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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025

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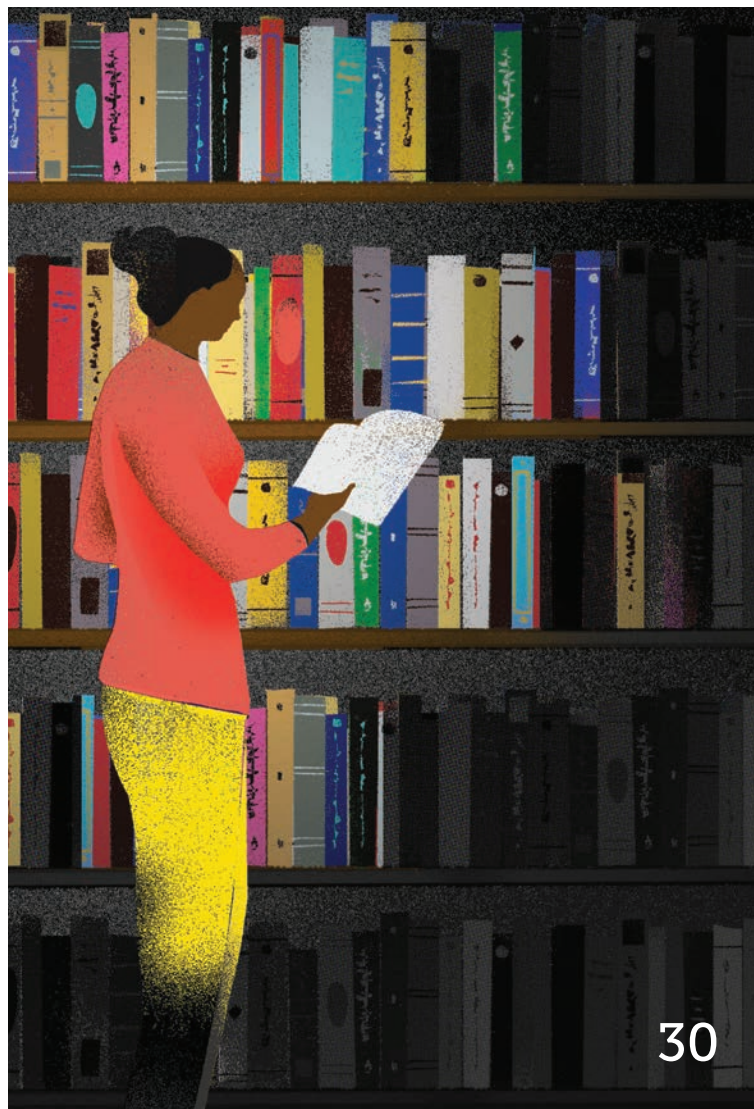
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The Road Goes Ever On

BY JOHN “DINK” DINKELMAN

LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA, SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

It seems only fitting that I am writing this column from the former Yugoslavia, given that this edition of the *Journal* marks the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords with fascinating ADST oral history excerpts from diplomats who were there.

Coincidentally, the former Yugoslavia is where—after nine grueling months of FSI convincing me that some of us will never have the knack for Slavic case endings—I started my first Foreign Service assignment in the summer of 1989, in Embassy Belgrade’s consular section.

And who knew that marrying a math professor on the Alternating Sign Matrices speaking circuit would afford me the chance years later to play trailing spouse for a few days and revisit the places where I’d served as an entry-level Foreign Service officer.

The “front-row seat” that first assignment provided to the nightmare of Yugoslavia’s subsequent disintegration was one of the most formative events of my life—both personally and professionally.

While it was painful for me, as a young man in my late 20s, to watch a rational, reasonable, progressive Western society quickly transition into

ethnocentric, xenophobic tribalism, I find it even more painful today, as a “boomer” in his mid-60s, to see many of those

same trends threaten other nations—including my own.

When Will It End?

In those waning days of Yugoslavia, people watched, usually with frustration, then anger, then horror, as their societal norms, protocols, and institutions fell apart—first slowly, then incrementally, and finally catastrophically.

When they dared discuss it with me, they would skirt the critical questions: “When will all this end?” and, more importantly, “How will all this end?” It hurt too much for them to speculate—so we mostly just trudged on day after day not speaking of the house burning down all around us.

Over the past months since taking office at AFSA, I have found myself starting to ask the same questions.

Seemingly without so much as the smallest consideration given to the long-term effects on the federal workforce, much less the Foreign Service, State Department leadership continues to roll out uncoordinated revisions to the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM), ill-conceived rule changes, and short-sighted reductions in force (RIFs)—all in the name of addressing perceived flaws in the system.

These officials seem to have forgotten that they are dealing with a profession where consideration, coordination, and collaboration are the fundamental tools needed to get things done.

They don’t realize that if you are to gain lasting change, you need to bring

your people along with you. They don’t understand that unilaterally implementing broad structural changes cannot and will not work without “buy-in” by the rank-and-file. Stephen Covey is undoubtedly rolling over in his grave.

I’ve stopped asking myself when and how all this will end, because the truth is that, for AFSA and its new president, this will never end. As long as there are dedicated Americans willing to submit themselves and their families to the challenges of serving our country overseas, AFSA will continue to fight for them. They can rest assured that the northwest corner of 21st and E Streets will continue to serve as an island of sanity and stability in the midst of all the turbulence and uncertainty engulfing Foggy Bottom.

Weathering the Storm

In his State VP column on page 74, Ro Nepal does an excellent job painting the sad picture of the present work environment at State. I would expand on his timely theme of “You Deserve Better,” because it doesn’t just apply to one agency.

AFSA continues to receive disturbing reports from its members in all the (remaining) foreign affairs agencies confirming that the malaise and trepidation in Foggy Bottom is not unique to the State Department.

As AFSA membership represents the spectrum of the Foreign Service—from those unceremoniously “shown the



John “Dink” Dinkelman is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

As long as there are dedicated Americans willing to submit themselves and their families to the challenges of serving our country overseas, AFSA will continue to fight for them.

door” over the past months, to those “left behind” to clean up the mess, to the younger, fresher talent on whom we rely for long-term institutional continuity who have one eye on the door—I feel it safe to say that while we are certainly not all in the same boat, we all remain in the same storm.

The gale warnings persist. Both from Washington, D.C., where Foreign Service careers are placed on the chopping block in the name of partisan budgetary battles, and from overseas, where, among the myriad challenges, FS employees and their families serve as 21st-century “guinea pigs” for what appears to be some tyrant’s newest weapon as AHI (anomalous health incident) attacks ravage their cranial nervous systems.

They all deserve someone in their corner. For the day-to-day challenges—vouchers are still not processed in a timely manner, education allowances continue to be improperly denied, and household effects inexplicably find their way to the bottom of the Indian Ocean—AFSA will remain dedicated to ensuring that the interests of the Foreign Service, its members, and their families remain at the center of all we do. We’re still here, and we’re not going anywhere, folks!

I’d note that this edition of the *Journal* is being published on November 1—

my first day of retirement. Hopefully at that time I will have reason to thank the very overworked Office of Retirement for seeing to my smooth transition to retiree status. If not, I can be grateful for my colleagues on the member services team at AFSA, who never cease to amaze me in their understanding of the intricacies of processes—even in the present “dynamic” environment.

In a sign of the times, I will be the first retiree serving as AFSA president that the organization has seen in its 101-year history, one of the effects of the president’s executive order discontinuing AFSA’s collective bargaining status.

While AFSA will continue to fight this in court, the reconfiguration of the AFSA presidency opens up a new realm of possibilities for me, since I am no longer bound by the limitations that come with federal employment.

I intend to take full advantage of this unexpected change and will be able to “speak truth to power”—something that an increasing number of AFSA members are no longer able to do.

Change and Challenges

So here I sit at a table across from University of Ljubljana’s math and physics campus on a brisk September morning listening jealously as energetic students decline the vocative,

locative, and genitive cases with ease.

I am heartened that, since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, many in their region’s successor nations have made progress in moving past ethnocentric xenophobia and resolving difficult problems.

But I realize that while different from the existential challenges faced by their parents and grandparents, these students are in just as great need of advocates and defenders against the challenges that confront their own generation. So it is for AFSA and the Foreign Service. So it will always be.

Human history is characterized by constant changes in social organization, technology, and culture that bring ups and downs, crises and challenges, as well as the potential for happiness and well-being.

I’m reminded of a quote from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* sent to me recently by a sanguine Foreign Service friend who has weathered more than his share of storms. It serves as a good reminder of the role we all play.

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” ■

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Telling the FS Story

BY SHAWN DORMAN

This edition comes to you in the midst of a government shutdown that has left many of our readers either furloughed or working without pay. And that is on top of the thousands who have been pushed out of the Service in recent months, and many others who remain, fearing for their jobs. These are not normal times, and we are right to worry about the survival of the professional, nonpartisan Foreign Service.

After a year of disruption, we head into the colder months and the holiday season looking to our communities for comfort and warmth. In that spirit, we bring you the 24th annual celebration of writing and publishing by members of the Foreign Service community.

The “In Their Own Write” books edition is always a favorite for the FSJ team to put together, as we get to explore and highlight the perspectives and creativity of this unique community of world travelers.

Among the 52 selections, you’ll find books on policy and diplomatic history, as well as memoirs and guidebooks. And in the “Of Related Interest” section, you’ll find 16 books by non-FS authors on topics relevant to diplomacy and development professionals.

Part holiday gift guide, part diplomacy time capsule, this collection is a reminder of the intellectual richness

within the Service. In a companion article, “In Their Own Words,” retired FSO David K. Wessel discusses writing with four FS family member authors, tracing how the life of a “trailing spouse” can become creative fuel.

I hope you will find inspiration in this collection for your own writing and publishing.

This month’s cover story, “Dayton Peace Accords at 30,” revisits the November 1995 peace agreement that ended the Bosnian War. For this anniversary, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) put together an extensive collection of oral histories relating to the efforts to bring stability to the Western Balkans. The selections here were compiled by Fran Leskovar, manager for the ADST project.

In “The End of CSO: Don’t Let Stabilization Expertise Go,” John H. Mongan reflects on the shuttering of the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, arguing that diplomatic conflict capacity must not vanish in the bureaucratic reorganization.

And FSO John Harris offers a lighter meditation on adaptation and perspective gained from commuting in Vietnam, in “Scooter Wisdom: Life Lessons from the Streets of Saigon.”

In a review essay of Scott Anderson’s new book on the Iranian Revolution, *King of Kings*, Ambassador John Limbert applauds the work of career diplomats who, “despite threats to their careers and their lives, insisted on providing the most accurate information and the best advice

possible from the field to decision-makers in Washington without regard to partisan politics of the winds of political fashion.”

A fifth installment of “Service Disrupted” stories includes insider accounts of how current events are disrupting the critical work done by Foreign Service members. In FS Heritage, Sébastien Perrot-Minnot recounts “The Life and Tragic Fate of a Young U.S. Consul” in Guadeloupe. And the Education Supplement includes a piece on returning to U.S. schools from overseas.

Ambassador Tom Boyatt offers an Appreciation of Ambassador William Harrop, “A Hero of Our Time,” who led the way for AFSA to become a union in 1972. And in the Reflection, Don Hausrath remembers the diplomat, historian, and writer Kenneth Wimmel.

Taken together, all these pieces underline the enduring strengths of diplomats on the ground—judgment, improvisation, courage, and humility.

To those who have recently left the Foreign Service through retirement, “the fork,” a RIF, or the elimination of your agency or office, thank you for your years of service. Please stay connected; you’ll always be part of the FS community.

Know that you have an open invitation to write for the FSJ as you begin your next chapter. Tell your story and help ensure that there is a record of the critical work you have done in public service.

Please take a look at our 2026 Calendar (<https://afsa.org/fsj-editorial-calendar>) and check out the FSJ Author Guidelines (<https://afsa.org/fsj-author-guidelines>). Send your suggestions, pitches, and submissions to journal@afsa.org. ■



Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

The *Journal's* Enduring Value

After a brilliant centennial celebration, *The Foreign Service Journal* suddenly faces a less certain future. The Trump administration is squeezing AFSA and thinning the ranks of the State Department, two bedrocks of the *Journal's* existence. Now, as it goes to publishing only six issues a year, we should pause to reflect on the publication's enduring value. I would highlight three aspects.

First, the *Journal* is uniquely entwined with the Foreign Service. The two claim a common origin, the drive culminating after the First World War to modernize American diplomacy. The two have grown up together. The *Journal* has provided an established forum for American diplomats. That makes it not so much a trade journal as a *tradescraft* journal, a space for practitioners to reflect on the real work of diplomacy.

A good example, from the October 2022 issue, is an essay by Rose Gottemoeller on the 1994 Budapest memo that assured Ukraine of its security if it handed over its nuclear weapons. That agreement became fiercely controversial after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As a lead negotiator, Gottemoeller was an insider, allowing her to explain the geopolitical context of the memo.

Second, over the past century, the *Journal* has served as a repository of the stories of diplomacy, surely the profession with the most wonderfully droll incidents of all. Its archive, now available online, is a treasure house.

One of my favorite examples comes from the November 1993 edition in which a British diplomat—and none other than the Permanent Under Secretary, the highest position in their career hierarchy—related the rendering of his august title into Japanese, which then came back as “immortal junior typist.”

Let me conclude with an observation drawn from my experience years ago as an editorial intern in the New York office of *Foreign Affairs*. That magazine shares a similar trajectory with the *Journal*. It, too, was conceived in the 1920s in reaction to the sudden American assumption of international responsibility.

Then, over the next century, *Foreign Affairs* was to the expanding globalism of U.S. foreign policy what the *Journal* was to the deepening professionalism

of U.S. foreign relations. Note that distinction between foreign policy and foreign relations. Where *Foreign Affairs* is comparatively weak—sifting and refining the rich raw material of the actual practice of diplomacy—the *Journal* is uniquely strong.

These are just a few reasons why I value the *Journal*, and wish it well in its second century, and deplore the infringements on its viability.

Fletcher M. Burton
State FSO, retired
Nashville, Tennessee

Survivors Remember the East Africa Bombings

August 7, 2025, marked the 27th anniversary of the East Africa embassy bombings. Thank you to AFSA and the *FSJ* for remembering every August.

While the State Department this year chose not to issue a public statement, the

anniversary was marked in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and a group of us met that morning at the plaque honoring the victims in Arlington National Cemetery.

This year's gathering came on the heels of the State Department's unfortunate decision to eliminate the Office of Casualty Assistance, which was created after the bombings to support the families of U.S. personnel or family members killed or injured overseas, and to fold the function into another office.

I was chargé d'affaires in Tanzania at the time of the bombings. For a large group of American and Tanzanian survivors of the Dar bombing, the anniversary engendered numerous heartfelt and inspiring email messages as we commiserated with one another.

One colleague wrote: “No one who wasn't there can fully understand, and I don't believe those of us who were can ever truly express the multitude of emotions that remain even 27 years later.” Another wrote: “We are all part of a united group, brought together by tragedy and now a group that has been blessed because we learned the true value of living each and every day because of that tragedy.”

Most of us by now have retired from U.S. government service, but many emails reflected today's unsettled situation in U.S. government agencies. One person noted: “We have been saddened by the rapid changes our friends have been reacting to.”

Another said: “The changes across our institutions have been difficult to witness—and for many, to personally endure. As painful as they are, they also underscore how much we've all given, and how deeply we care about the missions we served. For those of us who've moved into retirement or new chapters, the sense of purpose doesn't disappear—it simply shifts form.”



Yet another message cited the importance of our work in development and diplomatic “soft power”: “We all thought we were spending our lives making the world a better place, and we did. It is heartbreaking seeing it unravel in this fashion and so quickly. We must hope that our passion for service and internationalism passes down to the next generations and they carry the flame for us.”

The survivors of the Nairobi and Dar bombings haven’t forgotten that traumatic, tragic day, August 7, 1998. As one person put it, “The years move on, but some moments stay lodged in the soul. This is one of them.”

*John E. Lange
Ambassador, retired
Vienna, Virginia*

I Hope It Never Happens to You

Before Augusto Pinochet lost the 1988 plebiscite in Chile, forcing an election after 17 years of military dictatorship, media organizations were still under the thumb of his henchmen, and fear was rampant about bucking the government in any way. Journalists’ houses were burned, they were threatened, their cars were vandalized, television news stations went “black,” and radio towers were knocked over.

Ambassador Harry Barnes insisted that we in the U.S. Information Service (USIS) were to make visitations to beleaguered media organizations up and down the country, and he expected trip reports each time.

Those trips were the embassy’s show of support for free media. I would like to think that journalists took courage from our visits, and gradually a “NO” campaign opposing Pinochet’s continued dictatorship came together, and he was voted out.

Leading up to the democratic vote,



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one of the national (university) television stations decided to host Chile's first-ever presidential debate, patterned on how debates were conducted in the U.S. As press officer, I was invited to sit with the television station's planning group, and we worked out the green-light/red-light system, the order of questioning, and so on. That involvement and cooperation was an honor for me.

Chile closed down the night of the first debate, as it was such a novelty. No one was in the streets. Viewership was estimated at around 90 percent.

I remember one locally employed staff member in the press section, a Foreign Service National (FSN) who had grieved the loss of democracy in Chile during those years. A dedicated polling place worker, she told me: "I hope the U.S. never experiences this loss of democracy. It is as devastating for us here as it would be for you there."

Sonja Sweek

State FSO, retired

Lincoln City, Oregon

Why I Also Joined NARFE

Full disclosure—I am a life member of AFSA and the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE). As a retired Diplomatic Security employee, I am also a life member of DSSAA, the Diplomatic Security Special Agents Association.

If you are reading this magazine, you are probably familiar with the many benefits of being a member of AFSA. I would like to explain the three primary reasons why I decided to *also* join NARFE.

Advocacy. As a federal employee retiree, I was uncertain what role I could play in trying to defend the pay and benefits we all worked so hard to earn. NARFE is not a union but an advocacy group representing all agencies that

works to help elected officials and the public understand the importance of the federal workforce.

It has numerous tools to help us engage with our lawmakers. The advocacy page on the NARFE website makes it easy for people to contact their elected officials (just don't do that from work or from a work computer). And its advocacy arm enjoys an excellent reputation with both parties on the Hill.

A recent example: NARFE officers were present at the signing of the legislation to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) affecting Social Security payments (those of you who were affected understand the magnitude of this achievement).

Federal benefits education. NARFE helps current and former employees and their families understand their benefits. I was fortunate to attend the Foreign Service Institute's retirement seminar before I retired, and it was loaded with great information.

But other agencies don't necessarily do such a good job preparing their employees. On the NARFE website, members can view numerous Federal Benefits Institute webinars on a wide variety of topics relating to benefits.

Community. The community aspect of NARFE was my primary reason for joining. I retired to western South Dakota, and as you can imagine, there are not a lot of foreign affairs retirees in the area. When I want to talk about TSP, TDY, or FEHB, I have a difficult time finding someone who speaks my language.

With nine local "chapters" throughout South Dakota, NARFE offers a community that understands my questions and concerns. My local chapter invites representatives from our three elected

officials to give us legislative updates and relay our concerns.

We host representatives of the major Federal Employee Health Benefits providers annually to help the federal family understand the Open Season options. NARFE also holds meetings at the state and national level.

If your budget only allows for joining one group to advocate on your behalf, it is easy to recommend maintaining AFSA membership. But if you can afford to give up one "candy coffee" each month, and depending on where you have settled in retirement, I would strongly encourage also considering a membership in NARFE.

For me, also joining NARFE was one of the best retirement decisions I made. You can learn more at www.NARFE.org.

Daryl Zimmerman

Foreign Service Specialist, retired
Sturgis, South Dakota ■

Correction

In the September-October appreciation, Richard Boucher's birth year incorrectly appeared as 1952. He was born in 1951.

We regret the error.



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Trump Administration Cancels Annual Federal Workforce Survey

For the first time since 2010, the federal government will not conduct the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), the governmentwide questionnaire that measures morale, engagement, and satisfaction among civil servants.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced on August 15 that it has canceled the 2025 edition of the survey, citing plans to “recalibrate” FEVS to align with the Trump administration’s workforce priorities.

OPM Director Scott Kuper said the updated version, expected in 2026, will remove questions added under the Biden administration on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), while refocusing on “a high-performance, high-efficiency, and merit-based civil service.”

The cancellation comes amid widespread upheaval in the federal workforce, including mass firings, relocations, and cuts that have already fueled concerns about morale. Past FEVS results have provided one of the clearest pictures of workforce sentiment, influencing management decisions and shaping the Partnership for Public Service’s annual *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings.

For the State Department, those rankings have been especially sobering in recent years: Its employee engagement and satisfaction score fell to 62.8 in 2024, down from highs near 70 in 2010, placing the department 16th out of 18 large agencies.

Observers warn that skipping the survey deprives both agency leaders and Congress of valuable feedback. “By making this decision, the administration is depriving itself of the ability to make data-driven leadership decisions that can

Contemporary Quote

“Diplomacy matters. War, threats, and violence are never the answer. Dialogue, deliberation, and discussion are. We don’t always have to agree and we don’t always succeed—but we cannot stop trying.”

—Linda Thomas-Greenfield accepting AFSA’s Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy at Georgetown University, October 1.

help government better deliver for the public,” said Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service.

The FEVS is also tied to a legal requirement, enacted in the 2004 National Defense Authorization Act, for agencies to survey employees annually on workplace conditions. OPM has not explained how the government will comply with that mandate this year.

Human Rights Reports Scaled Back

The State Department’s annual “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” for 2024 were released on August 12, 2025, six months later than usual and in dramatically reduced form. For decades, the reports have been considered the most comprehensive government-produced assessment of human rights worldwide. This year’s versions, however, were significantly shortened and whole sections were removed, prompting widespread criticism that the administration is whitewashing abuses by allies, targeting adversaries, and undermining U.S. credibility.

The reports, mandated by Congress since the late 1970s, have historically provided detailed, nonpartisan assessments of conditions in almost every country and territory in the world. They have served as a trusted resource for Congress, the courts, immigration adjudicators, human rights advocates, and even businesses conducting risk assessments. In 2022–2023 alone, lawmakers cited the reports

more than 70 times in legislation.

But the 2024 editions were cut by more than half, with entire sections eliminated. Coverage of government corruption, election abuses, systemic racial and ethnic discrimination, violence against women and minorities, child abuse, and LGBTQ+ rights has disappeared.

Long-standing sections on prison conditions, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and reprisals against human rights defenders have also been dropped, even as the State Department itself estimates there are more than 1 million political prisoners worldwide.

The result is a selective and inconsistent picture. The report on Israel, for instance, plummeted from more than 22,000 words last year to fewer than 1,500, and omits reference to International Criminal Court arrest warrants for top Israeli and Hamas leaders.

The report on El Salvador, once offering specific details on arbitrary detentions and torture, now concludes there were “no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.”

Meanwhile, reports on Brazil and South Africa—whose governments have clashed with the Trump administration—emphasize “disproportionate” curbs on free speech and “worsened” racial tensions.

Talking Points offers a snapshot of recent developments affecting the Foreign Service. The following items were finalized for publication on September 25, 2025.

Administration officials defended the restructuring as a bid to “increase readability” and remove “redundancies.” State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce insisted that no country is “singled out for condemnation or praise.”

Critics, however, see the cuts as deliberate politicization. “It sends a signal that there’s going to be a free pass [on human rights issues] from the United States government, that it will look the other way if a government is willing to cut deals or do the bidding of this administration,” said Uzra Zeya, head of Human Rights First and a former FSO and senior State Department official.

Freedom House warned that the omissions “deal a heavy blow to U.S. leadership on human rights, serve the interests of authoritarian powers, and leave policymakers and private-sector consumers with fewer resources to inform their work.”

The consequences reach beyond Washington, D.C. Civil society organizations rely on the reports’ compilation of evidence from U.S. embassies worldwide, NGOs, and international monitors.

The timing of the cuts also raises alarms. In 2024 voters in more than 60 countries went to the polls, and more than 100 elections are scheduled worldwide in 2025.

Yet the 2024 reports exclude sections on election abuses and irregularities, just as authoritarian governments are working to erode international standards of democratic accountability.

Labor Rights at a Crossroads

On August 28, President Trump issued an executive order further excluding agencies and subdivisions from collective bargaining rights under Chapter 71 of Title 5, citing national security.

The order removed protections for



Heard on the Hill

Why Diplomats Matter

Congress has a responsibility to ensure America continues to have the most capable diplomatic and development workforce in the world. And I recognize your commitment to working on an authorization and the hard work of both of our staffs.

