming new members was directed at Russia is spurious. I was in the hallways at NATO headquarters when the first Russian generals were escorted in for military briefings. We were also transparent with Moscow's political establishment.

In January 1997, in advance of the creation of the NATO-Russia Council, USNATO hosted four Russian senators (Federation Council members), explaining NATO's “Open Door” policy to the group.

NATO has never sought out new members, but any democracy in the

trans-Atlantic region can request admittance to the Alliance. We reminded the Russian senators that NATO had expanded before: in 1952 when Turkey and Greece joined; in 1955 when West Germany joined; in 1982 when Spain was admitted; and in 1990 when East Germany joined NATO during German unification. None of those enlargements led to any significant change in NATO's *defensive* position or, conversely, in Russia's view of Europe.

Putin's much-quoted offer to Lord Robinson that Russia join NATO is mythical or, at best, ironic, because the post-Cold War order Putin openly desired was that there be no alliances in Europe, only a peace guaranteed by America and Russia over respective spheres of influence.

During our briefing, the Russian senators learned that NATO policy permitted European countries to join PfP to be able to cooperate with NATO without becoming members. Most former Warsaw Pact nations had much work to do on their political structures, let alone their military organization, before they would be ready and eligible for NATO membership.

Even after two days of briefings, the senators could scarcely believe that each



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Diplomacy Council of America. The opinions and characterizations in this piece are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government.

NATO member had an equal voice, even though none could match individually the strength of American arms. For them, the Warsaw Pact was run by Russia for Russia. They presumed it was the same with NATO.

I cannot vouch that the senators were convinced of political equality within NATO, but they did not seem to worry about NATO enlargement. As one said to me on their departure: “I hope you take in all the countries from the Warsaw Pact. They’ll kill your organization just like they did ours. They are nothing but trouble.” His prediction has proven wrong—there is zero equivalence between the ethos of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

The Kremlin knew that NATO would expand because most countries of Central and Eastern Europe were telling everyone, quite openly, that they wanted to join NATO and the European Union (EU).

In October 1997, USNATO invited senior officials from the most promising NATO candidates—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—on a NATO Tour of Houston, San Antonio, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

Our goal was that senior officials instrumental in forming NATO policy for candidate countries become well versed with U.S. policy, policymakers, and the political and social conditions in which U.S. policy is made.

The trip was also valuable in exposing our guests to U.S. public opinion. For example, they took part in a two-hour talk radio show on Houston’s KENR. Listeners wanted to know why our guests’ countries wanted to join NATO and what they could bring to the Alliance. Our guests were surprised to learn that some Americans were skeptical of NATO and its role, so this

They pointedly noted that such a conversation with an opponent of government policy was something that would have never happened in the Warsaw Pact.

discussion helped them to address the concerns of skeptics at home.

The highlight of the Houston stop was a Baker Institution seminar at which our visitors heard addresses by George H.W. Bush, James Baker, Warren Christopher, Henry Kissinger, and Mikhail Gorbachev. I was able to introduce them to Kissinger, and they sought his advice on which reforms their countries should focus on first.

Next, the World Affairs Council of San Antonio arranged a reception with the mayor and his international affairs councilman to discuss how businesses could benefit from Alliance membership. We finished off with a visit to the Defense Language Institute at Lackland Air Force Base to discuss military training for NATO.

In Chicago, we met with members of the Council on Global Affairs for further serious discussions on foreign policy. Our itinerary included cultural events—a tour of Chicago’s architecture, a visit to the Chagall mural and Picasso’s sculpture, a stroll along Michigan Avenue, and a raucous dinner at Buca di Beppo’s.

Our guests cited these events as just as valuable as the policy briefings. They liked seeing how ordinary Americans lived and thought about global issues. They were touched that I included them in an evening with my family and friends.

In Washington, D.C., we met with Susan Eisenhower, the highest-profile

American opponent of NATO enlargement; participants said it was the best debate they had on the issue.

Our guests explained to Eisenhower that they wanted to be fully in the West because they worried about Russian revanchism but also because they saw the success of the EU and NATO as proof of the validity of the West’s fundamental values. They pointedly noted that such a conversation with an opponent of government policy was something that would have never happened in the Warsaw Pact.

The Poles cited NATO’s founding document, saying that to deny membership to any country that met NATO standards would betray the Open Door principle. After 45 years of Russian domination, they were ready to be equals in democratic structures.

That feeling was still strong in 2018, when I was serving as chargé in Montenegro. Montenegro joined NATO in 2017, realizing fully that they would be sending their troops to defend U.S. and Alliance interests in Iraq and Afghanistan the day after they got in.

NATO did not enlarge as a policy to thwart Russia. Rather, countries in Central and Eastern Europe flock to NATO and the EU as soon as they can because of their experiences under Russian domination and the promise to be equal partners in democratic organizations.

This is what the Kremlin still fails to understand. ■

LOCAL LENS



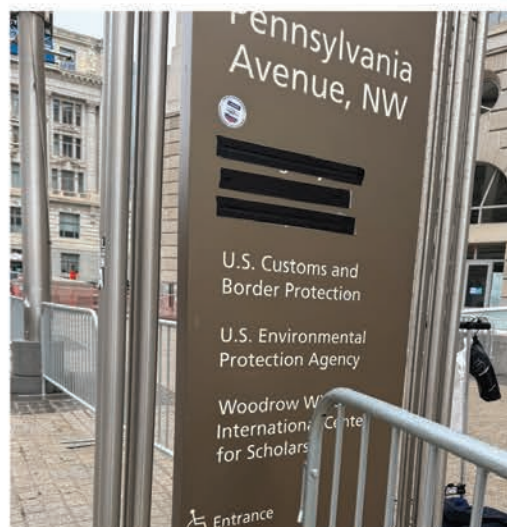
The treaty between Hamas and Israel has been broken once again. The war rages on while my wife and I take in the calm view from Mount Nebo in the Madaba Governorate of Jordan. The mountain sits 700 meters (2,300 feet) above sea level and is part of the Abarim mountain range. The region is rich in olive trees—and history. We join Moses, who took in the same view circa 1406 BC, and look at the promised land and hope for peace. ■

Joseph A. D'Agostino III served as legal assistant with the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai, Egypt, from 2020 to 2022. He is currently in the Office of Legislative Affairs at the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. This photo was taken in March 2025 with an iPhone 15.

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