As Bill Burns, one of America’s finest Foreign Service officers wrote, and I quote: “Diplomats are translators of the world to Washington and Washington to the world.” They are early warning radars for threats and opportunities. Builders and repairers of relationships, policymakers, drivers and executors, protectors of our citizens abroad, promoters of America’s economic interests, interrogators of military intelligence and economic tools, organizers, conveners, negotiators, communicators, and strategists.

That is why what we do here matters. Our work must enhance, not diminish, the ability of our diplomats to succeed that has always required clear eyes, real oversight, and a bipartisan process.

—Representative Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.) in a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing titled “Markup of State Department Authorization Bills” on September 17.

Civil Service employees in the U.S. Agency for Global Media (including VOA), the Bureau of Reclamation’s hydropower facilities, subdivisions of the Patent and Trademark Office and NOAA, the Commerce Department’s International Trade Administration, as well as NASA. Union leaders warned that the action would weaken employee protections and reduce accountability.

Days later, on September 15, employees and union members gathered outside NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C., to protest workforce reductions and the loss of union protections.

AFSA is also at the center of this fight. On April 7, AFSA filed a suit in federal district court challenging a March 27 executive order that revoked bargaining rights for 97 percent of its bargaining unit members at State and USAID. A legal battle ensued; the case remains active and is central to protecting Foreign Service members’ workplace rights.

In May, Judge Paul L. Friedman granted AFSA’s request for a preliminary injunction, temporarily blocking the order as applied to the Foreign Service. Although a federal appeals court later paused that injunction, AFSA has pressed forward.

In August, the union filed a motion for summary judgment, asking the court to rule on the merits of its case based on the current record. The government quickly responded with its own motions, asking the district court to hold the motion for summary judgment in abeyance and asking the court of appeals to overturn AFSA’s earlier win.

Judge Friedman recently granted the government’s motion to hold the case in abeyance pending the outcome of the court of appeals’ ruling on the preliminary injunction. Whatever the outcome, the case remains active and central to protecting Foreign Service members’ workplace rights.

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At a time when the United States finds itself confronted with a rapidly changing world of shifting alliances, allegiances, and centers of influence, a world in which American dominance over events is no longer nearly as certain as it was a few years ago, it is more important than ever that this country be served by a strong professional Foreign Service. Such a Service demands an educated, trained, dedicated, hard working and highly motivated corps of people. In order for the foreign affairs agencies to recruit and retain men and women with these qualifications the agencies must be able to successfully compete with private organizations which are in the market for the same people.

—Letter from former AFSA President John D. Hemenway to Congressman Al Ullman (D-Ore.) of the House Ways and Means Committee in the December 1975 edition of the FSJ.



Meanwhile, private-sector labor faces its own crisis. In August, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals declared the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) unconstitutional in a case involving SpaceX, effectively halting enforcement of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

The NLRB, reduced to two members and lacking a quorum, has nonetheless sought to defend its jurisdiction, filing a suit on September 12 against the State of New York over a new law authorizing state oversight of private-sector union elections.

Congress has begun to push back. On September 17, Senators Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), joined by more than 40 colleagues, introduced the Protect America’s Workforce Act to nullify Trump’s recent executive orders and restore collective bargaining agreements in place as of March 26, 2025.

A September 15 Congressional Research Service report, “National Security Exclusions from the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statutes,” provides additional context. The report

notes that while presidents have historically excluded some agencies with intelligence or defense missions, the Trump orders sweep in more than 40 entities, including many without clear national security functions.

CRS also reviews the wave of litigation by NTEU, AFGE, and AFSA, and points out that Congress could revisit or narrow the statutory authority presidents use to impose such exclusions.

With executive actions, court rulings, congressional responses, and union litigation all in play, both federal and private-sector employees now face a rapidly shifting landscape for collective bargaining rights.

DSS Joins D.C. Crime Crackdown

The State Department’s law enforcement arm, long tasked with protecting U.S. diplomats and securing U.S. embassies and personnel around the world, has assumed a new and unusual role at home. The Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) is now working alongside local police in Washington, D.C., participating

in the administration's effort to clamp down on crime in the nation's capital.

In August, DSS officers were deployed on the streets of Washington, D.C. State confirmed in a statement that it is "actively partnering with the Metropolitan Police Department and other law enforcement to provide interagency support in the ongoing mission to deter and reduce crime in the District of Columbia."

The move has sparked controversy. Critics call the deployment a political show, pointing to cases like the August 19 arrest of a part-time delivery driver who was charged with having an open container of alcohol in a vehicle. A DSS officer was involved in the arrest, which later escalated into a resisting charge. One federal public defender described the case as a by-product of a "federal occupation of D.C."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has defended the effort, saying that as the "front porch" of the United States, Washington should be safe and welcoming to foreign leaders and citizens alike.

DSS has more than 2,500 employees worldwide and a mandate that includes counterterrorism, counterespionage, and protection of senior officials. As it expands its domestic profile, critics question how far the agency's traditional diplomatic security role can stretch.

Passport Bill Raises Alarm

A new Republican bill in the House, introduced by Rep. Brian Mast (R-Fla.) the week of September 15, is drawing fire from civil liberties groups for giving the Secretary of State sweeping authority to revoke or deny U.S. passports.

The proposal comes just months after Secretary of State Marco Rubio revoked the visa of Turkish doctoral student Rümeyşa Öztürk, based solely on an op-ed she co-wrote critical of Israel. This move was later overturned by a court. Critics say the bill would open the door to similar actions against U.S. citizens.

The legislation claims to target "terrorists and traffickers," but its vague reference to providing "material support" to terrorist organizations has alarmed watchdogs. Seth Stern of the Freedom of the Press Foundation warned it amounts to "thought policing at the hands of one individual," giving the Secretary the power to designate people as terrorist supporters "based solely on what they think and say."

Opponents warn the law could chill dissent far beyond the current political climate.

Where Is *State Magazine*?

Have you seen *State Magazine* lately? We haven't either—not since May 2025.



State Magazine is the in-house publication of the State Department, with roots dating back to 1947, when the *Foreign Service News Letter* was first published to keep the Foreign Service community informed of

developments affecting operations and personnel.

Over the decades, the publication changed names—from *Department of State News Letter* in 1961 to *State* in 1981, and finally *State Magazine* in 1996.

The magazine went all-digital in 2015 and moved to its current online platform in 2019. It had been published monthly until this past spring. Since then, no word



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Site of the Month: *America's Diplomats*

AMERICA'S DIPLOMATS SPEAKER SERIES

This month, we highlight the *America's Diplomats* video series, which shines a spotlight on citizens from all over the United States who represent America abroad.

Through one-on-one interviews, the series traces the personal journeys of distinguished public servants and offers first-person insights into the challenges and rewards of a diplomatic career.

Launched by the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, with support from the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, the project celebrates the service of career diplomats and foreign policy professionals and inspires future generations to follow in their footsteps.

Speakers share how they were inspired to join the State Department, the mentors who shaped their path, and the skills that sustained them through decades of service. Episodes feature leaders including Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Ambassador Don Lu, Ambassador Todd Robinson, Ambassador Barbara Bodine, Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, and many others, each offering a distinct perspective on advancing U.S. interests in a complex world.

At a time when a strong public service is more critical than ever, *America's Diplomats* offers an honest and compelling window into the lives of those who have shaped U.S. foreign policy across administrations.

Watch the series at <https://www.americas-diplomats.com/>.

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

from the State Department on when, or whether, *State Magazine* will return.

We'll be keeping an eye out.

Oversight Lessons on Afghanistan

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released its July 30, 2025, quarterly report to Congress, before the office closes permanently this fall. Since 2008, SIGAR has produced 68 reports, creating the most detailed independent record of the U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.

The latest report highlights the enduring lessons of that effort. Recent audits uncovered compliance lapses among contractors, adding to a record 171 criminal convictions and nearly \$1.7 billion recovered.

More broadly, SIGAR points to systemic problems such as corruption, poorly coordinated projects, and unsustainable programs that collapsed once U.S. funding ended. Even after the 2021 withdrawal, the office tracked more than \$21 billion in ongoing aid under Taliban rule, ensuring transparency in how funds were used.

As SIGAR closes its doors, its central warning resonates beyond Afghanistan: Without clear goals, local buy-in, and strong oversight, reconstruction efforts are likely to fail.

To read the report, visit <https://bit.ly/SIGAR68>. ■

This issue of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.



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The End of CSO: Don't Let Stabilization Expertise Go

BY JOHN H. MONGAN

A persistent and repeated error through the ages has been the failure to understand that the preservation of peace requires active effort, planning, the expenditure of resources, and sacrifice, just as war does.

—Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War*, 1996

The Trump administration's decision to disband the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)—like its more publicized dismantling of USAID—represents a belief that the U.S. can choose how it wants to engage abroad. Of course, the idea that the U.S. can choose how it engages abroad is the exact thought that motivated presidential candidate George W. Bush when he said in 2000 that the U.S. "shouldn't be in the business of nation-building."

Four years later, after 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq, it was President Bush who created CSO's predecessor, the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), and it was Bush who signed legislation institutionalizing it in 2008. As of the time of this writing, that statutory "coordinator" appears to be vested in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) that will coordinate disaster response efforts.

S/CRS was created to memorialize and operationalize the lessons of the major stabilization missions of the 1990s and 2000s—Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, among others. It evolved into CSO under President Barack Obama to "anticipate, prevent, and respond" to conflict risks and became the centerpiece of implementing the Global Fragility (GFA) and Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Acts of President Donald Trump's first term. It will be interesting to see whether the department is able to implement those acts without the bureau.

It is reasonable to expect that some conflict-related contingency will arise in the next decade, and the department will be no better prepared to respond than when it became necessary to establish a new mission in Pristina in 1999; provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan in 2002; effective governance in Iraq in 2003; or the GFA's small-scale, conflict-focused interventions in different countries today.

Whatever one thinks of CSO, it was

the only element of the State Department specifically tasked to think through these challenges, and its absence re-creates a capability gap likely to haunt the department in the years ahead. Ironically, it would have been an organization well suited to plan for the takeover of Greenland, Gaza, or the Panama Canal, or the reestablishment of a presence in Damascus—all initiatives this administration has proposed.

Without relitigating the decision to abolish the bureau, it is incumbent on department leadership to consider how to maintain some degree of conflict capacity for the time when political leadership suddenly cares about a conflict challenge somewhere.

The Secret Sauce

All bureaucracies have good intentions that can lead to pernicious side effects. Professionalism leads to apolitical expertise but risks the moral cowardice of careerism. Physical fitness is essential for armies in combat but leads to many officers who are better at push-ups than strategy. Patience and judiciousness are essential qualities for diplomacy but can camouflage laziness and indecisiveness.

CSO challenged these diplomatic hazards by asserting that diplomatic responses to conflict require fast and decisive action, much like military responses. CSO developed a range of capabilities during its existence, but three core requirements guided its formation and operations, and remain gaps for the department:



John H. Mongan joined the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, later CSO, in 2005 and has served in a variety of leadership roles in the bureau, including in field operations in Afghanistan and in support of the Syrian opposition in Türkiye. A former Foreign Service officer, he served tours in Albania, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. He retired from the State Department in September 2025.

• **Expeditionary Operations:** putting the right civilians in the right place, at the right time, with the right preparation for the job.

• **Operational Planning:** making sure the people deployed have a feasible and well-understood mission.

• **Flexible Funding:** making sure the people deployed have the right resources to fulfill the plan.

An Expeditionary Mindset and State's Culture

When the State Department struggled to establish a diplomatic mission in Kosovo in 1999, I was a new FSO who had recently worked for a humanitarian agency in Kosovo. I was amazed the U.S. government could not manage to do a

better job of opening a mission than my old NGO could.

Five years later, I was further astounded to learn the department had no standard plan to prepare me for deployment to an Afghan provincial reconstruction team (PRT), even though the Vietnam Civil Operations and Rural Development Support program (CORDS) was within living memory.

State does not like “expeditionary” operations. Countless Foreign Service officers have taken great risks abroad, but the Service as a whole does not do so systematically, and careerism encourages the department’s leaders to defer to security rather than to the needs of the mission—or rather, bakes security into the main need of the mission, which is paradoxical.

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

Diplomatic Security, meanwhile, premises its operations on every diplomat being a “principal” who must be protected as a dignitary. Diplomats certainly are not cannon fodder, but they cannot perform their jobs if they are all treated as dignitaries who ought not to take risks overseas.

CSO's and S/CRS's best work involved putting diplomats far forward

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into hazardous places and providing them with extensive—and expensive—training and equipment that, pre-Benghazi, allowed them to do things other State personnel were not permitted to do. Benghazi ended policymakers’ willingness to support such missions, but the department never liked them in the first place. State’s disdain for such challenges will not make them go away, and we cannot pretend State is at its most effective and influential in the places it is not present.

The George W. Bush-era leadership that created S/CRS spoke as if every diplomat needed to be able to serve on a PRT, but such a Foreign Service would be ill-suited to the work on most issues in most countries. For example, skills that make a diplomat successful on a PRT may not help as much when working through trade treaties or child custody disputes.

State needs a cadre of personnel ready for high-threat environments, but a “conflict cone” of FSOs will not do, because larger conflict missions need conflict-ready public diplomacy, consular, management, and other types of FSOs, while conflict-cone officers need “normal” jobs to sustain a career path, not to mention a stable family life.

Long before having a “Ranger Regiment” of elite light infantry, the Army had a “Ranger School” to teach elite tactics to a small group of soldiers who would carry those skills back to their own units. A three- to four-week “Expeditionary Skills” course over and above the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) course could prepare 5 to 10 percent of the Foreign Service and select civil servants for tough missions and unexpected contingencies and see to it such officers were distributed evenly around the department. The Navy and Air Force have similar courses for personnel who must be ready for combat even though it is not their job.

These personnel would be trained to protect their own facilities and movements under DS oversight, with regulations and policy adjusted to recognize their missions as different from the Foreign Service’s preferred operating model. Each regional bureau could manage its own “stable” of expeditionary-trained personnel and mobilize them from across the bureau as needed.

The course should be mandatory for assignment to high-threat posts. Regular exercises connected to military exercises could maintain this capability to deploy individuals with the military or larger teams into high-threat environments at short notice.

Operational Planning and Diplomacy

Putting people in harm’s way obligates the department to give them clear and feasible goals so they know when to end the mission or “normalize” it. Operational planning is a core State Department weakness, one that CSO played an outsized role in filling, even in missions where it had no field role and was only an adviser.

DS has an excellent planning process for establishing or securing a hazardous mission, but it is grounded purely in force protection and the logistics requirements that flow from it. For example, when the department instructed DS to establish a mission in one African country several years back, DS examined available facilities and risks and determined the mission would require 50 DS and military personnel to secure, leaving room to accommodate just four “substantive” personnel, including the chief of mission.

This process, however, does not circle back to policy to understand what these few substantive personnel might

accomplish that would justify risking many more DS and military personnel, if the hazards really require them. It also does little for existing posts where the challenge is to keep engaged in certain unstable areas within a country without expecting or absorbing much additional logistical support.

The inevitable result is an unwieldy and costly mission unlikely to achieve the hoped-for goals. A better policy-led planning process, combined with trained “expeditionary” diplomats, could promote a relatively secure, yet more effective, diplomatic mission in a high-threat locale.

From 2020 until this year, CSO’s work implementing the GFA involved developing just such a policy-centered planning process for 10 GFA-designated countries, involving data analysis, defined and complementary diplomatic and assistance goals, and reliable indicators of effectiveness. These GFA planning efforts, however, never combined, or even consulted with, nonassistance resource, staffing, and security planning for these posts—a gaping flaw in its implementation.

A planning cell of 20-25 personnel, ideally based in the Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, could combine M, DS, and CSO planning capabilities to support embassies and regional bureaus with the kind of rigorous and integrated planning needed for effective stabilization responses.

Flexible Funding Fills Gaps

A common complaint about CSO among less-imaginative State counterparts was that the bureau was “unpredictable,” often proposing to do things in country X that were totally different from what it was recommending in country Y. Many State personnel preferred dealing

with the clear “lanes” of functional bureaus like International Narcotics and Law Enforcement or Population, Refugees, and Migration.

CSO’s unpredictability, however, was its greatest strength. It was a multi-tool, not a screwdriver or wrench, providing smaller and more targeted interventions optimized for the challenge at hand. Capable people put into harm’s way with a sound plan need resources both to support their own logistics and to engage and build capacity with their local partners, many of whom will be people previously unknown to the U.S. government, with needs that can be learned only by meeting them.

Any capacity the department retains for stabilization and expeditionary

efforts will depend on some form of flexible funding unconstrained by congressional earmarks or annual funding cycles—not necessarily a large account, but a carefully stewarded and regularly maintained one.

A Learning Organization

Better training and security culture matched with better planning and flexible resources will deliver many of the capabilities embodied in CSO and S/CRS—but not well enough. No one claims that State does not need the Bureau of Consular Affairs because every officer has done a consular tour, or that we do not need the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs because we have an economics cone.

Unifying conflict capabilities in a single bureau created a virtuous cycle for a learning organization that could iterate and improve better than can be expected from a mishmash of DS training, regional bureau responses led by a seventh-floor planning team, and funds presumably managed by the director of foreign assistance.

But maintaining these disparate capabilities in any form is much better than losing them entirely. Retaining these capabilities in any form creates the hope that, when the next challenge arises, the department will not need to start from zero again, with the waste, dangers, and disappointments caused by our lack of preparedness in the days before CSO. ■

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Slobodan Milosevic (third from left), Alija Izetbegovic (fourth from left), and Franjo Tudjman (sixth from left) initialing the Dayton Accords at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, outside Dayton, Ohio, on November 21, 1995. The Dayton Accords ended the conflict arising from the breakup of the Republic of Yugoslavia and paved the way for signing the final “General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina” on December 14, 1995.

The Dayton Peace Accords at 30

Firsthand Accounts from U.S. Diplomats Who Were There

COMPILED BY FRAN LESKOVAR

For four years in the early 1990s, a horrific war raged in the Balkans following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. After witnessing ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and a refugee crisis not seen in Europe since World War II, as well as coming to terms with the fact that a more powerful intervention was needed, the United States embarked on a mission to end the conflict in 1995. Between August and October 1995, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke and his team shuttled between Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb, negotiating ceasefire conditions and outlining the terms of an eventual peace agreement.

On November 1, 1995, representatives from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia met at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, for proximity peace talks. Twenty-one days later, the General Framework Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, commonly known as the Dayton Peace Accords, was reached, beginning the complex peace implementation process that continues to this day.

In recognition of the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) collected oral history accounts from U.S. officials involved in the 1990s efforts to bring stability to the Western Balkans and subsequent implementation of the accords. ADST combined these with an extensive collection of oral history on the Balkans already in its archive and with accounts from the U.S. Department of State's Dayton Accords History Project to create an interactive digital anthology.

The anthology offers a historical narrative and lessons learned that are helpful in training the next generation of America's national security leaders; it also illustrates the dedication and contributions of U.S. Foreign Service officers to making the United States "safer, stronger, and more prosperous."

The following excerpts, drawn from the anthology, reflect the evolution of U.S. engagement in the Balkans as seen through the eyes of U.S. diplomats—from the optimism that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, through the challenges of ending the Yugoslav conflict, to the Dayton Peace Accords and their enduring



A Centauro armored car of the Italian army enters Sarajevo on January 11, 1996, during the NATO intervention following the Dayton Accords.

legacy. For more firsthand accounts on the subject, visit the digital interactive anthology at <https://adst.org/dayton-accords/>.

—Fran Leskovar

Optimism Regarding Peacekeeping in the Post–Cold War World

By Karl L. Inderfurth

This was a time [the early 1990s] when there were great hopes for the United Nations (UN) and for peacekeeping. The Cold War was over. Peacekeepers had just a few years earlier been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. ... But there were also two looming problems. The immediate issue was what was happening in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia and, specifically, what to do about [Slobodan] Milosevic and the attempt by the Serbs to "ethnically cleanse" Bosnia.

Everyone was reading these horror stories in the press about the Balkans. The Balkans were at war. What would happen to Kosovo and Macedonia and Croatia? This was part of the breakup, the fallout if you will, of the end of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia was disintegrating.

Karl L. Inderfurth, a former ambassador, served as U.S. representative for special political affairs and deputy U.S. representative on the United Nations Security Council between 1993 and 1997.



Fran Leskovar is the project manager for the Dayton Peace Accords Oral History Project at the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), a nonpartisan 501 (c)(3) educational organization located at the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center. ADST is dedicated to capturing, preserving, and sharing the experiences of U.S. diplomats.



This map shows Bosnia and Herzegovina as per the Dayton Accords, with the Inter-Entity Boundary Line demarcating the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the one hand and Republika Srpska on the other.

Mood on the Yugoslav Desk

By Bilha Brayant

It had become a very difficult place to work [in 1994]. All of us on the Yugoslav desk were very, very unhappy that after all our hard work, we couldn't stop the bloodshed. We were faced daily with reports describing in detail the massacres of innocent people that occurred in many places. I remember reading about 16 or 17 Bosnians who got on a train for Sarajevo and never arrived there. Later their bodies were found in a mass grave.

We had to read the reports about the terrible rapes and just horrible situations—a young Muslim woman in Sarajevo who was raped by Serbs not being able to tell her parents about it [so as] not to bring shame on the family. And with all of that going on, we sat there and wrote platitudes. We are the most powerful nation in the world. If we had said to Milosevic, “Stop it. If not, we will drop a bomb in the middle of Belgrade”—just say it, “Don't do it.” But we kept saying we would not get involved.

Milosevic is a bully, and we all knew he was a bully. You have to use different tactics with a bully, and yet we treated him like a normal man.

Bilha Brayant, a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service, served as a Yugoslav desk officer in 1994.

The Mount Igman Tragedy: Ending the War Becomes a Priority

By Craig Dunkerley

Thinking back to that moment: For many of us who had been working on European issues, Srebrenica seemed to demonstrate in the most painful way the hollowness of the international community's efforts up to that point simply to stop the killing in Bosnia.

Within the U.S. government, there was also a realization in this general period that NATO—and that would mean the U.S. in a big way—would be in fact very much on the hook if things really got threatening with the UN peacekeeping effort in the former Yugoslavia. There had been an earlier commitment to use U.S. troops as part of a larger NATO operation if the UN peacekeepers needed to be extracted under difficult conditions—something that seemed not unlikely given the course of events in early 1995. All this gave force to an evolving realization in Washington of just how seriously U.S. interests might be damaged if things continued in the current direction. It underscored for some the need for a new course.

This was the context of the Bosnian issue when I first returned to the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) ranks. Events struck as a rush. Just as I was arriving, the administration was beginning a new round of diplomatic efforts. Holbrooke was undertaking the first leg of what would eventually become his constant “shuttle diplomacy” with the parties of the region. This trip was, of course, cut short by the tragic accident on Mount Igman in mid-August when key members of his team—Bob Frasure of EUR, together with Nelson Drew of the National Security Council staff and Joe Kruzell of the Pentagon—were killed when their armored personnel carrier went off a dangerous mountainside road.

I remember very clearly going out to Andrews [Air Force Base] with so many colleagues from the State Department to meet the return of their bodies and then attending the set of memorial services for the three at Arlington [National] Cemetery. As Holbrooke has described in his own writings, that tragedy, in turn, set in motion a number of high-level decisions that began to mark a major shift in U.S. course. That was certainly the sense for those of us working at the EUR Bureau level at the time, [during] those August/September days; in contrast with the preceding two years or so, we now had passed a major policy turning point.

Craig Dunkerley, a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service, served as director of the Office of European Security and Political Affairs from 1995 to 1997.



NB/ROD

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke (left) and former Prime Minister of Sweden Carl Bildt, who served as the European Union's Special Envoy to the Former Yugoslavia from June 1995 and co-chair of the November 1995 Dayton Peace Conference, in discussion as they await a C-130 Hercules aircraft that will fly them into Sarajevo for peace talks on October 2, 1995.

The Road to Dayton

By Peter Galbraith

There were basically eight weeks of shuttle diplomacy. Holbrooke flying from Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb. Dayton then began on the first of November and went for 21 days. A great deal of what was accomplished in Dayton had actually been accomplished before then.

The first of these was a meeting in early September in Geneva with the foreign ministers—Milutinovic of Yugoslavia, Sacirbey of Bosnia, and Granic of Croatia—at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, in which they agreed to some fairly far-reaching

basic principles, one of which was that everybody agreed that Bosnia-Herzegovina would continue as a single state.

Second, it would have two entities: one being the *Republika Srpska*, which was the first time that that name was recognized, and the other being the *Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina*; and that there be common institutions and so on. Then those were elaborated in a meeting in New York on the 25th of September with further agreed principles. There was a process that was laying down a lot of the stuff that was being elaborated at Dayton.

Peter Galbraith served as the first U.S. ambassador to Croatia from 1993 to 1998 and played a crucial role in ending the war in Croatia.



Buildings and vehicles destroyed in Grbavica, a suburb of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the Bosnian conflict.

Dayton Accords, U.S. Product, and Milosevic's Urge to End the War

By Rudolph V. Perina

The Europeans were allowed to be there symbolically because we all knew that in the end we would need the Europeans. NATO would have a post-Dayton role, and a vast amount of reconstruction assistance would be required, and so on. But by and large, Dayton was a U.S. show, and really Holbrooke's show. I think Holbrooke deserves a lot of credit for what was accomplished in Dayton. Certainly, the agreement did not bring love and everlasting peace to the Balkans, but it did stop the fighting and the bloodshed, and that in and of itself is a very significant accomplishment.

Now I also think—and I believe Holbrooke would agree with this—that Milosevic did a lot to make Dayton possible. This does not absolve him of his complicity in starting the whole conflict, but it is a reality that should be understood. Milosevic operated much like Holbrooke in keeping a lot of information to himself and not sharing it. He cut the final deal in Dayton with Holbrooke, making an agreement possible. ...

[The Dayton Peace Accords] were actually signed twice. There

was a signing ceremony at the end of the Dayton Conference in November, and then there was a formal signing ceremony in Paris in December, which the French very much wanted. Holbrooke agreed to this because we needed the Europeans to help implement the agreement, and also because the Paris ceremony was pretty much *déjà vu*. The really significant event was when the three presidents signed the agreement in Dayton.

Many Serbs in the delegation, as I mentioned, were devastated. They saw the agreement as a total sellout. But for Milosevic, it was a real moment of triumph. Here he had moved from being a sanctioned pariah to being a peacemaker on television screens around the world. Congratulations to the three presidents came from everywhere, including from President Clinton at the White House.

I really think Milosevic believed at that moment that he had managed to change his image and shed his pariah status. But we had not forgotten about Kosovo, and Kosovo was yet to be his undoing.

Rudolph V. Perina, a former ambassador and career member of the U.S. Foreign Service for more than three decades, served as a chargé d'affaires at U.S. Embassy Belgrade between 1993 and 1996.

Compromise and Creative Diplomacy at Dayton

By Robert William "Bill" Farrand

The whole peace agreement that was hammered out in Dayton in three weeks almost fell apart because of Brcko. It almost fell apart. Neither side would budge at all. It was going to become, people were concerned, it would become a *casus belli* again, a trigger for more fighting from the partisan groups, things of this nature.

So, they agreed at Dayton ... I think it was [Secretary of State Warren] Christopher who came forward and said, "Look, we can't resolve this issue. We're going to have to figure out what

to do. ... What if we put this under arbitration, binding arbitration for one year? What about that?" In other words, we close this discussion down, this three-week discussion, and we leave this one issue out here hanging, breathing, but we put it under binding arbitration.

Robert William "Bill" Farrand, a former ambassador and career member of the U.S. Foreign Service, served as deputy high representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1997 to 2000 and the first supervisor of the Brcko district.

Dayton's Unintended Consequences

By Allan Reed

The Dayton Peace Accords ended a horrible conflict, but it set in place a system that is so unwieldy. There are 14 levels of government. At each level, you have a tripartite system, where you have a Bosnian Serb, a Bosnian Muslim, and Bosnian Croat, and they all have equal veto power. Nothing ever gets done, except at the municipal level where there is direct election of mayors.

There are still problems to this day. The country is divided into two. There's the Republika Srpska, which is where the Bosnian Serbs are under Milorad Dodik. There's the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a federation of Croats and Bosniaks (who are Muslims). There is an enclave up toward the Serbian border, and there are cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and each canton has a parliament. It's just totally unwieldy.

Allan Reed, a career USAID FSO, served as a mission director in Bosnia between 2009 and 2012.

The Dayton Accords: Their Meaning Today

By Larry C. Napper

Dayton is one of the crowning achievements of American diplomacy in the 20th century, not because it solved all the problems of the Balkans, but because it halted a war in the heart of Europe that had devastated the region and caused many thousands of innocent deaths.

The Dayton Agreement reminds us that diplomacy is not without risks and costs, including the lives of three close associates of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke: Robert Frasure, Joseph Kruzel, and Sam Nelson Drew, whose sacrifice helped lead directly to the accords.

With Putin on the march in Ukraine, China rising in East Asia, and full-scale war threatening in the Middle East, creative, persistent, and imaginative American diplomacy has never been more important.

Larry C. Napper, a former ambassador and career member of the U.S. Foreign Service, served as director of the Office of Soviet Union Affairs (1991-1994), U.S. ambassador to Latvia (1995-1998) and Kazakhstan (2001-2004), and coordinator for U.S. assistance in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans (1998-2001). ■



The historic town of Mostar—with its Old Bridge, the “Stari Most,” across the Neretva River—is a symbol of reconciliation. Built in the 15th and 16th centuries as an Ottoman outpost, the town was largely destroyed during the 1990s conflict. The bridge was rebuilt and many edifices restored or reconstructed with the support of UNESCO, a project completed in 2004. This photo was taken in 2012.

FOCUS ON FOREIGN SERVICE AUTHORS

In Their Own **WRITE**



The *Foreign Service Journal* is pleased to present our 24th annual Foreign Service authors roundup. With “In Their Own Write,” we celebrate the wealth of literary talent within the Foreign Service community and give our readers the opportunity to support their storytelling colleagues.

Many of these titles, in particular the memoirs, are excellent resources for anyone contemplating a career in international affairs. And the list comes to you in time for your holiday shopping.

Each entry contains full publication details along with a brief commentary sent to us by the author. All listed prices are for the paperback edition unless there is only a hardcover edition; where an e-book is available that is noted.

This year our list of books written, edited, or translated by Foreign Service personnel and their family members stands at 52. The list is not a definitive record of works by FS authors. As always, we rely on the authors themselves to bring their books to our attention. If your recent book is not listed here, please let us know, and we can add it to next year’s collection. We accept submissions for the November–December *FSJ* all year—for more information, email InTheirOwnWrite@afsa.org. We also welcome advertise-

ments for books all year. Contact Ad Manager Molly Long at long@afsa.org.

We can feature only one book by each author. For inclusion, books must be available for purchase, and we use publisher list prices as of press time in late October. Also note: Inclusion of a book in this collection does not imply endorsement by AFSA or the *FSJ*. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to share the news of books published by members of the FS community but does not vouch for the contents of the books.

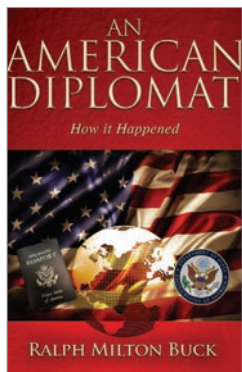
This year, in addition to five works of history or biography and two books on policy and issues, we have 13 memoirs, 26 works of fiction, one volume of poetry, and five self-help books and guidebooks.

As always, we also offer a selection of recent books “of related interest” to diplomats and their families that were not written by FS authors (for that section, see page 40).

It takes a village to put this collection together. This year, it was assembled by Publications Coordinator Hannah Harari. ITOW and ORI blurbs were written by Deputy Editor Donna Gorman and Senior Editor Susan Maitra.

—Shawn Dorman, Editor in Chief

MEMOIRS



An American Diplomat: How It Happened

Ralph Milton Buck, SB Publications, 2025, \$14.95/paperback, e-book available, 326 pages.

This memoir revisits the author’s experiences abroad starting with the war in Vietnam through Afghanistan in 2005. It covers the 1979 attack on the U.S. embassy in Iran, murders of U.S. ambassadors, the Panama Canal treat-

ties and rise of Noriega, economic crises in South America in the 1980s and 1990s, and anti-narcotics work overseas. Each chapter includes an analysis of lessons learned and offers some surprising conclusions.

Ralph Milton Buck was a Foreign Service officer for 33 years. He worked in nine different bureaus in the State Department and served in eight countries (Vietnam, Canada, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Panama, Bolivia, Brazil, and Afghanistan). He served in two wars, survived at least one revolution, and was evacuated out of Iran in 1979. Buck graduated from the University of Florida, did graduate work at the University of North Carolina, and has a master’s degree in economics from Georgetown University.



Dark Agent: Global Service & Sacrifice, the Memoirs of L.W. Kwakou Casselle

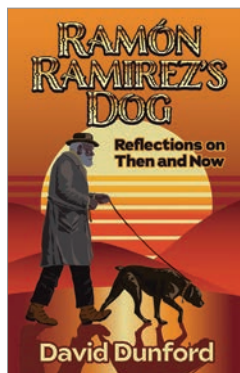
L.W. Kwakou Casselle, independently published, 2025, \$25.99/hardcover, e-book available, 234 pages.

This is the story of a Black kid from Las Vegas who was destined to become a high school dropout—until he was sent 1,500 miles from home to learn service and discipline at a military school in

Missouri. He would go on to launch a new life, earning an ROTC scholarship to attend Hampton University before getting his commission as an Army officer and leading infantry soldiers in the 1st Cavalry Division.

This nonstop adventure takes you across some of the world’s most dangerous cities, where the “Dark Agent” rescues Americans, provides aid to the wounded, and captures fugitives, all while raising a young family. His journey takes him from the inner city to the White House and beyond as he follows a family tradition of service and sacrifice.

L.W. Kwakou Casselle is a retired Senior Foreign Service specialist with 22 years of service as a Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) special agent. Casselle served as director of counterterrorism at the White House and chief of staff for DSS. Overseas he served in Abu Dhabi, Iraq, Belize, and Afghanistan.



Ramón Ramirez's Dog: Reflections on Then and Now
David Dunford, independently published, 2024, \$8.95/paperback, e-book available, 277 pages.

Ramón Ramirez's Dog is a collection of essays written over the years about the adventures and misadventures that happen mostly outside but occasionally inside the diplomatic career of a U.S. ambassador. Common threads

weaving the stories together are desiring a life well lived, balancing career with family and friends, keeping physically fit, and appreciating the natural world around us.

David Dunford is a retired FSO who served in Quito, Helsinki, Cairo, Riyadh, and as ambassador in Muscat. He has written about policy issues, including as an essayist for one of last year's featured books, *American Global Leadership: Ailing US Diplomacy and Solutions for the Twenty-First Century*.

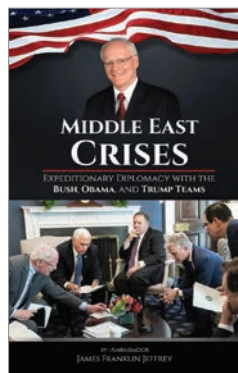


PCMO: Memoir of a Peace Corps Medical Officer
Ty W.K. Flewelling, independently published, 2025, \$24.00/paperback, e-book available, 203 pages.

This book details the life of a Peace Corps medical officer, Dr. Ty Flewelling, who served in Turkmenistan from 1995 to 1998. The memoir covers Flewelling's experiences beginning with the orientation process and

continuing through three years of service with the Peace Corps, where he worked with the State Department to create a joint medical unit. He also describes his work at the International Medical Clinic in Ashgabat caring for people from other diplomatic missions.

Ty W.K. Flewelling, DMSc, PA-C, is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service class of Minister Counselor and a retired senior medical attaché at the State Department. He is a physician associate, board-certified in primary care and surgery, and holds a doctorate in medical science–global health. He was last posted in Bangui. He retired on June 30, 2025, after a 30-year Foreign Service career.

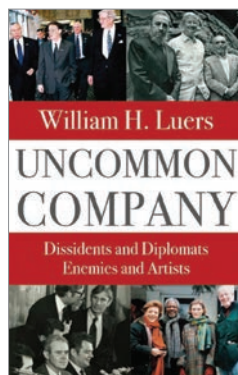


Middle East Crises: Expeditionary Diplomacy with the Bush, Obama, and Trump Teams
James Franklin Jeffrey, The Book Publishing Pros, 2025, \$16.99/paperback, e-book available, 285 pages.

Part memoir and part analysis, *Middle East Crises* reveals the realities of diplomacy, war, and American power in one of the world's most complex regions.

Ambassador James Jeffrey offers a firsthand account of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East from 2004 to 2020. He describes the behind-the-scenes action in critical hot spots including Iraq, Türkiye, and Syria. He examines the early challenges of the Iraq War, the emergence of ISIS, and the complexities of dealing with leaders like Turkish President Erdogan and Russia's Putin while reflecting on the broader principles guiding U.S. foreign policy, the challenges of maintaining alliances, and the personal sacrifices of those on the ground.

James Franklin Jeffrey spent 35 years in the Foreign Service, retiring in 2012 with the rank of Career Ambassador. He served as ambassador to Iraq, Albania, and Türkiye; deputy national security adviser; and deputy chief of mission in Baghdad, Ankara, and Kuwait City. In 2018 Jeffrey was recalled from retirement to serve as chief of mission in Syria and special envoy to the Defeat ISIS Coalition.



Uncommon Company: Dissidents and Diplomats, Enemies and Artists
William H. Luers, Rodin Books, 2024, \$35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 472 pages.

In *Uncommon Company*, William "Bill" Luers shares stories of his career as a U.S. diplomat in Europe and Latin America, where he introduced art and culture to forge common ground and

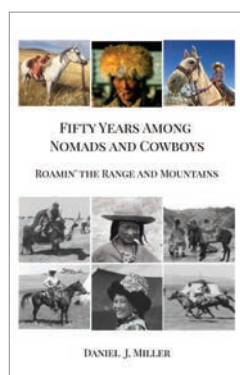
community, improving the lives of citizens in many countries closed to Western ideas.

From touring the Soviet Union with playwright Edward Albee in the 1960s to bringing such famous writers and artists as John Updike, Arthur Miller, Francine du Plessix Gray, and Frank Stella to Caracas and Prague during his ambassadorships in Venezuela and Czechoslovakia, Bill Luers practiced cultural

diplomacy. His unique ability to wield “soft power” strengthened relationships wherever he served.

After more than 30 years with the State Department, Luers brought his art expertise to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Serving as its president, he secured the Met’s Annenberg Collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works by such masters as Van Gogh, Picasso, and Cézanne.

Bill Luers died in 2025. For more on his career, see the September-October *FSJ*.



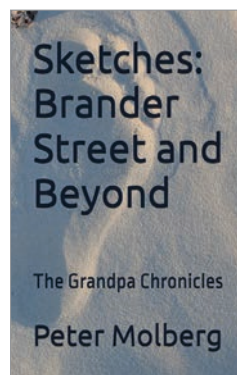
Fifty Years Among Nomads and Cowboys: Roamin’ the Range and Mountains
Daniel Miller, Blurb, 2025, \$15.99/
paperback, digital available,
184 pages.

In *Fifty Years Among Nomads and Cowboys*, Daniel Miller offers 50 extraordinary images from his work and journeys in Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, India, Southeast Asia, Mongolia, and

the American West.

Spanning from 1974 to 2024, the principal images are complemented by 91 other photographs and text describing the lives of nomads and cowboys, the livestock they care for, the festivals they participate in, and the rangelands and mountains they call home. Part memoir and part ethnographic portrait, the book is a unique record of little-known landscapes and cultures by a former cowboy, rangeland ecologist, and international development specialist.

Daniel Miller was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal in the mid-1970s. As a USAID agriculture officer from 2003 to 2017, he served in Washington, D.C., Afghanistan, India, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Mongolia, and Pakistan. After retiring, he worked on livestock development projects in Mongolia. He currently resides in Buffalo, Wyoming.

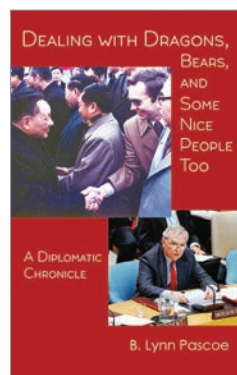


Sketches: Brander Street and Beyond: The Grandpa Chronicles
Peter Molberg, independently
published, 2025, \$12.00/paperback,
print only, 214 pages.

The author, a doctor who spent a decade in the Foreign Service, calls these vignettes of his life “word sketches” that are “open to anyone but especially intended for [his] grandchildren.”

Beginning in his North Dakota birthplace, they include bits about his family and childhood, his educational path from the North Dakota School of Forestry through Harvard and Stanford, his time in the Peace Corps, his experiences practicing medicine and learning to fish in small-town Oregon, teaching in two residencies, and, finally, his years overseas in the Foreign Service. He describes pain, pathos, and pleasure encountered along the way in this book designed to record but also to entertain.

Peter Molberg was a regional medical officer in the Foreign Service from 2001 to 2012. His posts included Mali, India, Bangladesh, Türkiye, and Washington, D.C.



Dealing with Dragons, Bears, and Some Nice People Too: A Diplomatic Chronicle
B. Lynn Pascoe, New Academia
Publishing, 2024, \$35.00/paperback,
print only, 542 pages.

This volume in the ADST-DACOR Diplomats and Diplomacy series offers a candid insider’s take on 45 years of change in China, the Soviet Union/Russia, and Southeast Asia, along

with an inside look at the work of the United Nations to manage conflicts around the world.

B. Lynn Pascoe covers Kissinger’s China diplomacy, the later establishment of formal diplomatic ties, and the fallout from the brutal 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. He analyzes U.S.-Soviet conflicts in the 1980s and the transformation of the relationship after Gorbachev’s rise to power. He writes of his role in U.S. civilian and military work after a monstrous tsunami killed more than 170,000 people in Indonesia’s Aceh province. And he outlines his successes and failures during five years as under-secretary-general for political affairs at the United Nations.

During almost four decades in the Foreign Service, B. Lynn Pascoe served as ambassador to both Indonesia and Malaysia and worked in various positions dealing with China and the former Soviet Union.



Attaché Case: Backstage at the Embassy

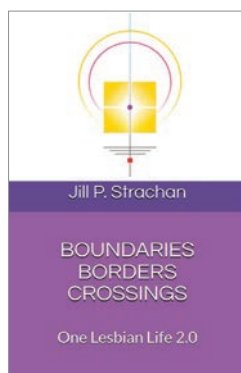
Todd Pierce, New Texture, 2024, \$14.95/paperback, e-book available, 268 pages.

Every diplomat knows that the gap between the realities of diplomatic life and the way it is portrayed in the media is wide. But, at least according to Todd Pierce, the reality is often more interesting, and stranger than the fan-

tasy. He wrote *Attaché Case* to demystify the inner workings of an embassy the way Anthony Bourdain demystified the restaurant kitchen. And, he explains: “I wanted the humor in there, along with my personality—specifically my ADHD, gaffe-prone, very gay personality.”

This comic memoir is about American power and what it felt like to represent the U.S. as a working-level diplomat from the end of the Cold War through the first Trump administration.

Todd Pierce joined the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in 1992 and later transitioned to State. He served in Athens, Ankara, Tirana, Rangoon, Geneva, Accra, and Washington, D.C. After retiring in 2018, he now works as a college counselor based in Florida and Greece.



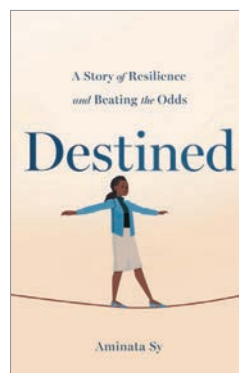
Boundaries Borders Crossings: One Lesbian Life 2.0

Jill P. Strachan, Combray House, 2025, \$20.00/paperback, e-book available, 227 pages.

In *Boundaries Borders Crossings*, the author writes of her experiences as a lesbian, the shared realities of Third Culture Kids, and the enduring impact of a world perspective. She tackles themes of universal social concern

and social change with passion and wit. Using archival letters and journals, she chronicles her early years as a Foreign Service child, coming out as lesbian in the 1970s, and coping with the AIDS crisis in the United States.

Jill P. Strachan grew up overseas as the daughter of Foreign Service Officer D. Alan Strachan and Evelyn B. Strachan. The Strachans were posted to Athens (1947-1952), Lahore (1959-1962), and Cairo (1962-1965). She also visited her parents in Sri Lanka for extended periods from 1966 to 1968.



Destined: A Story of Resilience and Beating the Odds

Aminata Sy, Aminata Sy Enterprises, 2025, \$21.99/paperback, e-book available, 216 pages.

Could you create opportunity from adversity and transform your life?

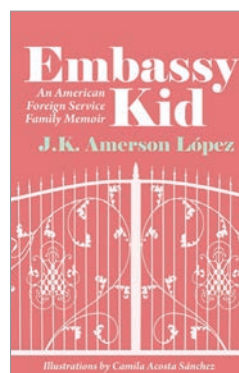
Perseverance, patience, generosity, resilience: Aminata Sy learned these values from her aunt while growing up in Dakar. Her childhood

was riddled with broken bonds and poverty that threatened to derail her life.

In *Destined*, Sy shares her journey, offering an intimate look at her life as a mother juggling school and work in pursuit of a rewarding career and a better life for her family. An immigrant with little education, Sy earned multiple degrees and became one of the few Senegalese Americans to serve as a U.S. diplomat.

Narrated with humility and candor, *Destined* is intended as an inspirational memoir, reminding us that each challenge makes us stronger, each goal makes us wiser, and no dream is too far out of reach.

Aminata Sy joined the Foreign Service in 2021 and has served in Brazil and Kenya.



Embassy Kid: An American Foreign Service Family Memoir

J.K. Amerson López, Westphalia Press, 2025, \$18.22/paperback, e-book available, 324 pages.

Embassy Kid offers a poignant, intimate look at what it means to grow up in the shadows of diplomacy. As the child of a U.S. Foreign Service officer, J.K. Amerson López navigated a world of cultural shifts, political upheavals,

and personal identity struggles—all set against the backdrop of American embassies and international communities in Europe and Latin America during the Cold War.

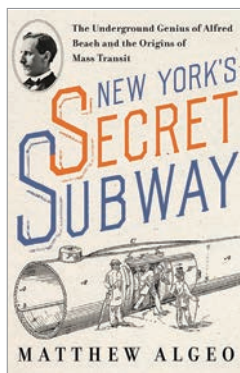
Through vivid storytelling and candid reflections, the book

transports readers to the front lines of a global upbringing, from navigating life in foreign capitals to the complex emotions of belonging everywhere and nowhere at once. With humor, honesty, and keen insight, the author presents a unique perspective on history, home, and the human connections that shape us.

Embassy Kid is a volume in the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training's Memoirs and Occasional Papers series.

J.K. Amerson López, a writer and motivational speaker, is the eldest daughter of Foreign Service Officer Robert C. Amerson, who served with the U.S. Information Agency from 1955 to 1979, in Caracas, Milan, Bologna (SAIS), Rome, Bogotá, Washington, D.C., and Madrid, and as the Murrow Fellow at the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY



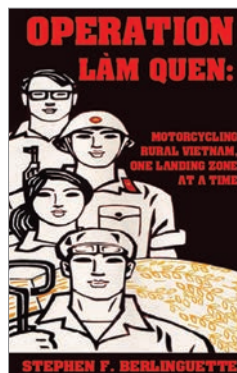
New York's Secret Subway: The Underground Genius of Alfred Beach and the Origins of Mass Transit

Matthew Algeo, Island Press, 2025, \$35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 288 pages.

In the nineteenth century, Manhattan's streets were so choked with pedestrians, horses, vehicles, and vendors that a trip from City Hall to Central Park could take hours. Alfred Beach had the perfect solution: build a giant pneumatic tube underneath Broadway from the Battery to Harlem. Air pressure would shoot passengers up and down the island in clean, quiet carriages. But Beach was up against the operators of the horse-drawn streetcars and the politicians in their pay, including William M. Tweed, the notorious "Boss" of Tammany Hall.

In *New York's Secret Subway*, Matthew Algeo tells a classic story of good versus evil, pitting the mild-mannered Beach against the oafish tyrant Tweed, the exemplar of corruption in the Gilded Age. It also tells the story of one of the most astonishing feats of engineering in American history.

Matthew Algeo is the spouse of Allyson Algeo, who recently retired after a 20-year Foreign Service career that took the couple to Bamako, Rome, Ulaanbaatar, Maputo, Sarajevo, and Gaborone. They now live in Lawrence, Kansas, where Algeo hosts NPR's Morning Edition on Kansas Public Radio.



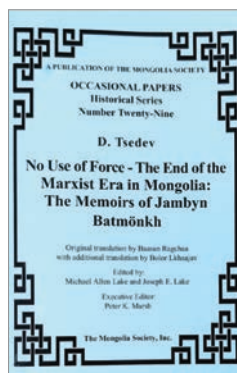
Operation Lam Quen: Motorcycling Rural Vietnam, One Landing Zone at a Time

Stephen F. Berlinguette, Royal King Dynasty Press, 2025, \$14.99/paperback, e-book available, 340 pages.

On a solo motorbike journey through Vietnam, Stephen Berlinguette seeks out the forgotten front lines of the Vietnam War—crumbling firebases, overgrown airstrips, and jungle-claimed bunkers—tracing what remains of America and Vietnam's shared past. Along the way, he trades stories with local veterans, drinks roadside beer, and navigates the quiet hum of rural life.

Both travelogue and historical investigation, *Operation Lam Quen* explores a Vietnam where memory clings to the soil and silence says more than monuments. With dry wit and clear-eyed reflection, the author confronts his own uneasy fascination with war ruins, the allure of dark tourism, and the distance between then and now. This story of rust, ghosts, and the road is a must-read for war history buffs, veterans, off-map travelers, and lovers of the long ride.

Stephen Berlinguette was a USAID Foreign Service officer for 15 years, managing teams and economic growth programs in Rwanda, Liberia, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Morocco until the agency's dismantling in 2025. He also served with the Department of Commerce for more than three years.



No Use of Force—The End of the Marxist Era in Mongolia: The Memoirs of Jambyn Batmönkh

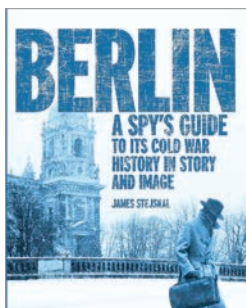
D. Tsedev, translator, Michael Allen Lake and Joseph E. Lake, editors, Mongolia Society, 2024, \$50.00/paperback, print only, 277 pages.

In 1984, at the urging of members of the Soviet Politburo led by Mikhail Gorbachev, Jambyn

Batmönkh replaced Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal as leader of the Mongolian People's Republic, the world's second-oldest Marxist country. Over the next six years, Mongolia attempted to maintain its socialist identity as Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms and the unraveling of the Soviet Union were taking place next door.

Edited and translated for the first time, *No Use of Force* is Batmönkh's own account of his attempt to balance what was best for his country against the pressures generated by Gorbachev's reforms in Moscow and the collapse of the Soviet empire. It offers a rare glimpse into the perspective of the leadership of a Soviet satellite state in the closing days of the Cold War.

Michael Allen Lake is the son of retired Foreign Service Officer Joseph E. Lake. He was born in Taiwan and raised in Nigeria, Bulgaria, and Northern Virginia. He worked for one year at U.S. Embassy Ulaanbaatar when his father was the first resident ambassador to Mongolia.



Berlin: A Spy's Guide to Its Cold War History in Story and Image

James Stejskal, Double Dagger Books, 2025, \$29.99/paperback, e-book available, 172 pages.

Divided, occupied, and deeply contested, post-WWII Berlin became home to the world's most elite intelligence operatives. American, Soviet,

British, French, and East and West German services turned the city into a vast chessboard of espionage, deception, and covert operations.

In *Berlin*, former Green Beret and intelligence officer James Stejskal delivers a gripping, photo-rich guide to the key players, locations, missions, and betrayals that defined Cold War Berlin. Part travelogue, part historical dossier, this book is your gateway to understanding how the Cold War was fought—and why Berlin remains the most spy-saturated city on earth.

James Stejskal is a military historian and author of 13 books. He served in the U.S. Army and in the CIA. He has been married to Ambassador (ret.) Wanda Nesbitt since 1997; the couple lived and served in Zaire, Rwanda, Tanzania, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire, and Namibia.



Son Tay 1970: The Operation Ivory Coast POW Rescue Mission

Justin W. Williamson, Osprey Publishing, 2024, \$23.00/paperback, e-book available, 80 pages.

Son Tay 1970 details the planning, preparation, execution, and aftermath of the heroic attempt by U.S. Special Forces to rescue 61 American POWs held in Son Tay, Vietnam, just 23 miles from Hanoi,

in November 1970. The raid involved dozens of U.S. Army and Air Force aircraft and helicopters. To draw North Vietnamese attention away from the mission, the U.S. Navy conducted the largest air operation of the war. In the ensuing battle, U.S. raiders engaged in close combat with North Vietnamese and Chinese forces, while aircraft provided close air support, bridge demolition, air defenses, and enemy ground forces.

The mission was widely hailed as an overwhelming success except for one problem: The POWs were not there.

Justin Williamson has been in the Foreign Service for 18 years and has served in Mexico, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Spain, and Fiji.

POLICY & ISSUES



Ukraine: Putin's War for Russia's "Near Abroad"

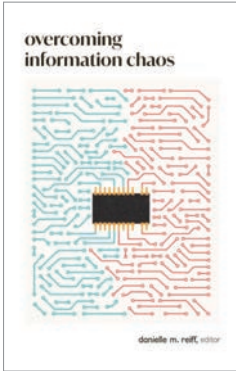
John J. Maresca with Ida Manton, ibidem Press, 2024, \$23.00/paperback, e-book available, 210 pages.

During a 28-year Foreign Service career, John Maresca served in numerous high-level positions across Europe and played a pivotal role in ending the Cold War following the collapse of the

USSR. In *Ukraine*, he and Ida Manton offer a firsthand account of the long set of negotiations that culminated in Paris in 1990. They recount the past situation in the region, explaining how it led to today's war in Ukraine.

John Maresca joined the Foreign Service in 1966. He served as chief of staff for two secretaries general of NATO and began negotiating with the USSR in Helsinki in 1972. He served as U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) from 1989 to 1992. After serving as U.S. special envoy to the newly independent states, he became a roving American conflict mediator, seeking to resolve local conflicts in Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh, and regions of former Yugoslavia before retiring in 1994.

Ida Manton is a scholar and lecturer in international relations and diplomacy, with a focus on negotiations and conflict resolution. She has coordinated OSCE's oral history project, through which negotiators share their recollections of how milestone agreements were created.



Overcoming Information Chaos: A Guide to Cultivating Peaceful Communities in the Digital Age
Danielle M. Reiff, editor, Upriver Press, 2025, \$29.95/paperback (presale), e-book available, 450 pages.

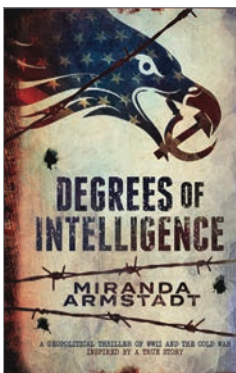
Written by 14 media scholars and practitioners, legal experts, democracy specialists, and peacebuilders, *Overcoming Information Chaos*

provides expert guidance about how to defend against false information, mitigate the spread of information disorder, and cultivate community and constructive civic engagement across our traditional divides.

Media literacy is a new and essential element of peacebuilding in the digital age. This book helps us to understand how the media ecosystem has changed since the digital transition. In the digital age, peacebuilding starts with learning to use the media responsibly. Ultimately, it's up to each of us to slow down and be savvy in our interactions with information and each other.

Danielle Reiff is a peacebuilder, writer, and editor. As a USAID Foreign Service officer for 20 years, Reiff specialized in supporting democratic transitions and peacebuilding processes in Kampala, Juba, Bogotá, Tbilisi, and Colombo. Retiring in 2024, she founded the nonpartisan Peacebuilders Initiative.

FICTION



Degrees of Intelligence
Miranda Armstadt, independently published, 2025, \$18.95/paperback, e-book available, 350 pages.

This geopolitical thriller—inspired by Miranda Armstadt's own father's experience with the State Department in 1950s Cold War Europe—takes readers behind the scenes in the early years of the CIA, as America fought communism after World War II. Characters

include the beautiful daughter of a TV news pioneer, a dashing British viscount, and a teenage Holocaust survivor who lost his entire family to the Nazis.

Armstadt uses family letters as well as CIA, State Department, and military memos and documents to weave a vivid tableau of U.S. and British intelligence operations from World War II through the Kennedy administration of the 1960s, along the way showing how a life of secrecy affects everyone it touches.

Miranda Armstadt's father, an FSO from 1952 to 1958, was posted to Belgrade; Salzburg; and Bad Godesberg, Germany. *Degrees of Intelligence* won a gold medal in the 2025 Historical Fiction category from the Military Writers Society of America.



Run
Matthew Becker, Aethon Books, 2024, \$12.99/paperback, e-book available, 342 pages.

When congressional staffer Ben Walsh receives a cryptic text from his wife, Veronica, he doesn't think much of it. But while waiting to hear from her again, Ben discovers that the text came an hour before a shooting that occurred along her daily running route.

She isn't picking up her phone, and when she doesn't return home, he knows she is somehow involved. But if she isn't one of the victims, then what could have happened?

When the police name Veronica as their main suspect, Ben questions what he really knows about her. His best chance at saving Veronica is to find her and the truth before the police—or the real killer—do. But what if the truth is more deadly than he could imagine?

Run is the first in a three-book series by Matthew Becker, whose wife, Sarah, is a political officer. The Beckers have been posted in Tashkent and Managua. The other two books in the series are *Don't Look Down* and *Face the Storm*.



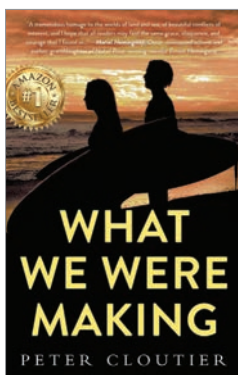
October Surprise
Gary Clements, independently published, 2025, \$16.95/paperback, e-book available, 220 pages.

Rex Avalon, second in charge at the U.S. embassy in the tiny (fictional) European kingdom of Morovia, is invited by its foreign minister to lead the nation's transition from dictatorship to democracy. But Rex's efforts are complicated by the competing plans

of an expatriate leader, the machinations of the U.S. president, and Morovia's history of intertribal conflict.

Rex also must decide whether the beautiful young Moravian queen is friend, foe, or something altogether different. Like Clements' first novel, *Darwin Speaks!* (2024), *October Surprise* uses satire to explore some of our weightiest contemporary challenges.

Gary Clements is a retired economic officer who served tours in London, Quito, Santo Domingo, Rennes, and Managua. He currently lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he writes novels in between rounds of golf.



What We Were Making

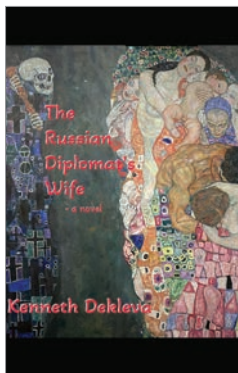
Peter Cloutier, Mindstir Media, 2023, \$15.95/paperback, e-book available, 334 pages.

What We Were Making follows Jane, a British diplomat assigned to Jakarta to work on an intertwined computing and conservation endeavor in the region's outer islands. She meets Bill, an American expat teacher on one of the grant-recipient islands, and the two

bond over the course of her visits as she is exposed to the island life he has come to understand.

But when a natural disaster exposes a plot to undermine the foreign aid provided, each protagonist faces the prospect that their values, duties, and ethics may have compromised the community they were supposed to support. Every assignment ends. Every visa expires. The show must go on.

Peter Cloutier is a retired USAID FSO who spent 21 years in Kabul, Maputo, Luanda, Dili, and Bangkok.



The Russian Diplomat's Wife

Kenneth Dekleva, independently published, 2025, \$11.99/paperback, e-book available, 290 pages.

Vienna, Austria—the city of spies. A deep-cover U.S. intelligence officer code-named Copernicus has a chance encounter with a Russian woman while viewing a Klimt painting in a museum. The encounter—a perfect spy recruitment—leads to mystery, romance, and

tragedy. But when Copernicus' agents begin dying in Western Europe, Russia, and North Korea, his meetings with the Russian

woman draw the attention of the CIA and Russia's GRU. A deep-cover Mossad officer offers enticements of his own, leading to a deeply moving denouement.

Kenneth Dekleva, a member of the Senior Foreign Service, was a regional medical officer/psychiatrist from 2002 to 2016. He served in Moscow, New Delhi, Mexico City, Vienna, London, and Washington, D.C. He is the founder and CEO of Blackwood Advisory Solutions LLC, a boutique global telepsychiatry and business intelligence consulting firm.



closer to home

Robert Richard Downes, Longhornbar Books, 2025, \$14.95/paperback, e-book available, 220 pages.

The sequel to 2024's *and far away* of the Man series, *closer to home* follows a retired intelligence officer who is frequently asked to undertake special projects even though he really just wants to relax at home in New England with his books and his

cats. After completing a dangerous assignment in Europe, the Man is recuperating from an injury when he begins to suspect an international crime syndicate is abducting and trafficking young people in Boston. He feels compelled to hunt down that group and end its operations.

Robert Richard Downes is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer with 37 years of federal service, the majority with the State Department. He joined the department in 1981 and served in Australia, Germany, Mexico, Nicaragua, Thailand, and Venezuela. He now lives in his native Texas, where he kayaks, writes, and volunteers for local charities and international organizations. He is the author of five books including *Hello to a River*, a 2024 book on kayaking in Texas.



Counter Narrative

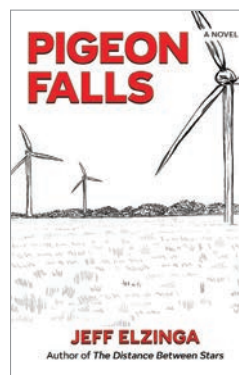
Gordon K. Duguid, DS Productions, 2025, \$17.99/paperback, e-book available, 346 pages.

The African island nation of Kitega is descending into chaos, torn apart by ethnic rivalries and escalating violence. Armed militias assassinate high-ranking government officials while insurgents clash with the military in a blood-soaked power struggle.

Desperate to avert disaster, the United States dispatches H. McFadden Hightower as its special envoy. His mission: prevent mass atrocities at all costs. But Hightower's intervention sparks tension with Phil Bardo, a seasoned diplomat stationed in Kitega, who believes Hightower's heavy-handed tactics risk worsening the conflict.

Their ideological clash opens the door for manipulative Kitegan factions to exploit the chaos for their own ends. As violence spirals out of control, the question becomes not just who will prevail but at what cost—and whether doing the right thing will save lives or destroy them.

Gordon Duguid is a retired FSO who served with USIA and the State Department from 1990 to 2020 in Washington, D.C., the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Burundi, NATO, India, the Organization of American States, Serbia, and the National Intelligence University. *Counter Narrative* is his first novel.



Pigeon Falls

Jeff Elzinga, Water's Edge Press, 2025, \$24.00/paperback, e-book available, 278 pages.

Pigeon Falls follows surveyor Tom Bishop and his small band of co-workers, a traveling crew of wind turbine builders, to an out-of-the-way corner of Wisconsin's Driftless Area for one final project of the season before winter arrives. Soon, however,

unforeseen challenges test the crew's character and threaten to pry the team apart.

Caught up in the ordeals are a pig farmer hell-bent on reversing generations of family failure and a young newlywed with an abusive husband. Tom Bishop must also face his own health issues as he considers what legacy a childless, divorced man can hope to leave behind.

(Continued on page 42)

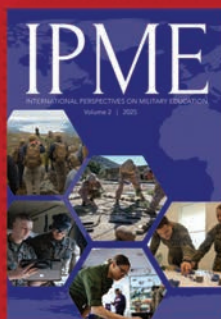
www.usmcu.edu/mcupress

MCUP



MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY PRESS

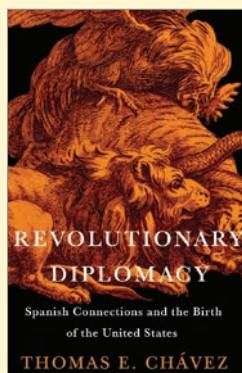
MCUP publishes open access, scholarly books and journals on military history/heritage and national security topics in order to support excellence in Marine Corps University's professional military education, to inspire debate, and to advance knowledge for a diverse community of scholars, U.S. and allied military leaders, and policy makers. MCUP accepts book and journal submissions throughout the year.



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OF RELATED INTEREST



Revolutionary Diplomacy: Spanish Connections and the Birth of the United States

Thomas E. Chávez, University of Virginia Press, 2025, \$29.50/paperback, e-book available, 186 pages.

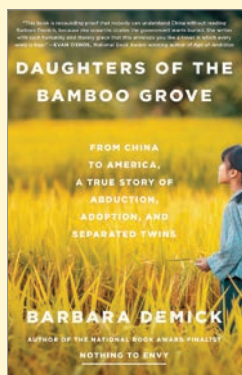
Historian Thomas Chávez spent nine years overseeing the collection, transcription, translation, and publication of all documents pertinent to Benjamin Franklin in Spain's archives. From these

he's written four books; *Revolutionary Diplomacy* is his latest.

Chavez told the University of Virginia's Author's Corner that while many Americans know about France's contributions to our fight for independence, fewer are aware that Spanish men, matériel, and "diplomatic muscle" also played a critical role.

Chávez outlines the successes and failures of the American partnership with Spain during the Revolutionary War. He also introduces readers to Franklin's fellow envoys Silas Deane, Arthur Lee, John Jay, and Robert Morris, recounting their negotiations with Spain, which helped to expand a mere colonial rebellion into a full-fledged war.

Thomas Chávez has a PhD in history from the University of New Mexico.



Daughters of the Bamboo Grove: From China to America, a True Story of Abduction, Adoption, and Separated Twins

Barbara Demick, Random House, 2025, \$32.00/hardcover, e-book available, 352 pages.

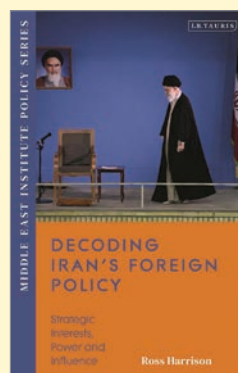
Already a mother of two, Yuan Zanhua knew her pregnancy was forbidden by China's one-child policy. So when her twins, Fangfang and Shuangjie, were

born in 2000, she and her husband left baby Fangfang in the care of relatives, hoping to evade punishment. But when Fangfang was nearly 2, she was violently taken from the family, who had no idea how or where to search for her.

Barbara Demick was the Beijing bureau chief for *The Los Angeles Times* when she began exploring the origins, cruelty, and

long-term effects of China's one-child policy, and the religious movement behind many international adoptions. Demick tracked down Fangfang—now living in the United States and renamed Esther by an adoptive family that had no idea of her traumatic past. The well-researched story hinges on whether the twins will meet again and what might happen if they do. China experts and consular officials focused on adoptions will find the story particularly compelling.

Barbara Demick is a former foreign correspondent for *The Los Angeles Times* who served as bureau chief in Beijing and in Seoul.



Decoding Iran's Foreign Policy: Strategic Interests, Power and Influence

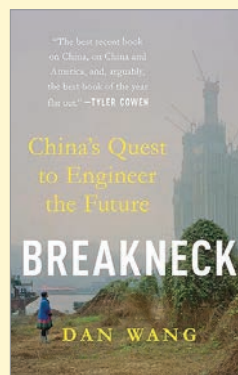
Ross Harrison, I.B. Tauris, 2025, \$26.95/paperback, e-book available, 288 pages.

In *Decoding Iran's Foreign Policy*, author Ross Harrison attempts to bypass the typically polarizing debates about Iran by using a "strategic lens" to offer an objective explanation of Iran's

foreign policy goals.

Harrison explains how the challenges posed by regional and global actors, as well as Iran's own long history, affect Iranian foreign policy today. He argues that it is necessary to understand the different strains in Iran's foreign policy—both ideological and practical—in order to predict its future behavior.

Ross Harrison is a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C., and an adjunct professor at the University of Pittsburgh. For more than 15 years, Harrison taught at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. His work has appeared in publications including *The National Interest*, *Al-Monitor*, *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Parameters* (U.S. Army War College).



Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future

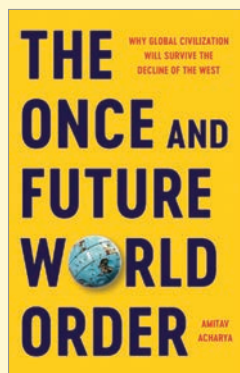
Dan Wang, W. W. Norton, 2025, \$31.99/hardcover, e-book available, 288 pages.

Author Dan Wang spent a decade living in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai, investigating and reporting on China's astonishing technological progress during that period. He watched as bridges, railways, and buildings went

up seemingly overnight, and with them the economic situations of everyday Chinese citizens. But, as he outlines in *Breakneck*, this progress hasn't come without pain: China's rapid advancement, he argues, has been thanks in part to political suppression, government surveillance, and social engineering.

Wang calls China an "engineering state," comparing it to the U.S., where development has stalled because lawyers and others reflexively block even positive changes. Wang points to similarities between the two rival countries and argues that if China and the United States learned to value each other's strengths, both Americans and Chinese would benefit.

Dan Wang is a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover History Lab. His essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The Financial Times*.



The Once and Future World Order: Why Global Civilization Will Survive the Decline of the West
Amitav Acharya, Basic Books, 2025, \$32.50/hardcover, e-book available, 464 pages.

To understand today's economic, political, and cultural collapse, political scientist Amitav Acharya takes readers back thousands of years, looking at examples of cooperation and peace

that long predate the creation of the United States.

Acharya argues that the West does not have a monopoly on the concepts of individual rights, freedom, or democracy, and he cites examples from ancient Egypt, India, and China as he builds his case that today's crisis is not unique in history. In fact, he argues, the end of Western dominance could allow non-Western nations to build a better, more prosperous world, if only we can learn from our joined history.

Amitav Acharya is a distinguished professor of international relations at American University, where he holds the UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance at the School of International Service, and serves as the chair of the ASEAN Studies Initiative.

Other Recent Books of Interest



Tomorrow Is Yesterday: Life, Death, and the Pursuit of Peace in Israel/Palestine
Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, Macmillan, 2025, \$30.00/hardcover, e-book available, 272 pages.



The American Revolution and the Fate of the World
Richard Bell, Riverhead Books, 2025, \$35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 416 pages.



The Good Allies: How Canada and the United States Fought Together to Defeat Fascism During the Second World War
Tim Cook, Penguin Canada, 2025, \$26.00/paperback, e-book available, 576 pages.



Other Rivers: A Chinese Education
Peter Hessler, Penguin Press, 2025, \$32.00/hardcover, e-book available, 464 pages.



Autocrats vs. Democrats: China, Russia, America, and the New Global Disorder
Michael McFaul, Mariner Books, 2025, \$35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 544 pages.



Waste Land: A World in Permanent Crisis
Robert D. Kaplan, Random House, 2025, \$31.00/hardcover, e-book available, 224 pages.



We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution
Jill Lepore, Liveright, 2025, \$39.99/hardcover, e-book available, 720 pages.



Here Comes the Sun: A Last Chance for the Climate and a Fresh Chance for Civilization
Bill McKibben, W. W. Norton, 2025, \$29.99/hardcover, e-book available, 224 pages.



The Collapse of Venezuela: Scorched Earth Politics and Economic Decline, 2012-2020
Francisco Rodríguez, University of Notre Dame Press, 2025, \$75.00/hardcover, e-book available, 538 pages.



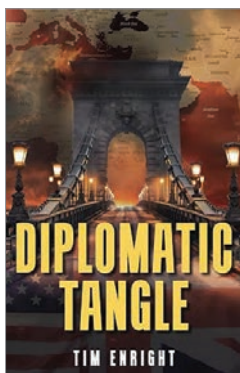
Statecraft 2.0: What America Needs to Lead in a Multipolar World, 2nd ed.
Dennis Ross, Oxford University Press, 2025, \$21.95/paperback, e-book available, 496 pages.



Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West
John J. Sullivan, Little, Brown and Company, 2024, \$32.50/hardcover, e-book available, 416 pages.

(Continued from page 39)

As an FSO with the State Department, Jeff Elzinga served in Tunisia and Malawi. He then spent more than 20 years as a college instructor, retiring in 2018 as emeritus professor of writing at Lakeland University in Wisconsin. His debut novel, *The Distance Between Stars* (2020), was a finalist for the Midwest Book Award.



Diplomatic Tangle

Tim Enright, Birch Forest Publishing, 2024, \$18.95/paperback, e-book available, 398 pages.

As the U.S. prepares for high-stakes nuclear negotiations with Iran, diplomat Ben Brownwell finds himself navigating a labyrinth of political ambition and betrayal. A leak from within his own ranks threatens to undermine the fragile talks. For British intelligence officer Kate Sinclair, the stakes are both personal and professional. Her investigation into Iranian sleeper cells in Europe reveals a chilling connection to a broader plot. Ben and Kate must work together to prevent the negotiations from ending in disaster.

With the clock ticking down, a U.S. senator becomes a target, and the balance of power teeters on the edge. In a world where secrets are weapons and alliances are fragile, Ben and Kate must confront not only their adversaries but the limits of their own principles.

Tim Enright joined the State Department as a Foreign Service officer in 2005 and has served in Iraq, Russia, the UAE, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Albania. He is currently studying Mandarin and preparing to move to Guangzhou in 2026. He is also the author of *Proportional Response* (2021).



Black Sun Rising

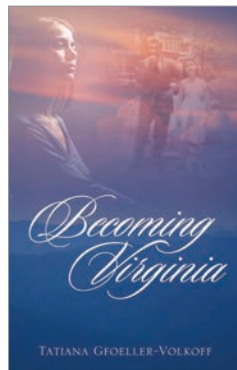
Otho Eskin, Meridian Editions, 2025, \$19.95/paperback, e-book available, 296 pages.

When Washington, D.C., homicide detective Marko Zorn's partner is murdered, his search for justice leads him to Black Sun, a violent neo-Nazi movement built from the ruins of World War II. Their goal: unleash a catastrophic attack that will plunge the nation into chaos.

To stop them, Marko must outwit a woman known as the

Bride of the Apocalypse, navigate the treacherous ambitions of two of the world's richest and most ruthless men, and confront a conspiracy stretching from Washington's corridors of power to the city's shadowy underworld. Can Marko save the country from annihilation?

Otho Eskin joined the Foreign Service in 1961 and retired in 1982. He served in Damascus, Belgrade, Reykjavík, Berlin, and Washington, D.C. This is the fourth book in his well-received Marko Zorn series (though each can also be read alone), including *The Reflecting Pool* (2020), *Head Shot* (2021), and *Firetrap* (2024). Also a playwright, Eskin has had work professionally produced in Washington, New York, and Europe.



Becoming Virginia

Tatiana Gfoeller-Volkoff, Outskirts Press, 2024, \$47.95/hardcover, e-book available, 260 pages.

Brilliant young psychiatrist Jane, traumatized by a sexual assault, is following the trail of a young man, Gerald, who died mysteriously. She crisscrosses the United States looking for his relatives and friends, searching for clues to his personality and the reason for his sudden demise. The aftermath of the Vietnam War, class and race relations in the Deep South, drug addiction, and patriotism all provide useful hints. As Jane searches, she delves into her complicated relationship with her own mother and her anguish over not being able to conceive a child.

Tatiana Gfoeller-Volkoff served for 33 years in the Foreign Service, with assignments in Poland, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Soviet Union, Belgium, Russia, Turkmenistan, and as ambassador to Kyrgyzstan. She has taught at Georgetown University and is the author of another novel, *A Simple Love* (2021).



Only Now We Are: A Novel

Nathan Kato-Wallace, independently published, 2025, \$17.99/paperback, e-book available, 377 pages.

The Omicron is feeling lost, and not even the reverence of his followers distracts him from the sense he's left something behind. His best friend, the Mouth, convinces him to retrace the steps that led to his elevation as the supreme leader of this new society.

He recalls being rejected, squatting in an abandoned factory, and shivering through a winter of privation. He remembers sowing barren ground, watching the community grow, and harvesting seemingly infinite free money. He remembers longing, jealousy, violence, and deceit as their utopia turned profane. Soon he may remember why he chose to forget in the first place.

Only Now We Are is an exploration of memory and loss, idealism and human nature, and the hazards of living your own truth.

Nathan Kato-Wallace has been a Foreign Service officer at the State Department for 13 years. He served in Guangzhou, Praia, Washington, D.C., and Paris. He is currently serving in Dakar, where he is also AFSA's post representative. *Only Now We Are* is his first novel.



Speak the Devil's Name

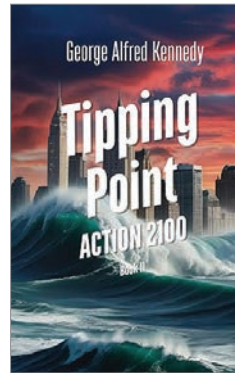
Brandon Kelley, independently published, 2025, \$12.99/paperback, e-book available, 396 pages.

When a top-secret Joint Special Operations Command surveillance and reconnaissance mission goes sideways deep in Afghanistan's unforgiving Hindu Kush Mountains, Nick Mandias is thrust into a deadly game of survival against a formidable

foe he did not expect—a rogue CIA paramilitary officer who has launched an unsanctioned covert operation behind enemy lines.

Half a world away, in the sweltering shadows of Southeast Asia, a young CIA case officer is pulled into the most critical assignment of his career. As he learns about the U.S. government's penetration of the People's Republic of China, he must navigate a dangerous web of loyalty, sacrifice, and high-stakes espionage.

Brandon Kelley joined the State Department after service in the U.S. Army and completion of a master's degree in international studies from the University of Central Florida. A Foreign Service officer since 2014, he has served in Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, and Washington, D.C. His first novel, *Call Me Milt* (2022), was a modern pirate tale set in the Caribbean.



Tipping Point:

Action 2100 (Book II)

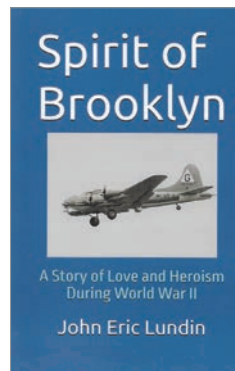
George Alfred Kennedy, SETAF Publishing, 2025, \$20.00/paperback, e-book available, 337 pages.

After successfully establishing her London-based Hinton Foundation, American climatologist Dr. Tracie Hinton launched a campaign for the presidential nomination. Hinton stunned the political establishment

when a wave of discontent over the failure of U.S. leadership to preserve the health of planet Earth swept her and her new political party—ACTION 2100—into the White House in January 2053.

The complete surprise and scope of Hinton's victory stunned the political establishment and portends the likelihood of a permanent shift in American attitudes and political preferences. The two major political parties must now seek a temporary and unlikely alliance to preserve their historical primacy. This is the second volume in the author's Tipping Point series, following *Tipping Point: The World in 2050* (2024).

George Alfred Kennedy spent 35 years in the State Department, retiring as a Senior Foreign Service officer after assignments in seven countries, including as consul general in Toronto, deputy assistant secretary, and senior adviser to Ronald Brown, the first Black secretary of Commerce. He currently lives in Arizona.



Spirit of Brooklyn:

A Story of Love and Heroism During World War II

John Eric Lundin, independently published, 2025, \$16.95/paperback, e-book available, 334 pages.

Spirit of Brooklyn is a historical novel that begins in 1941 in Brooklyn, New York, where two college students meet. As they fall in love, Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, and their future and that of

their generation is changed forever.

The story follows Nils through Army Air Corps pilot training and then to piloting a B-17 bomber flying out of England. "Spirit of Brooklyn" is the name Nils and his crew give to their plane. Marie must return to England with her father, a senior British Foreign Office official, where her life takes an unforeseen turn,

and the story moves to Occupied France, where both Nils and Marie find themselves working with the Resistance.

The fictional characters in this story are woven into an accurate historical portrayal of places, events, tactics, and technical information, whether in the air or on the ground, based on extensive research. The book highlights the role of women during World War II.

John Eric Lundin is a retired Foreign Service officer, having served from 1971 to 2001. He started his career with the U.S. Information Agency and served overseas, mainly in public affairs positions, in Taiwan, Denmark, China, and Japan, in addition to assignments in Washington, D.C.



Chief Gati and the Talking Wind and Other Short Stories
Martin Muganga, Page Publishing, 2024, \$13.95/paperback, e-book available, 60 pages.

This collection of 10 short stories offers African folktales filled with magic, bravery, and intelligence. The stories highlight the importance of environmental conservation, community-building, and defying the odds, making

this book an entertaining and educational read for all ages. The stories bring together villagers and foreigners who work together to overcome an epidemic, along the way offering insight into African culture and traditions. The gods Mawiko, Kaga, and the magical talking Wind are also recurring characters.

Martin Muganga's spouse joined the Foreign Service in 2022. Their first tour was in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where Muganga worked as a security escort and administrative rover. Their next assignment will take them to Maseru, Lesotho.



Dog's Breakfast
Tom Navratil, Willow River Press, 2025, \$19.99/paperback, e-book available, 328 pages.

Deputy Chief of Mission Andy Pulano is fed up with being treated with less respect than his ambassador's prized Labrador retriever. He sets out to undermine his boss and advance his own career by instigating a crisis at post in the fictional Vodania, which

hardly needs any outside help in falling apart.

After someone attempts to poison the Labrador, Andy assigns Tara Zadani, a newly arrived second-tour officer, to investigate. Tara suspects she's been set up to fail, but she soon makes a discovery that puts Andy's entire scheme—and his fevered hopes for a promotion—at risk. (See the full review in the September-October 2025 *FSJ*.)

A State Department FSO for 29 years, Tom Navratil served in Santo Domingo, Tokyo (twice), Moscow, and as deputy chief of mission in Skopje. His humor writing has appeared in *Points in Case*, *Weekly Humorist*, *Slackjaw*, and other publications. *Dog's Breakfast* is his debut novel.



Red's Law
Cheryl Rebecca Nugent, Palmetto Publishing, 2025, \$19.99/paperback, e-book available, 454 pages.

Gardenia Hill, a South Carolina animal sanctuary, was founded by Katherine "Red" Sutter and has been run by her niece, Greer, since Red's death. The never-ending challenges the sanctuary faces include saving victims of dog fighting, puppy mills,

hoarding, and abject cruelty.

When Special Agent Adam Grant visits Gardenia Hill, he's looking for anything to support his hunch that a serial killer is targeting animal abusers. But Greer and Adam find they have a lot in common, and his visits become more than work, especially when he connects with Polly, a shy Husky rescued from a puppy mill.

Will there be romance? Is there really a serial killer?

Cheryl Rebecca Nugent is the spouse of retired Foreign Service Officer Allen Nugent. She and her husband were posted to Rangoon, Asunción, Guangzhou, Canberra, Bangkok, and Koror. *Red's Law* is Nugent's fourth novel, inspired by her own years of work in animal welfare in the U.S. and overseas. She lives and writes in South Carolina.



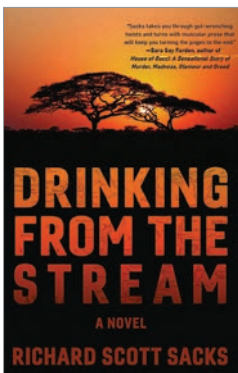
The Nubian Queen

Charles Ray, DS Productions, 2025, \$0.99/e-book, digital only, 91 pages.

After Octavian defeated Cleopatra and Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium and seized control of Egypt, he returned to Rome in triumph, made himself emperor, changed his name to Augustus, and set his sights on the gold-rich Nubian lands of the Upper Nile.

But the people of Kush refused to surrender to Rome. Nubia, known as Ta-Seti to the Egyptians and Kush to those who lived there, was a kingdom of warriors. When its king was killed in an early battle with the Romans, his queen, a warrior who had lost an eye in the same battle, took the throne. Rome may have finally met its match.

Charles Ray was an FSO from 1982 to 2012, with assignments in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. He was the first U.S. consul general in Ho Chi Minh City and was ambassador to Cambodia and Zimbabwe. Other books he has authored include *Rusty Rhodes Bounty Hunter*, *Adventures of Marshal Boone Collins*, and *Caleb Johnson Mountain Man*.



Drinking from the Stream

Richard Scott Sacks, Koehler Books, 2025, \$20.95/paperback, e-book available, 326 pages.

Drinking from the Stream is set in the early 1970s during the violent upheaval of the Vietnam War and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The action in this coming-of-age tale leapfrogs from Louisiana to London, Paris, and East Africa.

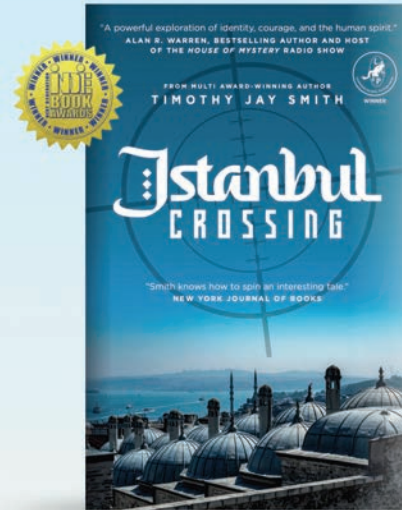
Jake Ries, a 22-year-old Nebraska farm boy turned oil roughneck, becomes a fugitive when he unintentionally kills a homicidal white supremacist on an oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico. On the run, he meets Karl, a restless Oxford dropout and former anti-war activist struggling with his own personal demons. Together they plunge into the Ethiopian and East African hinterland, where they discover that dictatorship and mass murder are facts of life.

Richard Scott Sacks was a State Department FSO from 1989 to 2014 with postings in Mexico City, Casablanca, Hanoi, Seoul,

ISTANBUL CROSSING

by award-winning author TIMOTHY JAY SMITH

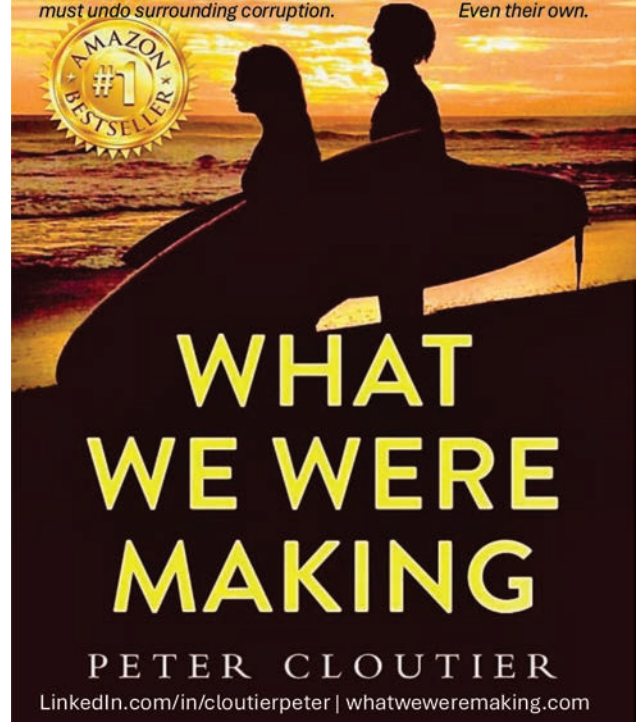
a refugee story



told from the other side of the channel

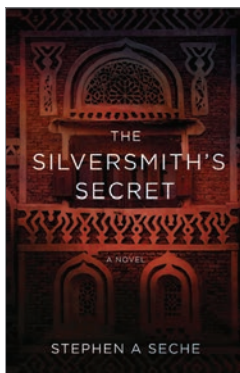
OUT NOW

Two expatriate lives intersect at the edge of civilization. One a budding ambassador, in pursuit of aid effectiveness, justice, goodwill. The other, an island teaching waterman, living breath to breath, wave to wave, fish to fish. When catastrophe unfolds, they must undo surrounding corruption. Even their own.



LinkedIn.com/in/cloutierpeter | whatweweremaking.com

Panama City, and Islamabad. He has also worked as a reporter with *The Miami Herald*, the Associated Press, and *The Middlesex News* in Framingham, Massachusetts. *Drinking from the Stream* is his first novel.



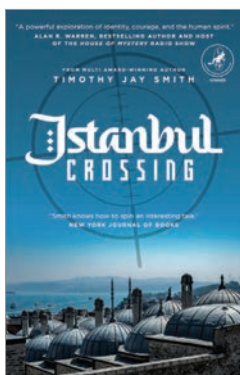
The Silversmith's Secret

Stephen A. Seche, Koehler Books, 2025, \$18.95/paperback, e-book available, 260 pages.

In April 1949, shortly after landing at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv, gifted silversmith Moishe Azani presses a note into the hands of the American pilot who has just delivered hundreds of Yemeni Jews like himself to the Promised Land of Israel.

For more than 60 years, the note sits untranslated and unread, until it comes into the possession of Hank Amato, the pilot's grandson. Unemployed and aimless, Hank seizes the opportunity to travel to Yemen and retrieve the jewelry Moishe was forced to leave behind, a decision that leads him—in the company of a charming female journalist—to a corner of the globe where poverty, corruption, and terrorism have taken root. Hank finds himself caught up in a terrorist scheme, but he may also find the makings of a fresh start.

Stephen Seche served as U.S. ambassador to Yemen from 2007 to 2010. Other postings over the course of a 35-year career with USIA and the State Department included Syria, India, Canada, Bolivia, Peru, and Guatemala.



Istanbul Crossing

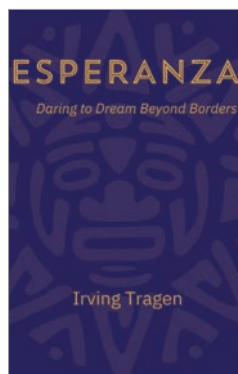
Timothy Jay Smith, Leapfrog Press, 2024, \$16.99/paperback, e-book available, 256 pages.

Syrian refugee Ahdaf earns a meager living in Istanbul helping others make the crossing to Greece—a perilous line of work. But it's no riskier than what he would face if ISIS discovered the truth of his sexuality.

When both the CIA and ISIS approach Ahdaf about transporting high-profile individuals and serving as a double agent for their causes, his life is thrown into turmoil. As his feelings for one of his clients come to light and a possible relationship grows, the decision is taken out of his hands.

A new choice lies before him, between two men and two different futures—assuming Ahdaf lives to see either of them. *Istanbul Crossing* is the story of adversity, love, and the courage of an ordinary man who must brave impossible situations to survive.

Timothy Jay Smith is married to Michael S. Honegger, a former Foreign Service Reserve officer and retired Peace Corps chief financial officer. The pair have held multiple short- and long-term assignments in Thailand, Poland, and Albania.



Esperanza: Daring to Dream Beyond Borders

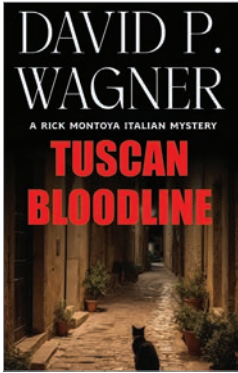
Irving Tragen, Arlington Hall Press, 2024, \$25.99/paperback, e-book available, 371 pages.

This second book of a trilogy dealing with El Salvador in the mid-20th century, and the obstacles to its political and socioeconomic development, follows Esperanza, a girl born in a poverty-ridden rural village. She com-

pletes the eighth grade before tragedy strikes, and she decides there is no future for her in her village. Esperanza, her mother, and her infant brother set out for the capital, where she finds work as a cook in the households of American officials and works to build a better life.

Irving Tragen, the 103-year-old author, worked at the State Department and USAID for 33 years and spent another 14 at the Organization of American States, including nearly a decade as the executive director of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission. During his career, Tragen worked in all 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries. His autobiography, *Two Lifetimes as One: Ele and Me and the Foreign Service*, was spotlighted in *The Foreign Service Journal* in October 2019. Book One of this series, *Mañana Is Yesterday*, was published in 2023.

The author thanks the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) for its support in publishing this book. Arlington Hall Press is an ADST imprint.



Tuscan Bloodline:

A Rick Montoya Italian Mystery

David Wagner, Kindle Direct Publishing, 2025, \$14.99/paperback, e-book available, 257 pages.

In this ninth book in the Rick Montoya Italian Mystery series, our interpreter and amateur sleuth is asked to help a college buddy, Rocco Monti, search for his Tuscan roots. Rocco wants to cut through the family lore and find out

why his great-grandfather left Italy in a hurry a century earlier. Was he in some kind of trouble? Was a young lady involved? Could there have been a murder? Montoya flies in from the U.S., and the two friends head to the walled village of Lucignano; but as they dig into the past in search of the truth, Rocco learns more about his Italian family than he expected.

David Wagner is a retired Foreign Service officer who spent nine years with the U.S. Information Service (USIS) in Italy, never realizing that he was researching his future mystery novels. Other diplomatic assignments included Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Washington, D.C. He and his wife, Mary, live in Pueblo, Colorado.



Falling Seven Times

Mark G. Wentling, Archway Publishing, 2024, \$24.99/paperback, e-book available, 318 pages.

Desperate to provide for her family, Alya leaves her home in Ethiopia in search of work abroad. Her journey is fraught with physical and emotional challenges—difficult work conditions, language barriers, and cultural clashes—as she works to secure a

better future for herself and her loved ones. *Falling Seven Times* illustrates the resilience and courage that labor migrants must summon each day as they face uncertainty while holding on to the hope of rising again. Readers will begin to understand the personal toll of labor migration.

Mark Wentling was born in Wichita, Kansas. In 1967 he went to Honduras as a Peace Corps volunteer, and in 1970 he joined Peace Corps/Togo. He began his career with USAID in 1977 and served as principal officer in six African countries. He has visited all 54 countries in Africa. Now retired, he resides in Lubbock, Texas.

Embassy Kid

J.K. Amerson López

Caracas, 1958: A revolution sends a reviled dictator into exile, and Vice President Nixon is attacked by a murderous mob.

Rome, 1963: President Kennedy gets a rock star reception as he tours the Eternal City.

Bogotá, 1966: A Marine Security Guard discovers a bomb in an embassy office minutes before it is set to explode.

Madrid, 1972: Fire engulfs the family's home.

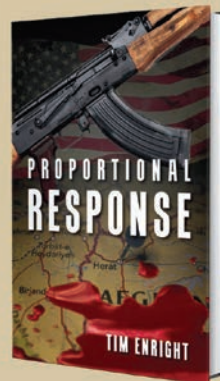
Post to post, languages morph, school systems change, and friends vanish into the past.
Every place is home, but never for long.

America, it turns out, is the most foreign post of all.



Westphalia Press

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YOU THOUGHT YOU
UNDERSTOOD



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FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULTS



Seeing Things: The Boogieman

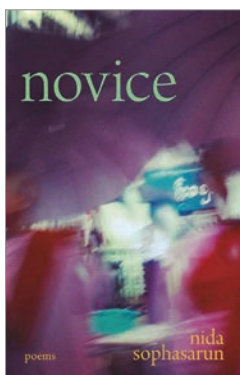
Ryan K. Abdelaziz, independently published, 2024, \$8.99/paperback, e-book available, 47 pages.

This first book of an expected trilogy follows James, an ordinary young man with an extraordinary secret—he can see things others can't, including a terrifying creature who haunts his dreams. Discovering he is a Seer,

James finds himself thrust into a clandestine battle of good versus evil. Guided by his mentor, George, James learns to harness his powers as he confronts the sinister creatures of his relentless nightmares. As he battles dark forces and uncovers hidden truths, he discovers the weight of destiny on his shoulders.

Ryan Abdelaziz is a 9-year-old Foreign Service kid (yes, you read that right) who lives in Virginia with his little brother, Luca, and his Foreign Service parents, Gabi and Khalid. The family has been posted in Nassau, Riyadh, and Recife.

POETRY



Novice

Nida Sophasarun, LSU Press, 2025, \$20.95/paperback, e-book available, 78 pages.

How close can a person come to home when their family has deserted it? Guided by this question, the poems in Nida Sophasarun's *Novice* traverse natural, animal, and dream worlds, seeking intimacy in a snake coming in from the rain, a mother's body

imagined as a house, and the moon serving as both the missing piece and the linchpin in a night sky.

Organized by tropical seasons and unfolding in Asia and the American South, *Novice* proposes that home is monumental and ruined, remembered and forgotten, local and diffuse, peopled and haunted. The themes in this book of poetry draw

on the author's nearly 25 years in a Foreign Service family and experiences in Thailand, Burma, Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Bulgaria.

Nida Sophasarun is from Atlanta and holds degrees from Wellesley College and Johns Hopkins. Her husband is Foreign Service Officer Josh Huck.

GUIDEBOOKS/SELF-HELP



Preserving with Purpose:

Reimagining Buildings for Community Benefit

Amy Hetletvedt, Island Press, 2025, \$40.00/paperback (presale), e-book available, 216 pages.

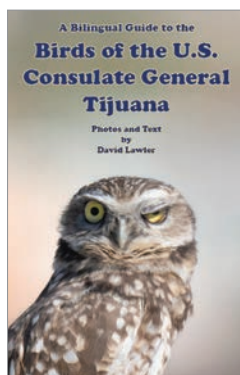
While prominent buildings like Notre Dame in Paris rise from the ashes, historic buildings in disin-

vested communities are lost at an alarming rate. The resulting holes signify a loss of not only structures but also the stories and the embedded possibilities that the buildings represent.

In *Preserving with Purpose*, architect Amy Hetletvedt unveils a revolutionary but simple vision for rethinking building conservation in vulnerable communities. She explores ways to repurpose existing buildings, explains why these buildings matter, and shows what communities and professionals can make of them—together.

With nearly 200 images that visually support the concepts discussed, the book is an accessible, engaging resource for a broad audience including artists, activists, and those simply interested in the *why* of vacant, abandoned, and distressed buildings.

Amy Hetletvedt is a licensed architect, preservationist, and educator. She and her FSO husband have served in The Hague, Lomé, Prague, Tunis, and Ottawa. Hetletvedt also spent four years in an Expanded Professional Associates Program (EPAP) position concentrating on facility planning and historic building stewardship.



A Bilingual Guide to the Birds of the U.S. Consulate General Tijuana

David Lawler, independently published, 2025, \$10.00/paperback, print only, 80 pages.

From hummingbirds to hawks and from sparrows to swallows, this book is a photographic guide highlighting 30 species of birds that can be seen in and around the grounds

of U.S. Consulate General Tijuana. Through 75 photos taken by the author, and through descriptive text, readers can learn about these birds and how to easily identify and name them individually.

Additionally, the book describes how readers can be ethical bird watchers, what they can do in their daily lives to help protect birds and nature, and where else in Baja California and

California they can go birdwatching. The book is written in both English and Spanish and conveys the same information in both languages.

David Lawler, an award-winning photographer, has been a Foreign Service officer since 2014. He has served overseas in Tijuana, Hong Kong, and Ciudad Juarez, and domestically with State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and at the Foreign Service Institute in the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. He also served as Peace Corps volunteer in both Honduras and Panama.

For a copy, contact the author at davidsongbai@gmail.com.

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DRINKING FROM THE STREAM

by Richard Scott Sacks

Readers have likened the writing of STREAM to Melville, Michener, and Kerouac.



"Sacks takes you through gut-wrenching twists and turns with muscular prose that will keep you turning the pages to the end."

—Sara Gay Forden, author of *House of Gucci: A Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour and Greed*

Reader comments:

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"Cinematic, immersive, and absolutely timely. It has the bones of a cult classic."

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www.richardsacks.com



US Foreign Service Officer Recruitment: Persistence Pays, Mid-Career Advantage and the Long Game

Thomas John Moran, Carrollton Polymath, 2024, \$19.99/e-book, digital only, 38 pages.

Author Thomas Moran explains the Foreign Service hiring process and outlines how it differs from private-sector recruitment. He offers tips to

better position an application to maximize hiring advantage, particularly for the midcareer recruit.

Thomas Moran is a retired Foreign Service information management specialist who served in Saudi Arabia, Iceland, Afghanistan (twice), Egypt, Pakistan, Russia, and China.



Rome Made Easy: The Insider Guide to Authentic Rome

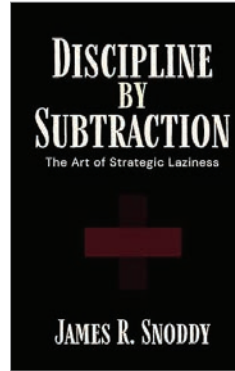
Douglas Morris, Lulu, 2025, \$19.99/paperback, e-book available, 271 pages.

Author Douglas Morris has lived overseas for 30 years, 15 of which were spent in Italy. In *Rome Made Easy*, he offers a local's insight into one of the most captivating cities in

the world, compiling his in-depth knowledge into a comprehensive travel guide that offers up-to-date insider tips and expert advice to make a visit to Rome enjoyable, rewarding, and, best of all, easy.

When sated with the splendor of ancient ruins, stunning art and architecture, vibrant markets, and guided walking tours through thriving local neighborhoods, find authentic places to eat and drink, including colorful *enoteche*, small family-owned trattorie, charming cafés, restaurants, gelaterie, and pizzerias. The author also recommends quality accommodations with reasonable prices.

Douglas Morris is the author of 16 books and numerous articles. His partner, Kelly Degnan, was a Foreign Service officer who served in Ankara, Khost, Brussels, Pristina, Rome, Tbilisi, and Washington, D.C. His other books include *Florence Made Easy* (2006) and *Venice Made Easy* (2013).



Discipline by Subtraction: The Art of Strategic Laziness

James Snoddy, Amazon KDP, 2025, \$14.99/paperback, e-book available, 205 pages.

Discipline by Subtraction is a field manual for people who are tired of optimizing systems that shouldn't exist. Written by a combat-tested infantry officer turned entrepreneur, diplomat, and systems strategist, the

book introduces a ruthless framework for reclaiming time and clarity by deleting the unnecessary.

Rather than glorifying hustle, this book elevates discernment—teaching readers how to prioritize actions based on return on investment. Through a fusion of military decisiveness, diplomatic triage, and entrepreneurial iteration, it equips readers to do more by doing less.

This isn't about doing nothing. It's about doing fewer things on purpose, with leverage, and without apology. If you're already operating at a high level but feel outnumbered by your obligations, this is your new doctrine.

James Snoddy is an FSO with the Department of State. During 11 years in the Foreign Service, he has served in India, Latvia, and Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to assignments in New York and Washington, D.C. He is currently posted in the State Department's Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy. ■

In Their Own WORDS

FS Family Members on Writing

**Four writers who are FS family members
talk about their paths to publication.**

BY DAVID K. WESSEL



David K. Wessel is a retired Foreign Service officer and amateur historian turned novelist. He followed his son into the State Department just before his 60th birthday and served two tours (assistant general services officer in Rome and non-immigrant visa

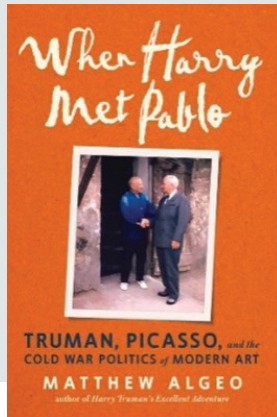
*consular officer in Guatemala) before hitting mandatory retirement at 65. His first book, *Choosing Sides*, was published in March 2024. He can be reached at davidkwesselauthor@gmail.com or through his website: www.davidkwessel.com.*

Each November *The Foreign Service Journal* features the recently published literary works of many members of our community. Memoirs, biographies and histories, books on international relations and diplomacy, adult novels and children's books, poetry collections, and guidebooks highlight the creative talents, mental energy, and writing skills that so many FS community members possess.

In this article, four current and former eligible family members (EFMs) share their experiences as authors and how their writing journeys have been influenced by living the life of a "trailing spouse." **Matthew Algeo** is a history writer, radio show host, and the spouse of a recently retired Foreign Service officer (FSO). **Matthew Becker** is an EFM currently living in Nicaragua and the author of a three-novel thriller series. **Derek Corsino** is a culinary artist, educator, and the spouse of a first-tour FSO stationed in Shanghai. And **Tomoko Horie**, a former television journalist, is currently based in Hong Kong with her second-tour FS spouse.



Matthew Algeo



Matthew Becker



This past spring the four authors, spread across the globe, were sent a common set of questions regarding their paths to publication. Their email responses were collected over the summer months and collated for this article.



David K. Wessel: *Have you always wanted to be a writer?*

Matthew Algeo: I was always a good writer and not cut out for manual labor, so it seemed a natural course. I majored in folklore in college, a sure sign I wouldn't be pursuing a career in, say, chemical engineering. After college I drifted into journalism, mainly working as a reporter at public radio stations all over the United States.

I sold my first book in the spring of 2005. I signed the contract, and that night my wife and I went out to celebrate. We awoke groggily the next morning. Allyson checked her email. The State Department was offering her a spot in the next A-100 class. Our lives were upended in the course of a day! She accepted the offer, and we moved to Washington, D.C., for training. Over the next 20 years, we would live in Bamako, Rome, Ulaanbaatar, Maputo, Sarajevo, and Gaborone. Along the way I would write eight books.

Matthew Becker: I never considered being a writer until my late 20s. My writing career is entirely based on my love of reading and a random thought one summer that since I had read enough thrillers, I could come up with a plot of my own. I decided that I might as well write it and see. Flash forward a few years, and here we are!

Derek Corsino: Writing a book was never on my "things I *must* do" list, but it began to creep up as something I as an educator *wanted* to do.

Tomoko Horie: Three years ago, I left my corporate job and became a freelancer. Since then, I started wanting to make writing my profession; I wanted to write a book. Now, I am working as a writer.

Wessel: *Where did the idea for your first book come from?*

Algeo: I write nonfiction, so all my books have been based on true stories, usually some small event that illuminates a larger issue. For example, *Harry Truman's Excellent Adventure* tells the story of a road trip that Harry and Bess



Author Matthew Algeo signing books at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, Missouri, November 14, 2023.



Derek Corsino



Tomoko Horie



“I enjoy researching the books more than I enjoy writing them, to be honest.”

—Matthew Algeo

Truman took in the summer of 1953, shortly after they left the White House.

At that time ex-presidents didn't receive pensions or Secret Service protection, so it was just the two of them driving cross-country in their Chrysler, staying in motels and eating in roadside diners. So, more than just the story of their trip, it's the story of life in America in the middle of the 20th century.

My most recent book, *New York's Secret Subway*, tells the story of the city's first subway, a pneumatic-tube line built clandestinely, but at the same time looks at the history of mass transit and politics in the Gilded Age.

Becker: There is that piece of fleeting hope you hold on to when a loved one has been involved in some sort of tragedy but hasn't been confirmed as a victim yet. In real life that normally ends only one way, so I wanted to construct a story where there was more than met the eye. Now I have so many ideas I'll never get through all of them.

Corsino: This first book stems from my students and curriculum. I thought of what I do in my introductory culinary arts classes and how I developed that successful curriculum. Then, I moved from there toward how the average person may want to learn.

Horie: My husband's first overseas assignment was in Tanzania. I thought it was a very special and rare opportunity to live in Africa, so I wanted to document my experiences there. But I figured that if I wrote only about life in Africa, people who aren't

interested in Africa wouldn't read it, so I decided to write about the challenges people face in their 40s and how I dealt with those challenges while living in Africa.

Wessel: What do you most—and least—enjoy about writing?

Algeo: I enjoy researching the books more than I enjoy writing them, to be honest. I like nothing better than walking into an archive or library or historical society with a list of items I want to look up. It's exciting to me. Most research trips don't yield much, but once in a while, you find a gem. Maybe it's an old letter that Harry Truman wrote to a friend about his road trip, or a ticket to ride New York's first subway, or photographs about the story you're researching that have never been published before. That's the best part, the hunt for those little bits and pieces that together complete the story.

Becker: I love writing the twist, writing those lines where everything you thought you understood is flipped on its head, and imagining readers' reactions when they get there. That's a large part of what I'm in it for. Most of my novel ideas start with “what if we thought x ... and then it was actually y.”

The chapters I enjoy writing the least are those right before a big reveal or twist. I'm so desperate to get there that it can sometimes make it feel like a bit of a slog doing that final buildup. But it's vitally important not to rush those!

Corsino: My book is primarily recipes; much of it was already written and extensively field-tested from years of student successes and failures. What was fun was reimagining some of them to work better in a home kitchen and reformatting them for home use and not industry use. I had to change the tone and vernacular quite a bit.

My least favorite part of writing a book was all the formatting and editing it requires. I self-published, so I built and edited the entire thing in-house. If a page number did not line up well with a particularly large recipe, I needed to edit all 117 pages.

“I did the classic querying into every agent’s slush pile, hoping for that one break.”

—Matthew Becker

Horie: I enjoyed writing about the surprising experiences I had in Africa and how they completely overturned my previous assumptions.

Wessel: Please describe your journey from the idea stage to publication. How has being part of the Foreign Service community helped during your publishing journey?

Algeo: In some ways it was an ideal situation. Whenever we were in Washington, D.C., I could do most of the research. A lot of what I needed was in the Library of Congress. Then, when we went back out for a tour, I could do the writing. Of course, when

the book was published, I would have to fly back from Mongolia or Mozambique to promote it in the States, but that’s the way life goes in the Foreign Service. And I could always count on our FS friends to show up for my events!

Becker: I did the classic querying into every agent’s slush pile, hoping for that one break. What ended up happening was things working in the opposite direction. While waiting for agent responses, I saw that my publisher at the time had opened a thriller imprint and was willing to accept submissions directly from authors. They liked my manuscript and offered me a three-book deal.

In the meantime, I was able to get an agent, who has been wonderful ever since. As with so many writing stories, it all moved very slowly until all of a sudden, it was a runaway train. We just completed that contract, and now my agent and I are discussing what we want to do next.

The Foreign Service community is an extraordinarily supportive group. We’re all doing this thing together and having experiences that are difficult to fully get across to anyone outside

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this life. So for me it has been having a built-in community of people who care about you and your successes and are rooting for you.

Corsino: It took about two years from start to finish, but really a month of constant work. I knew I wanted to write recipes, but I struggled with what the customer needed. Also, as culinary trends changed, my scope would get thrown out. So I opted for something more specific and broader in subject matter. That first book was done prior to my wife's first tour, but that lit a fire under me to get it done.

My next book, which is in development, is looking at a trend that is speculative but should be a hit right when it comes out. It's important to always know where they are going in culinary research and development.

Horie: At first I wrote in Japanese for a Japanese audience. Later, some American colleagues and friends said they wanted to read the book, so I decided to publish it in English as well. As a writer, I want to share new learnings and insights from the countries where I will live in the future through articles and books. Being part of the Foreign Service community provides me with that environment, and I am grateful for it.

Wessel: *Did your Foreign Service life hinder your writing journey in any way? If so, how?*

Algeo: Yes, undoubtedly it was difficult to do some research overseas, especially in the early years of Allyson's career. I often had to hire researchers to look things up for me in the States. As the years went on, however, more and more archival material could be found online (especially newspapers), so this became less of a concern. I should mention, too, that I always tried to find a place to do my writing, either in a library or a shared workspace. I have library cards from Rome, Ulaanbaatar, and Sarajevo!

Becker: The biggest hindrance is the distance away from writing events, whether launch parties or big conferences. There's no replacement for face time with readers (and other writers, editors, agents).

Corsino: No. As an EFM, and with a hiring freeze while being in a country with no bilateral work agreement, I find myself with an immense amount of time to write.

Horie: Not at all.

Wessel: *What advice would you offer other aspiring Foreign Service authors?*

Algeo: Write what you want to write, not what you think you can sell. If you write nonfiction, take note of all the times



Matthew Becker, with the first two books in his murder mystery trilogy. *Run*, a psychological thriller, was published in 2024, and *Don't Look Down* followed in 2025.

COURTESY OF MATTHEW BECKER

you've thought "I'd like to read a book about that," and write that book. Fiction is much more difficult to sell (and to write, I believe). The nice thing about writing nonfiction is that you don't have to write the whole book before you sell it, you only need to write a detailed proposal.

Becker: Find a community of writers. It doesn't matter who, and you certainly don't have to share your writing; but having people to talk to throughout a process that is filled with rejection at every step is a must. I am super chatty, so come talk to me!

Corsino: Give it a shot, and when in doubt self-publish!

Horie: Publishing a book might seem intimidating at first, but nowadays it's easy to self-publish without going through commercial publishing. Plus, not everyone gets the chance to live abroad, so I encourage you to consider publishing with the mindset of sharing what you have seen and experienced with others. ■

IRAN'S REVOLUTION AND Foreign Service Heroes

A REVIEW ESSAY

**A new book on U.S.-Iran relations and the Iranian Revolution
spotlights the outstanding work of career diplomats.**

BY JOHN LIMBERT

Events in Iran almost never make for cheery reading, especially when the story includes the U.S. government. Scott Anderson's new book, *King of Kings*, on the Iranian Revolution and U.S.-Iranian relations during the 1970s, tells another sad story that does little credit to its many actors, both American and Iranian.

As the title says, this is a story of "hubris, delusion, and catastrophic miscalculations."



John Limbert is a retired Foreign Service officer, academic, and author. During a 34-year diplomatic career, he served mostly in the Middle East and Islamic Africa (including two tours in Iraq), was ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (2000-2003), and served as president of the American Foreign Service Association (2003-2005), retiring from the post of Dean of the FSI language school in 2006.

*In retirement, he was brought back to serve as the first deputy assistant secretary of State for Iranian affairs (2009-2010). He was among the last American diplomats to serve in Iran, where he was held hostage from 1979 to 1981. He has authored numerous books and articles on Middle Eastern topics and a novel, *Believers*, co-authored with Foreign Service colleague Ambassador Marc Grossman. His most recent work, co-authored with Professor Mansour Farhang, is *A Modern Theocracy* (Mazda Press, 2025).*

Just one such was President Jimmy Carter's disastrous decision to admit the ailing Shah of Iran to the United States and the subsequent occupation of the U.S. embassy, which cost Carter his presidency and pushed Iran's revolution on the road to brutal theocracy.

A fresh and well-researched look at the Iranian Revolution—an event that changed the world's geopolitical equations dramatically and in ways we still grapple with today—is certainly welcome. For *King of Kings*, Anderson relied largely on extensive interviews with a limited number of participants (members of the shah's family and court, Iranian political figures, and U.S. diplomats) and other original sources.

As he says in the preface: "It is my hope that by focusing on the actions and experiences of that small cast of people who resided in or were eyewitness to the inner circles of the revolution, I might both tell a new version of an old tale and begin to answer some of the riddles of why the Iranian Revolution played out as it did." Arguably, he succeeds in this.

But this book has, in my view, another very important dimension: Anderson's account shines light on individual Foreign Service officers on the front lines in the Iran crisis who, when placed in an impossible situation, responded as their oaths of office demanded—with honor, insight, and courage.

In documenting these diplomats' professionalism, dedication, and honesty, his book is a highly readable antidote to the current

wave of ignorance that has told thousands of devoted public servants that they and their decades of service no longer matter.

FSOs on the Ground in Iran

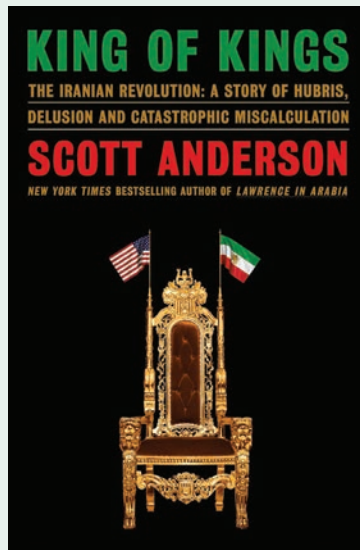
Anderson's most important story is not about famous people who write memoirs that end up on the 50-cent remainder table after two weeks. His story is of Foreign Service colleagues who never sought fame: brave and honorable public servants, including Bruce Laingen, America's last chief of mission in Tehran; Michael Metrinko, consul general in Tabriz and political officer at the embassy in Tehran; Henry Precht, country director for Iranian affairs; and William Sullivan, last U.S. ambassador to Iran.

Despite threats to their careers and their lives, they insisted on providing the most accurate information and the best advice possible from the field to decision-makers in Washington without regard to partisan politics or the winds of political fashion.

They were not always right. Who is? Both the clueless and the well-informed, including this essay writer, got many things wrong. In October 1979, for example, we all missed "the big one" and failed to evacuate our Tehran mission after President Carter, ignoring his own forebodings, admitted the shah to the U.S. Like almost everyone dealing with Iran in those days, we overestimated the strength of the monarchy, underestimated the power and depth of discontent in Iranian society, misread the goals of Ayatollah Khomeini and his allies, and relied on well-intentioned Iranian nationalists who in 1979 were (powerless) officials in Iran's provisional government.

We had neither read nor understood Khomeini's writings, such as *Revealing Secrets* (1942) and *Islamic Government* (1971), in which he condemned pluralism and democracy and outlined his blueprint for a theocratic dictatorship modeled on the imagined system of the Prophet Muhammad in seventh-century Medina. As a matter of fact, few middle-class Iranians, who marched (and voted) for an Islamic Republic in 1978-1979, had read Khomeini's works or understood his obscurantist and reactionary program. In the words of the scholar Shaul Bakhash, "[These Iranians] loved the revolution not knowing it would not love them back."

Being right was never the point (in the Foreign Service if we're always right, we're being too cautious); the point was to



avoid wishful thinking and self-delusion. For too long, Americans were tightly bound to the shah. The 1953 American- and British-backed coup that rescued the shah and toppled the nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq ensured that the shah saw that his remaining in power depended more on the goodwill of foreigners than on the goodwill of Iranians. The Americans, having once saved the shah, were now, for better or worse, stuck with him, his system, his relatives, and his sycophants.

A few of our colleagues asked: "Is unconditional support for the shah the best policy for the U.S.?" And those who could sense the undercurrents of resentment among Iranians had the temerity to ask: "Is our unconditional support for this unpopular ruler going to haunt us eventually?" Their doubts, which few wanted to hear, did not make the questioners many friends.

When Metrinko, who took his responsibilities seriously, reported a threatened mass resignation of Iranian Air Force pilots in Tabriz in October 1978, an outraged ambassador threatened to end the young officer's career. As Anderson writes (page 321): "In short order Michael Metrinko was ordered to Tehran, where he was once again brought before a furious William Sullivan. 'He told me that if I ever repeated a story like that again,' Metrinko said, 'causing panic and whatnot, he'd have me thrown out of the Foreign Service.'"

To his credit, as the wave of opposition grew in the fall of 1978, Sullivan came to recognize that the Pahlavi monarchy was finished and that Washington should start (in his words) "thinking the unthinkable." The message was not welcome, and reaction in Washington to Sullivan's reporting was about the same as his own initial reaction to Metrinko's bad news. Carter considered recalling Sullivan, and as the shah's government collapsed in January-February 1979, national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, living in a fantasy world, ordered Sullivan to stage a coup.

Knowing that the Iranian military no longer answered to the shah's generals, Sullivan responded with an obscenity and set about protecting his people when the embassy came under armed attack three days after the revolution. Leaving Iran in April 1979, Sullivan found himself frozen out in Washington, where his colleagues sensed damaged goods. His Foreign Service career was over.

A few of our colleagues asked: “Is unconditional support for the shah the best policy for the U.S.?”

The Game Went On

After royal authority collapsed in Tehran on February 11, 1979, Tabriz, Iran’s second city, was in chaos, and Consul Metrisko—seeking to protect a group of Americans held in the local prison—was captured, threatened with lynching, released, recaptured, and threatened with a trial, until he and his charges were sent to Tehran on February 18. He remained in the capital as political officer, doing excellent reporting until the final collapse in November.

In a bizarre postscript straight from Kafka, in October 1979, while Metrisko was on leave in Washington, the State Department arranged for him to meet senior officials to discuss his insightful reporting on deteriorating conditions in Iran.

As Anderson describes the scene (page 391): “Arriving at the conference room a few minutes early, Metrisko was going over his notes for his presentation when a departmental security officer approached to ask if they could speak in the hallway. There, the security officer explained that the meeting had been given a security classification higher than Metrisko had clearance to attend. Metrisko politely inquired if the officer understood that the reason for the meeting was to discuss *his* reporting. ‘Yeah,’ came the reply. ‘Doesn’t matter.’”

You can’t make this stuff up. The farce continued even while colleagues were reporting what they were seeing and hearing. In July 1979, Chief of Mission Bruce Laingen told Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in the clearest and most polite language that although the U.S. might want to admit the shah to the United States at some future date, to do so under present conditions would have three outcomes: (1) Bazargan’s moderate provisional government—already besieged by extremists of left and right—would collapse; (2) any chance of restoring some sort of U.S.-Iran relationship would disappear; and (3) the U.S. embassy could no longer operate in Tehran.

So, what did the president and his advisers do three months after receiving this unambiguous message? They admitted the shah, creating a story about his illness that, even if true, no Iranian was going to believe; left Laingen, Metrisko, and their colleagues in Tehran to face the consequences; and appeared surprised and unprepared when their house of cards collapsed on November 4.

Ignorance and Honor

Scholars still argue about the events of the Iranian Revolution and its brutal aftermath. In simple terms, who can explain the continued existence of an Iranian theocracy in the 21st century?

Those in power under the monarchy blame everyone but themselves and have made President Carter the revolution’s chief engineer. Just months before his July 1980 death in Cairo, when confined to a hospital bed in New York, the deposed shah received Ambassador Richard Helms and his wife, Cynthia, for a visit. According to Cynthia’s memoir, *An Ambassador’s Wife in Iran* (1981), the shah bitterly and insistently pressed Ambassador Helms to tell him why the Americans decided to get rid of the monarchy and replace it with the rule of a 75-year-old seminarian.

In *King of Kings*, Anderson puts aside grand strategy and conspiracy theories. He has provided us instead with the well-written account of a highly skilled journalist and novelist. The author of two novels and five works of nonfiction, including the well-received *Lawrence in Arabia* (2013), he worked as a war correspondent from 1983 to 2011, covering the Lebanese Civil War, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Darfur, and Libya.

Anderson brings wit and insight to his writing, which emphasizes the human element in historical narratives, focusing on individuals caught up in the sweep of larger conflicts or political crises.

Attuned to the apparent haphazardness of the Iranian Revolution, Anderson has written a fascinating narrative full of “oh no!” and “might have been.” Everyone, including the revolutionaries, was groping; everyone was improvising. They were not playing chess—where everything is seen and planned—but backgammon, a game Iranians invented and still adore. In backgammon, like politics, a player improvises, reacts, and cannot plan more than one or two moves ahead. Chance plays a vital role, and a fortunate or unfortunate roll of the dice will upend the entire game.

Coda

In 2005, as president of the American Foreign Service Association, I met with a staffer from the office of the Senate majority leader to seek the leader’s all-important support for legislation benefiting the Foreign Service. After listening to my presentation, the staffer said, “That’s all well and good, but many here believe that you FSOs have a very cushy life.” It was difficult to stay polite, but I could say only: “A cushy life!? Have you seen my career? Guinea. Iran. Mauritania. Sudan. Iraq. Where’s the cush?”

Although the Foreign Service has friends and supporters, we also have obstinate enemies who dislike us viscerally for who we are. With such enemies there's no arguing, no reasoning, and no convincing. One of their carps (among many) is that we take our oath of office seriously and—whatever our personal opinions—carry out the policies of the administration in service to the American people. We serve presidents and Secretaries of both parties and are responsible for providing the most accurate information and best advice possible.

Lacking jets, tanks, and warships to “persuade,” our tools are measured words, listening, empathy, and patience. We talk to the rascals and scoundrels who occupy thrones and palaces around the world. Our values and ethos, however, have not always endeared us to those pseudo-machos seeking to look tough, discredit a predecessor, and silence dissent. And in today's political bear pit, public servants—both Civil Service and Foreign Service—have become a particular target.

Readers may not always agree with Scott Anderson's analysis, but in *King of Kings*, he tells a riveting story that features igno-

Attuned to the apparent haphazardness of the Iranian Revolution, Anderson's fascinating narrative is full of “Oh no!” and “might have been.”

rance and greed among many, and honor, sacrifice, and insight among a few. His account of U.S.-Iran relations and the part played by these brave Foreign Service officers—whose values, to borrow a phrase from the U.S. Navy, were “Duty, Honor, Country”—reminds us of the critical work this small group of patriotic Americans does on behalf of the rest of us.

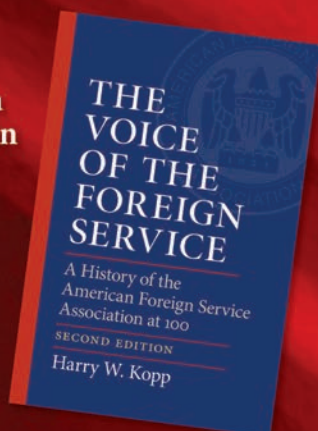
The tragedy is that no one listened then; and now these honorable public servants are not only ignored but openly despised and ridiculed. ■

Give the gift of understanding this holiday season!

The 100-Year History of the American Foreign Service Association

By Harry W. Kopp for the American Foreign Service Association

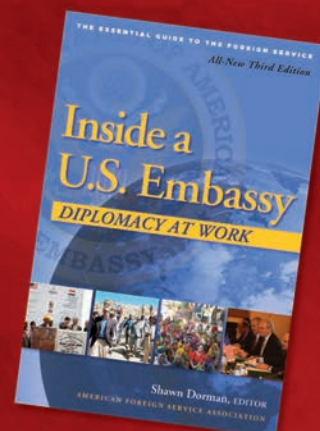
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The Essential Guide to the United States Foreign Service

Edited by Shawn Dorman

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Scooter Wisdom Life Lessons from the Streets of Saigon

For this author, commuting via scooter offered valuable lessons in how to survive—and thrive—in a complicated world.

BY JOHN HARRIS

As we prepared to move to Vietnam two years ago, which we often did in our itinerant Foreign Service lives, we found ourselves looking around for cultural portals through which to learn about our new home. Given the rich history of the country, not to mention our complex bilateral relationship, there was much to choose from. An obvious place to start was Anthony Bourdain's decades-long obsession with Vietnamese cuisine, or Ken Burns' searing history of what is referred to here as the "American War," or Viet Thanh Nguyen's extraordinary novel, *The Sympathizer*, now an HBO series.

Somehow, however, it was the BBC's hilariously absurd "Top Gear" episode about three middle-aged Brits' disaster-strewn motorcycle trip from the south to the north of Vietnam (more than 1,000 miles) that really spoke to us. This wacky adventure stuck with me as we subsequently made our way around the country. I began to see the streets as one massive and connected

organism, made of millions of individual parts but somehow behaving coherently as a united, kaleidoscopic whole.



Of all the planet's megacities, few are as synonymous with motorcycles and scooters as Saigon. Saigon—or Ho Chi Minh City, as it has been officially named since reunification in 1976 (though its residents use the two names interchangeably)—pulses with relentless two-wheel energy. Several roads are designed exclusively for scooters, and many of the city's gleaming new bridges across the storied Saigon River have dedicated, walled-off, scooter-only lanes. Cars are an annoying afterthought; unlike the capital, Hanoi, its northern, traffic-filled rival where cars choke the streets, Saigon is resolutely of, by, and for the scooter. Driving a car, you feel like a whale swimming through a school of nimble fish, moving slowly, deliberately, in a traffic pattern ruled by packs of agile, darting scooters.

With a population of nearly 10 million in Saigon, with likely at least as many scooters, its streets should be noisy and polluted. But every year the streets get cleaner, mostly because of the rise of electric vehicles (EVs). With U.S. government support, Vietnam is now a global leader in EV technologies. Two-wheeled EV entrepreneurs, in particular, are booming and, in some cases, preparing to export their technologies to the U.S. Keep an eye out for Vietnamese start-ups, like VinFast, DatBike, and Selex, any one of which may change the global EV market in the decades to come.



John Harris' career as a USAID Foreign Service officer brought him and his family to Vietnam, Ukraine, and South Africa. He was RIFed in September 2025 and currently lives in Cairo.



JANNEN MAY

A local family travels through Ho Chi Minh City in style, 2023.

I rode my scooter daily on my way to work for USAID at the U.S. consulate in downtown Ho Chi Minh City. The consulate was built at the site of the pre-1975 U.S. embassy, known from images of last-minute helicopter evacuations of Americans and American-aligned personnel in April 1975. When I first sallied forth into Saigon’s scooter-centric soul, I thought I was entering chaos. In time, with the benefit of two years of scooter driving behind me, I’ve learned that Saigon’s two-wheel universe actually brings the possibility of serenity—even profound life lessons—if you approach the task with an open mind.

To absorb many of life’s great lessons, you just need to jump on a two-wheeler and ride around the city.

In Saigon, being right is less important than being accommodating. Sure, there are rules on the books. In practice, however, nearly anyone can do nearly anything, any-time. In the absence of crosswalks, pedestrians cross even crowded thoroughfares at will—miraculously, nearly always successfully. With traffic lights a rarity, diverging traffic finds its way through confusing intersections with astonishing smoothness. The near absence of accidents despite the chaos would baffle someone trained in a

more rules-oriented system. (Just think of U.S. streets when a traffic light fails.)

Rules, of course, are important. But so is a bit of flexibility and imagination. On the streets of Saigon, everyone is accommodating. Scale the approach up to the national level, and this results in Vietnam’s famous “bamboo diplomacy,” which enables Vietnam to exist in a confusing, contested part of the



USAID VIETNAM

USAID’s Samir Goswami visited the Selex Motors factory, which manufactures electric scooters and batteries, on February 27, 2024.



Commuters on scooters navigate the crowded streets of Ho Chi Minh City, 2023.

world and remain everyone's trusted partner. Recently, in less than a year, Vietnam hosted the presidents of the U.S., China, and Russia. The secret of how Vietnam can pull off that extraordinary balancing act may be found in the functional chaos of its streets.

Wise riders head for openings, not closings. There is a clearly understood hierarchy on the streets of Saigon. In general, size gives precedence. Buses, for example, proceed deliberately into chaos, fully understanding that everyone will scatter by the time they arrive. Scooters, at the lower end of the size/priority continuum, must be considerably more agile.

Wise two-wheel pilots move toward openings, not closings. If the car just ahead unexpectedly signals that it's making a U-turn, wise riders accept this fact and time their arrival *after* the offending four-wheeler has cleared, even if the rules of the road are in their favor. Scooters in Saigon are pint-size, scrappy survivors. Adjusting to circumstances to find a path forward is much more important than analyzing what has gone before; what exists is much more important than what should be.



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USAID VIETNAM

USAID Administrator Samantha Power rides an electric motorbike in Hanoi, March 10, 2023.

The entire spectacle reminds me of the central tenet of improvisational theater: Always accept what has gone before and build on it. Scootering around Saigon teaches you to embrace the unexpected and thrive amid chaos, a valuable life skill.

There are different ways to know what's coming. In the relatively few intersections where traffic lights are operational and respected, scooters quickly build up behind the red light. Jostling

to get ahead, scooters soon fill the road space in front of the light as well, beyond where the traffic light is visible. You would have thought that these drivers would be at a disadvantage, not knowing when the light behind them turns green.

But there's more than one way to know when to proceed. These forward-leaning riders, for example, unable to see the green light behind them, are listening for the rev of engines instead. When enough engines rev, they can safely assume that light must have changed. You don't have to have seen the light to know that it has changed.

Watching this dance reminds me of the role of a diplomat overseas. You can read the news and digest the headlines, no matter where you are in the world. But to truly understand a place as nuanced and multifaceted as Vietnam, the only way to fully succeed is to be here, on the ground, using all your senses.

Proceed with caution, but proceed. On a scooter in Saigon, it is rare to have open road in front of you. There is almost always something alarming unfolding ahead. A sensible approach would be to slow down, perhaps even stop, until you can see a safe way through. Wise riders, however, continue toward the obstacle—safely, for sure, but resolutely. Nearly always, as you approach the obstruction ahead, conditions will have shifted by the time you arrive, allowing you to safely pass. You may not take the path you originally intended, and you may have to get creative in your approach. But pass you can.

This got me thinking about uncertainty and opportunity—two omnipresent truths of our lives overseas as FSOs. Who knew that scooters in Saigon could be such eloquent instructors of this critical diplomatic lesson? My experience has convinced me that a good deal of what you need to know about life, you can learn while navigating Saigon's scooter traffic. ■



Crossing the river at night in Ho Chi Minh City, 2024.

HANNAH HARRIS

VIEWS from the Field

AFSA launched the Service Disrupted public awareness campaign in May with a collection of testimonials from members to help illustrate the critical work of diplomacy and development and what is lost when the Foreign Service is taken off the field.

We've published Service Disrupted stories in every edition of the *FSJ* since April. Here we share the latest installment, which has been lightly edited for clarity. Most stories are printed anonymously, but the authors are known to us.

AFSA continues to collect your firsthand accounts of the dismantling of USAID and USAGM and of the reductions in force being implemented at State, as well as the impact of the government shutdown. How have the disruptions affected you and your work on behalf of the United States?

We are especially seeking specific, concrete anecdotes that shed light on what's happening in the field. Send your story (up to 500 words) to Humans-of-FS@afsa.org. Let us know if you wish to remain anonymous.

—The Editors

USAID Brought Stability to Somalia and the U.S.

I was flying from Mogadishu to Nairobi last year in a tiny airplane chartered by the State Department when a military drone that was surveilling al-Shabaab territory hit the plane. In the aftermath I remember thinking: "Is the work worth risking my life?" Of course it is.

In Somalia, USAID rehabilitated irrigation canals to provide water to its vulnerable population; taught children to read and write (at a cost of about \$150 per child) so they would have options other than being forced to join al-Shabaab; and built cell towers and restored water points in communities liberated from the terrorist organization.

In Marka, a town liberated from al-Shabaab in 2018, the trauma was still raw. Bullet-ridden walls, shuttered shops, and

empty homes told their own stories when USAID contractors showed up to help rebuild at the government's request. Our third-party monitoring implementer shared pictures of children peeking out from doorways, their eyes wide with fear. Hope was a whisper, barely audible.

That was three years ago. After USAID rebuilt the road through town, it was bustling with handcarts and motorcycles. The market was alive again. Photos show children playing near one of the eight schools USAID helped construct—schools that have given thousands of students a reason to dream again and offered parents hope for a better future, one without al-Shabaab. A young girl named Fatuma told our implementer that she wanted to become a doctor, not because it was a prestigious job, but because "no one should die just because they are forgotten."

But now, I fear we are forgetting them again.

In January 2025, the project's funding was cut. The peace committee we helped build will surely dissolve with no budget to support their mediation work. With no USAID workers left in the country, we don't know what happened to the schools, but we know the teachers couldn't work for months without pay and the government was not yet able to pick up the bill.

And al-Shabaab knows this too. They are not just fighters—they are opportunists. They will return to Marka and other towns slowly, not with guns at first but with offers: Food. Money. Protection. In a land abandoned by its allies, even the promises of warlords begin to look like salvation.

While Marka remains free from al-Shabaab, Aadan Yabaal, another coastal town in Somalia that was liberated in 2022, tells another story. In April 2025, al-Shabaab seized control of the town. The school built by USAID closed, the solar streetlights were likely destroyed, and the clan reconciliation committee ceased to exist.

We turned the tide once. USAID, United Nations partners, Department of Defense military advisers, Somali leaders, and community elders worked together to build something real. We saw warlords become ministers. We watched farmers sell tomatoes in markets that had been empty for years. We saw displaced families return home.

But now, we're watching it all slip away. Not because we were defeated, but because we gave up.

When USAID was shut down in Somalia, we lost more than the roads we built, the streetlights, and schools. We lost the trust of people who believed us when we said we were partners. We surrendered the hope that once flickered in a place where darkness reigned.

Somalia is more than a battlefield. It is a front line in the fight for dignity, stability, and peace. We have not just lost ground. We've lost time and momentum—and if we don't act quickly, we may lose an entire generation who once believed they had a future.

And that loss? It echoes far beyond Somalia's borders.

—Monika Gorzelanska, former USAID program office director

Three Years from Retirement

After 17 years of dedicated service as a public diplomacy FSO, I was notified that I am being separated due to the Department of State's recent reduction in force. This decision is deeply painful—not only on a personal level but because it represents a significant loss to the department's global mission and capabilities.

Throughout my career, I have served on the front lines of U.S. diplomacy, voluntarily accepting challenging assignments in the developing world, including in Nepal during the 7.9 magnitude earthquake and, most recently, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have spent the bulk of my career in sub-Saharan Africa, am a fluent French speaker, and have consistently chosen posts that advance U.S. values under difficult conditions in countries where many officers do not want to serve.

In Nepal, I did not go on authorized departure after the quake, choosing instead to stay behind and spearhead our social media accounts and media relations so that Americans in Nepal knew how to access our assistance, Americans abroad knew how to check on the welfare and whereabouts of their relatives, and both the Nepali and U.S. citizens understood how the U.S. government was assisting the victims of the earthquake.

My professional focus has been building trust and lasting relationships with journalists, civil society leaders, youth, and government counterparts—helping explain U.S. policies and values, managing educational and cultural exchanges, and promoting mutual understanding.

Most recently, I served in the J Bureau [civilian security, democracy, and human rights], leading a team working to protect and promote religious freedom in Africa and the Middle East. That mission was critical. We helped secure the release of several prisoners of conscience and get them to safety so that they could practice their faith in peace—upholding a core American value. Unfortunately, the elimination of the J Bureau precipitated my inclusion in the RIF.

My performance has never been in question. I have received awards in every position I've held, and I was competitively paneled into a prestigious long-term training detail at the National Defense University's Eisenhower School, set to begin in August.

My commitment to professional growth, to the department, and to public service has been unwavering. I have just learned that despite urgent advocacy efforts by NDU leadership, the department is backfilling my training detail with someone who did not go through the normal competitive process. How does such a system reward merit and accomplishment?

I became a U.S. diplomat to serve the country I love. It has been an honor and a dream come true. All I want is to continue contributing to our nation's diplomacy and global leadership. The department's decision to separate seasoned officers like me—at a time when our experience, language skills, and regional expertise are most needed—will have long-term consequences for the institution's capacity, particularly

in regions like Africa, where relationships are built on trust and continuity.

I hope that as leaders in the department reflect on the impact of this RIF, they will recognize the depth of the talent and commitment we are losing—and the human cost of that loss.
—*State FSO*

Weapons Expertise—Gone

When I received my RIF notice on July 11, I was a tenured Civil Service employee serving as a senior adviser on chemical and biological weapons issues and project manager for a portfolio of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) nonproliferation programs valued at more than \$50 million.

In addition to more than eight years of experience as a generalist project manager with the State Department, I also brought highly relevant subject matter expertise as a PhD physical scientist and maintained credentials, including contracting officer and grants officer representative certifications, to facilitate project implementation and oversight.

The office holding my position will continue to exist in the restructured organization chart, as it was established by statute. The RIF actions of July 11, however, eliminated virtually all working-level federal positions in this office, thus severely limiting its capacity to expeditiously respond to unanticipated WMD-related crises and proliferation challenges that may threaten the safety of Americans at home and abroad.

For example, the U.S. has and will likely continue to play a role in securing and verifiably eliminating remnants of the Assad regime's chemical weapons program in Syria to bring greater stability to the region—which is a stated priority for the administration. And there are numerous other ongoing activities in the office that strongly align with the administration's objectives to prevent designated terrorist organizations and Iran from gaining access to dual-use, WMD-enabling materials.

While this particular office was targeted, otherwise equivalent offices in the same bureau (i.e., retained in the reorganized State Department) were entirely unaffected by the RIF, including tenured and probationary staff members, suggesting the department did not follow standard RIF procedures as part of this reorganization.

—*State foreign affairs officer*

Further Fracturing State's Broken IT Systems

I serve as a Foreign Service specialist and diplomatic technology officer in Washington, D.C. The State Department included my position in its reduction-in-force action on July 11.

After 12 years abroad, I returned to Washington, D.C., in 2023 to take part in the Bureau of Diplomatic Technology's Executive Development Program (EDP). Following graduation from the EDP in 2024, I accepted a two-year domestic assignment with the clear understanding that it was a "detailed" assignment to the Office of Application Design and Delivery (ADD).

I have been serving in ADD in direct support of State's enterprise platform optimization efforts, driving urgently needed reform of both its sprawling and duplicative IT infrastructure and its fragmented, siloed organizational structure. This role represented an opportunity for the department to realize a return on its investment in my professional development, while also allowing me to apply and expand the strategic leadership, executive decision-making, and communications skills I cultivated through the EDP.

Over the past year, I have led efforts to modernize legacy systems, improve interoperability, and realign IT investments with the department's objectives. In one initiative, I identified a plan to save tens of millions of dollars annually through platform consolidation and optimization of a major software platform. With the department's decision to eliminate my position, however, this plan now faces indefinite delay—and may never move forward.

In addition, I was given a 15 percent retention incentive based on my leadership, expertise, more than a decade of institutional knowledge, and skills as a graduate of EDP. Despite these qualifications, the department chose to eliminate the very employee it deemed critical enough to warrant a retention incentive. It is contradictory—and illogical—to simultaneously recognize the value of my skills with incentive pay while including me in a RIF.

The department cannot reform its fractured IT footprint if it removes the personnel driving that transformation.

—*State FSS diplomatic technology officer*

Fired in the Middle of a Move

I am an FS-2 Foreign Service officer with 15 years' experience at the U.S. Department of State. On July 11, 2025, I was in the middle of my permanent change of station (PCS) move from a domestic assignment to my next overseas assignment, for which I was paneled on December 20, 2024.

I received my travel orders on June 18 and airline tickets to post on June 26. I packed up my house, shipped our only car, terminated the lease on our home, and unenrolled my child from daycare at the end of June. My family, including two toddlers, moved into a hotel as we awaited my consultations in D.C. before heading out to post—just two weeks before the RIF.

Overnight, with one email notification, we became homeless, jobless, without a car, and without school enrollment, cribs, high chairs, or any toys or clothing for our toddlers beyond what we had crammed into six suitcases.

We left our state of residence to move in with extended family, who were gracious enough to take us in, and awaited notification of how or when we would receive our belongings, which had already been shipped to post overseas, or our vehicle, which was awaiting shipment at the Baltimore port.

Beyond the personal financial costs of preparing for a PCS that was canceled last minute—including insurance, moving expenses, the purchase of a new POV specific to the country where we were assigned, snow tires, and food that's expiring in a warehouse overseas—I have also not received reimbursement for my PCS voucher.

When I contacted the department to request reimbursement for the nearly \$2,000 in overseas daycare registration and enrollment fees, I was told these were rejected because the education allowance is only for K-12. State also told me they would not reimburse me for the cost-constructed flight I booked for my consultations in D.C. that were canceled because of the RIF.

While we have since retrieved our vehicle and our unaccompanied air baggage (UAB) shipment, the department will not return our furnishings (household effects, or HHE) until I have separation orders, which I cannot receive because we don't have a permanent address. We don't have housing as I need to find full-time employment and my future job will dictate where in the U.S. we will reside. I can't list my temporary address for my separation address, because I am unable to receive all of the furnishings we shipped for an unfurnished housing assignment where we currently are staying with extended family.

I joined the department as a Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Undergraduate Fellow as a sophomore in college. My six tours have included service in the highest danger post outside the Middle East, as a staff assistant in the Executive Secretariat, and as President Trump's control officer. In every assignment at State, I earned awards, including a nomination for the departmentwide One Team award and selection to participate in the Secretary's Leadership Seminar, a yearlong executive program with the Harvard Business School to develop the department's next generation of leaders.

It has been the honor of a lifetime representing the American people and advancing our political and commercial interests around the world. I'm devastated to lose my dream career, pension, and community of incredible colleagues around the world.

—State FSO

We're Never Truly Closed

As a public diplomacy officer, I have saved countless vulnerable Americans from sending tens of thousands of dollars to scammers. Scammers always ramp up the pressure during holidays because they think the embassy will be closed and no one will respond to U.S. citizens who contact us.

The reality: We're never truly closed.

The scammers didn't know that I brought my laptop to every holiday gathering in the embassy community. I would open up the embassy's Facebook Messenger and wait for the messages to start pinging. They always did.

U.S. citizens reached out because they'd been told they needed to send money urgently—usually at least \$10,000—because their fiancée had been in an accident on the way to the airport to fly to America to meet them. Or the fiancée's ship had been shot up by pirates, and if they didn't send money to fix it, there would be an oil spill. Or their boyfriend had completed a peacekeeping mission but the U.S. military wouldn't pay for their flight home, so the U.S. citizen had to send money. It was the same handful of fake stories, over and over again.

I would take the time to go through the story and gently point out the ways it didn't make sense, sometimes coordinating with the duty officer or directing them to law enforcement resources to make sure we did everything possible to prevent the caller from losing their money to heartless scammers.

I've been promoted steadily up the ranks, have earned awards and prestigious stretch assignments based on my performance and leadership, and have worked tirelessly 365 days a year to protect our country and its citizens. None of that mattered. I was told I'm worthless, lazy, and useless simply because I was in a domestic assignment—a requirement for consideration for the Senior Foreign Service.

—State FSO

Ensuring Scientific Superiority

President Trump's policy agenda includes advancing U.S. leadership and domination in emerging technology. I have led our engagement with key countries like the U.K., Ireland, and France, including on the specific technologies this administration cares about: quantum, AI, and biotech. I'm able to translate our scientists' deep knowledge of emerging technologies into readable policy—a needed skill as we work to ensure the United States (not China) is the global leader in these fields.

But I was RIFed.

—State FSO ■

The Life and Tragic Fate of a Young U.S. Consul

Felix H. Suau, the U.S. consul in Guadeloupe, was only 27 and had served for just three years when he perished in the earthquake of 1843.

BY SÉBASTIEN PERROT-MINNOT

The story of how Thomas T. Prentis, U.S. consul in St. Pierre, Martinique, died in the volcanic disaster of May 8, 1902, is quite famous. The general public, however, knows much less of the story of the other American consul to fall victim to earth's convulsions in the French West Indies: Felix Henry Suau.

He lost his life in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, following the catastrophic earthquake of February 8, 1843, and after having served in his consular duties for nearly three years. I felt it was important to contribute to reviving, through this article, the memory of this dedicated and unfortunate civil servant.



Sébastien Perrot-Minnot, PhD, is an archaeologist, a member of the Guadeloupe Historical Society, and a member of the board of the Martinique Historical Society. In addition, he is honorary consul emeritus of Guatemala, a member of the board of the Union of Honorary Consuls in France, and an associate member of AFSA.

Felix H. Suau was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1815 to French parents who were naturalized American citizens: Pierre “Peter” Suau, from Bordeaux in southwestern France, and Rose Antoinette Champy, a native of Guadeloupe who died in Charleston in 1828.

Peter, a merchant, was appointed U.S. consular and commercial agent in Pointe-à-Pitre, the main port of the French colony of Guadeloupe, in 1830 and consul in the same city four years later. He was thus the first official installed by Washington in Pointe-à-Pitre. He served as consul there until his death on May 17, 1838, at the age of 73.

To succeed him, U.S. President Martin Van Buren appointed his son, Felix H. Suau, on October 12 of that year.

The corresponding documents were not delivered to the appointee until five months later, however, after the young Suau had written to “a member of Congress.” Further delays were caused by personal problems, notably health, and he did not forward his consular bond to the State Department until January 1840. Leaving Charleston on February 13, 1840, aboard

A letter from Felix H. Suau to Secretary of State John Forsyth dated November 14, 1839, informs the State Department of his plans and regrets the “unavoidable” delay.

the brig *Alpha*, he arrived in Pointe-à-Pitre on March 5. He was then presented with his exequatur, granted by the King of the French, Louis Philippe I.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Forsyth, dated February 13, 1840, Suau’s former employer in Charleston wrote that Suau had always conducted himself as “a strictly moral and honest young man.” The correspondence of the second U.S. consul in Pointe-à-Pitre with the department reveals that he was a diligent civil servant.

On May 5, 1840, in accordance with U.S. Foreign Service regulations, Suau drew up an inventory of the consulate’s property, noting the absence of the U.S. flag and arms, to be received five months later. He worked mainly in connection with the then-significant maritime trade between the United States and Guadeloupe but was also called on to assist American citizens (in particular, sailors having problems with the colony’s authorities).

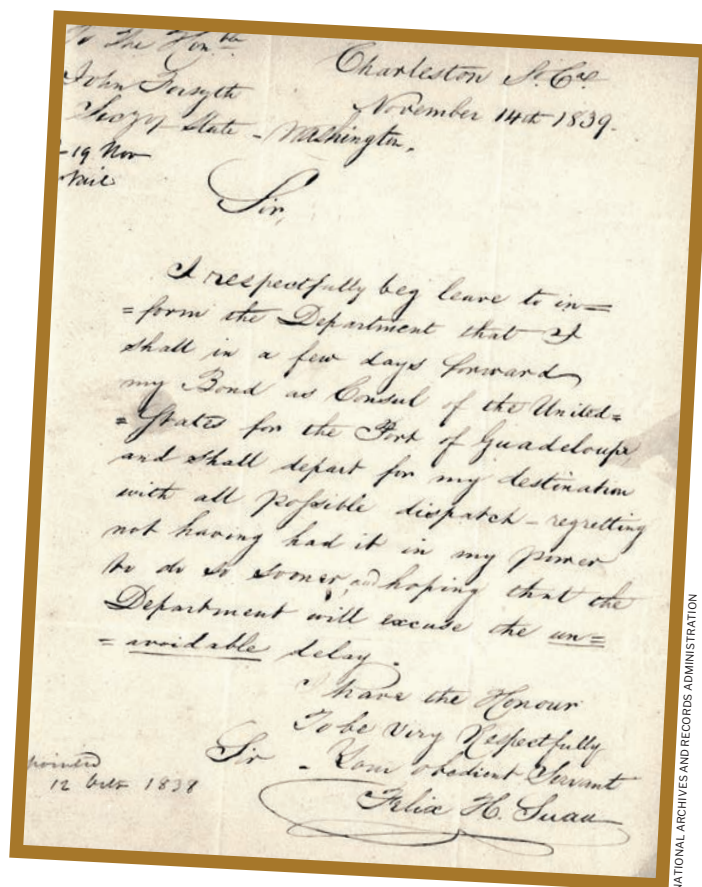
At the same time, Suau worked as clerk to a French firm of ship brokers, whose associates included his brother Henry Amand. It should be noted that his income as U.S. consul was not very high: He received no salary from Washington and had to earn revenue from certain paid acts and services related to maritime traffic.



During his consular career, Suau saw his reputation attacked by a U.S. Merchant Marine captain, George Howland. In a letter dated April 16, 1842, sent to Secretary of the Treasury Walter Forward and referred to the State Department, Howland accused the consul of charging him undue sums and, more generally, of abusing his office, lacking loyalty to the United States, and demonstrating incompetence. “He is very young and unexperimented,” Howland declared, going so far as to call for the official’s replacement.

Secretary of State Daniel Webster replied on May 2—but only on the question of the allegedly unjustified expenses and largely rejecting the claims made in this regard. As for the captain’s most severe accusations, they are totally unsupported by the other historical sources available on Suau.

Another incident worth mentioning occurred in 1841, when a man introducing himself as “Colonel” Monroe Edwards gave the consul a letter purportedly from former Secretary of State Forsyth. The Secretary asked Suau to lend his full support to this “gentleman of the highest respectability” traveling on “business.”



The following year, however, Suau read newspaper reports of the arrest in the United States of Edwards, who was actually a slave trader, forger, and swindler. Forsyth’s letter of recommendation was clearly a forgery, which the conscientious consul did not fail to point out to Secretary Webster.



Yet Suau’s consular mission is most notable for its tragic ending. The young civil servant was in Pointe-à-Pitre on the morning of February 8, 1843, when a powerful earthquake devastated the city, then home to some 22,000 inhabitants. With an estimated magnitude of around 8.5 on the Richter scale, this earthquake had its epicenter between Guadeloupe and Antigua and was felt from the north of South America to the north of the United States. It triggered a gigantic fire in Pointe-à-Pitre, further exacerbating the disaster. As a result, between 1,500 and 4,000 people are believed to have perished in the city.

In a February 12, 1843, letter to Secretary Webster, the U.S. consul in Antigua, Richard S. Higinbotham, stated: “A French ship of war arrived here this morning from Guadeloupe and reports that the once beautiful town of Pointe-à-Pitre is now a heap of ruins and about three to four thousand persons supposed to have perished.”

On February 16, his colleague in St. Pierre, Martinique, Philip A. de Crény, wrote in a missive to the same recipient: “Among the victims [of the earthquake], I regret to be obliged to announce



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF FRANCE

Published in *L'illustration* on March 18, 1843, this engraving shows the destruction of Pointe-à-Pitre by the earthquake of February 8.

Felix H. Suau Esq., United States Consul for the Island of Guadeloupe, who being severely wounded was obliged to have one of his legs amputated, but did not survive the operation."

A U.S. Merchant Marine captain who arrived in the martyred city on February 9, John G. Dillingham, indicated in a letter to his wife three days later that Consul Suau was the only American victim of the cataclysm, but we must be cautious on this point: It is known that several Americans were in Pointe-à-Pitre the day before.

In any case, Dillingham's words are not contradicted by the (very partial) register of deaths linked to the earthquake and fire, drawn up by the municipality of Pointe-à-Pitre on February 26. According to this document, Felix Henry Suau died on February 8 aboard the American brig *Rival*; he was 27 years old and single.



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF FRANCE

This map of Pointe-à-Pitre was published in the French magazine *L'illustration* on March 25, 1843.

The following month, news of the disaster spread through the U.S. press, and some articles reported Suau's death. For example, we can read in the March 17, 1843, edition of Boston's weekly newspaper *The Liberator* that "among the killed is the American Consul. He was taken from under the ruins with both legs broken and put on board an American vessel in the harbor, but died the next day" (in fact, he must have died on the night of February 8).

The fate of the consul's remains is unfortunately unknown, but they were probably buried in Pointe-à-Pitre.



The terrible toll of the earthquake in Guadeloupe prompted a wave of international solidarity, including in the United States. Pointe-à-Pitre was gradually rebuilt, and its

port resumed commercial activity. As early as May 1843, U.S. President John Tyler appointed a new consul for the city: John W. Fisher, who took up his post in October.

In this geologically unstable and meteorologically turbulent region of the Caribbean, the U.S. consulate in Pointe-à-Pitre was confronted with other natural disasters. In particular, its building as well as the residence of the head of mission were destroyed by the Okeechobee Hurricane in September 1928 (but then-Consul William H. Hunt survived). The consular post was definitively closed the following year, after almost a century of existence.

As for the unlucky consul Felix H. Suau, his story has faded over time but remains linked to that of the 1843 disaster. Fortunately, as the result of diligent research by several AFSA members, his name was inscribed on the AFSA Memorial Plaques in the C Street lobby of the Harry S Truman Building in 2021. Researchers had identified a total of 56 diplomats and consular officers dating back to 1794, whose deaths were



This engraving depicts Pointe-à-Pitre before the earthquake of February 8, 1843, and was published in a booklet in Naples, Italy, March 1843.

GUADELOUPE DEPARTMENTAL ARCHIVES

unknown when AFSA unveiled the original plaque in 1933. The AFSA plaques honor Foreign Service members and pre-1924 diplomats and consular officers who died under circumstances distinctive to overseas service for the U.S. government and American people—and the young consul, Felix H. Suau, is now among them. ■



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State tax provisions will be available to members on the AFSA website.



www.afsa.org/taxguide



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2025 AFSA Awards Honor Outstanding Performance and Constructive Dissent

AFSA is proud to announce the winners of the 2025 AFSA Awards, recognizing outstanding achievement, constructive dissent, and exemplary service across the Foreign Service community.

• **Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award:**

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield

• **Foreign Service Champions Award:** Virginia State Senator Tara Durant (R-Va.) and Delegate Paul E. Krizek (D-Va.)

• **Nelson B. Delavan Award:** Mina Raass-Dana
• **M. Juanita Guess Award:** Jiana Leonard

• **Award for Achievement and Contributions to the Association:** Vivian S. Walker

• **Group Exemplary Performance Award:** Jahari Fraser, Nikki Gamer, Christine Miele, Erin Oliver, Sharon Papp, Nadja Ruzica, Raeka Safai, and Kim Sullivan

• **Avis Bohlen Award:** Jane Thompson

• **Mark Palmer Award:** Nora S. Brito

• **Christian A. Herter Award:** Carrie Muntean

• **William R. Rivkin Award:** Eric Burkett, Andrea Capellán, Jessica Carlson, Andrea Cristancho, Abtin

Forghani, Sam Kraegel, R. Clark Pearson, Joshua Schramm, Meghan Waters, and Heather Wirick

• **Posthumous Constructive Dissent Award:** Rives Childs, Raymond Geist, Ambassador Leland Harrison, Minister Herschel Johnson, Roswell McClelland, George Messersmith, Paul Squire, Myles Standish, Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt, Myron Taylor, Pinkney Tuck, and George Waller.

Full coverage and profiles of this year's honorees will appear in the January-February 2026 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*. ■

CALENDAR

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

November 11
Veterans Day
AFSA Offices Closed

November 19
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

November 27-28
Thanksgiving Holiday
AFSA Offices Closed

December 3
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

December 22-26
Holiday Break
AFSA Offices Closed

January 1
New Year's Day
AFSA Offices Closed



AFSA President John Dinkelman presents on stage at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service during the 2025 AFSA Awards ceremony.



You Deserve Better

In September, around 1,300 of our colleagues, including some 240 members of the Foreign Service, marked their last days as department employees. These colleagues were all unfairly RIFed on July 11.

You may have noticed that I used the word “around.” I did so deliberately because there is much we don’t know about the RIFs given the department’s lack of transparency with AFSA and, more importantly, with all of you.

The silence we’re experiencing during such tectonic changes runs counter to what the department taught us in leadership training. There we learned about the importance of transparency from leadership during times of change.

Now, however, we find the rules on assignments, promotions, and recruitment transforming at a dizzying pace, with little communication about the department’s

intentions and objectives. The information vacuum has been filled with whispered conversations and Signal chats full of gallows humor and speculation about what comes next.

Despite the department’s failure to communicate, there is a lot we *do* know about the RIFs. Let’s start with the fact that we know every one of our RIFed colleagues deserves to be honored for their years, often decades, of dedicated service that made America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

They did this work tirelessly across the globe, with little or no recognition in Washington, often putting themselves and their families in harm’s way. Instead of being honored, they were dismissed in arbitrary and cruel ways.

To our RIFed colleagues: You deserve better. On behalf of your department colleagues, AFSA, and the

American people you have served, I thank you. We are profoundly sorry for how you have been treated.

We also know the RIFs had nothing to do with merit. This year’s promotion boards, which met as the RIF notices went out, recommended at least 10 of the RIFed employees for promotion. Recognized as the best of their competitive group, they were simultaneously told to leave. How does that make sense?

In addition, AFSA’s survey of RIFed officers reveals that 60 percent of the RIFed employees came from “competition groups” of just that one employee. In other words, more than half of the RIFs involved no competition whatsoever.

Juxtaposed against the rigorous competition embodied in the promotion boards, these single-person competition groups make a mockery of the premise that the RIFs were based on a

merit-based competition.

We also know that many of the RIFed employees had recently been selected for prestigious fellowships and detail opportunities. Some had successfully gone through the rigorous DCM/PO (Deputy Chief of Mission/Principal Officer) process and were preparing to head out to post, only to be RIFed because they were in the wrong office on May 29.

Finally, we know this: AFSA will stand up for the Foreign Service. We will continue to support our RIFed colleagues’ pursuit of legal recourse against their unjustified and baseless terminations.

At a time when many feel like they cannot speak, AFSA is your voice, calling attention to the unprecedented attacks on our entire Service. We will continue to advocate for you in every available venue, because we all deserve better. ■

The Challenge Campaign: Members Step Up

On October 1, AFSA announced that the goal of matching a \$100,000 donation from a retired Foreign Service officer had been met, following a short eight-week campaign. In fact, a total of \$126,404 was contributed to the Challenge Fund.

Upon hearing this good news, the donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, offered to match any donations above \$100,000. AFSA is so grateful to the incredibly generous donor who made this successful effort possible.

As a result of this challenge campaign, close to \$260,000 was collected in total, all of which goes directly to support AFSA operations, per the donor’s wishes.

We thank all who pitched in during this challenge—the first of its kind in AFSA’s history. If others are inspired to do the same, they will find a willing partner in AFSA.

Please contact AFSA Executive Director Ásgeir Sigfússon at asgeir@afsa.org if you’d like to make a challenge donation to support AFSA during these turbulent times. ■



Finding Strength in Community

It's been two months since I was forced into retirement. On September 2, the last of us were illegally and immorally forced out, save for a handful who continue to process our retirements, severances, and annual leave payouts, and finalize close-out actions.

To those doing this difficult work: You have my respect and gratitude. When your last day comes in March, please know your efforts were deeply appreciated.

Sitting here now in the home I always planned to return to (just not so soon), I am still figuring out what retirement means and what moving forward entails: working, volunteering, painting-by-number, sitting by the lake, aimlessly wandering—or rolling with whatever the day may bring.

I expect many of you would agree that one of the most important and positive aspects of working at USAID and in development was a sense of community. I worried that leaving the agency and moving across the country would also mean losing my community.

Happily, that fear was unfounded. What I have discovered, and I hope you have as well, is that my community is not only still there but growing stronger by the day. Having a community, and being part of one,

provides purpose; and realizing that mine remains intact has been an anchor during this transition.

I have always leaned more introverted, quiet in larger groups but more open with a close circle of friends. Now, however, I find myself engaging more broadly, connecting through Facebook and other online platforms, joining groups like Our USAID Community and the USAID Alumni Association, participating in my local Returned Peace Corps Volunteers chapter, and reconnecting with long-lost friends.

These communities, large and small, have given me opportunities to vent, commiserate, process, and plan. They have also allowed me to simply be myself, not just the “illegally fired FSO,” and to begin discovering who I am beyond my identity as a development worker. I will always be a USAID FSO, but I am also becoming something more, and my community is helping me get there.

You may think: “So what? I have so many more pressing worries than a privileged, retired white guy could ever imagine.” My situation is not yours, but I do believe that we will all find our way and that our communities will help us do so.

Look for and find solace in those around you—your

I will always be a USAID FSO, but I am also becoming something more, and my community is helping me get there.

big and small communities. While we may never return to the exact situations and relationships we had before we were RIFed, we may just find something new.

I am still a work in progress, but I am getting there.

My hope is that, in time, we will all find our new selves and be comfortable, even happy. Until then, know that you are not alone. Communities of like-minded people are waiting to welcome you. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meetings

June 18, 2025

The board agreed to award a 2025 AFSA Exemplary Performance Award jointly to eight individuals on AFSA's crisis response team.

The board agreed to award the 2025 William R. Rivkin Award for constructive dissent by a mid-level officer jointly to 10 individuals.

July 16, 2025

The board agreed to fund the gap in the AFSA president's salary between his annuity and his salary at retirement from November 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, once the president retires from public service.

The board appointed an Ad Hoc Volunteer Committee, to be chaired by Julie Nutter.

The board appointed an Ad Hoc Development Committee, to be chaired by Sue Saarnio.

The board agreed to vote at its August meeting to determine who will serve as conductor for upcoming Governing Board meetings, rotating that responsibility among board members by month. ■



Protecting Retiree Interests

We face several significant issues as we close out the year. The tumultuous ride since January has created solidarity among us retired Foreign Service AFSA members, united in protecting the national interest through a strong, nonpartisan Foreign Service.

It is inspiring to see the number of us who have stepped forward, working to increase AFSA membership, offering pro bono legal services, writing op-eds, and pitching in however we can. Thank you.

With the RIFs and early retirements, as well as refusal of most foreign affairs agencies to withhold dues, our numbers have dropped dramatically—from 17,000 in December 2024 to about 12,000 in September 2025. Thanks to

years of sound financial and contingency planning and some modest cost-cutting, we have managed to provide the same level of service in 2025 as in prior years.

We continue to reach out to former members, many of whom are unaware that their membership has lapsed, and we are confident that our numbers will continue to rise.

AFSA alumni volunteers have been at the heart of this effort. So far, 25 alumni volunteers have made more than 300 phone calls. Since launching the phone bank, both alumni membership inquiries and renewal requests have increased steadily.

As you may have read, the administration no longer recognizes AFSA as a union representing most Foreign Service members. Yet, as we

have for the past 100 years, we continue to represent and defend our members, including retirees, as a professional organization. That commitment has not changed.

Our general counsel continues to provide legal advice on retirement-related issues. Our counselor for retirees still goes to bat for you when bureaucratic challenges arise. And I, along with our two retiree representatives, Julie Nutter and Michael Kirby, look after your interests by ensuring that retiree perspectives are considered in AFSA's policies and plans.

This summer's debate over the budget reconciliation bill included provisions that could affect pensions, health insurance, and other elements of federal retire-

ment. Thanks to the efforts of our advocacy team, those provisions were not included in the final version.

Next, Congress is considering a State Department Authorization Act and possibly even a rewrite of the Foreign Service Act. If enacted, these could institute profound changes for current Foreign Service members. Whether they will affect retirees remains unclear, but we are watching the situation closely to keep you informed.

Finally, for members who have recently left active service, AFSA offers a robust array of useful webinars covering many of the challenges in your new life. To find the most recent AFSA webinars, please visit <https://afsa.org/alumni-retirement-resources>. ■

AFSA Welcomes New Counselor for Alumni and Retirees

AFSA is pleased to welcome Brian Himmelsteib as the new counselor for alumni and retirees.

Brian joined AFSA after a 20-year career with the U.S. Foreign Service. Brian's career focused on East Asia and the Pacific, with tours as head of the management section in Singapore; Laos; Osaka-Kobe, Japan; and Surabaya, Indonesia.

Brian served two tours in the State Department Operations Center, one as a watch officer, and one as a manager of the watch, as well as a tour on the Korea Desk. His last assignment was at the Foreign Service

Institute as the deputy head of the School of Language Studies, where he helped shepherd major changes to the language exam.

Brian entered the Foreign Service with Chinese and later learned Indonesian, Japanese, and Lao. He grew up in northern New Jersey and graduated from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Prior to the Foreign Service, Brian held several jobs, including cruise director on a Yangzi River cruise ship.

Brian and his two children root for the Ohio State Buckeyes and, if given a choice, would take a win against their northern neighbor over a national championship. ■



Brian Himmelsteib

Honoring Fallen Colleagues

At its September 17, 2025, meeting, the AFSA Governing Board approved the addition of three names to the Virtual AFSA Memorial Plaque. These three Foreign Service officers, all of whom died overseas while serving with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), are **Francis P. Corrigan Jr.**, who died in an airplane crash during official travel in Laos in 1961; **William H. Lewis**, who died of cerebral malaria in Ghana in 1963; and **Wayne A. Wilcox**, who died in an airplane crash during official travel in France in 1974.

Their names were not inscribed on the AFSA Memorial Plaques at the time of their deaths because AFSA had adopted more

restrictive inscription criteria at that time. In 2001 AFSA restored the more inclusive criteria dating from the plaque's inception in 1933 but did not review the names on the USIA Memorial Wall, which had been moved to the State Department's C Street lobby in 1999, to determine if all who now qualified had been honored by AFSA.

AFSA Awards and Plaques Committee chair John Naland and volunteer researcher FSO Lindsay Henderson recently conducted that review, prompting the addition of the three fallen USIA colleagues to the virtual plaque.

In 2021 AFSA decided to honor any newly discovered deaths from past

decades on a virtual plaque to save space on the physical plaques for the names of current and future Foreign Service members who die in circumstances distinctive to overseas service. Eight colleagues are now honored on the virtual plaque.

Anticipating that researchers in coming years will discover additional qualifying deaths from past decades, the Governing Board also instructed AFSA staff to inform a future board if the number of names on the virtual plaque

ever reaches 26, enough to fill one of the three currently blank plaques in the C Street lobby.

If in the intervening years relatively few additional contemporary deaths have been inscribed on the physical plaques, a future Governing Board may choose to approve inscription of the 26 virtual plaque names in chronological order on one of the blank physical plaques.

To see the virtual plaque, visit <https://afsa.org/virtual-afsa-memorial-plaque>. ■

AFSA Responds to FSOT Changes

On September 5, the State Department announced major updates to the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT).

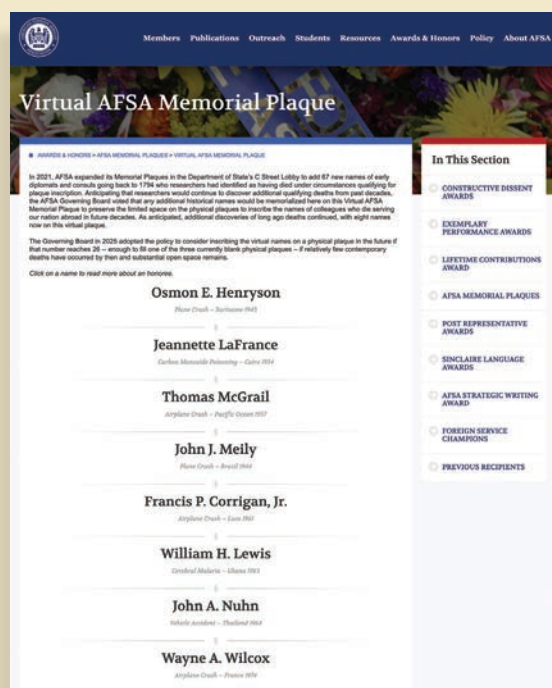
The updated exam, scheduled to be administered for the first time October 18-25, will feature a new logic and reasoning section, discontinue the situational judgment section and personal narrative essays, and refine the job knowledge and English expression portions to better align with job requirements.

In a press release on the same day, AFSA strongly objected to one element of the rollout: the department's new requirement that all candidates currently on the Foreign Service Officer register must retake the FSOT to remain eligible for selection.

AFSA stated that the abrupt, retroactive change "abandons merit-based principles while putting an unfair burden on those who have already satisfied all the requirements to get into the Service."

AFSA warned that this reversal undermines trust in the fairness and consistency of the hiring process, sending the message that "rules change without warning" and that "merit matters only when convenient."

To read the full release, visit <https://afsa.org/press>. ■



The Myth of Merit: Insights from AFSA's RIF Survey

Following the State Department reductions in force (RIFs) on July 11, AFSA invited its members to participate in a survey to gather data about those who were affected.

Altogether we heard from 250 respondents, 212 of whom affirmed they had received a RIF notice. Eighteen were eliminated for other reasons (e.g., not State Department, not Foreign Service, already retired), leaving a total of 194 State RIF respondents.

All data is self-reported, and AFSA is unable to independently verify the responses. The survey does not include Civil Service RIFs, which exceeded 1,000 people and had a substantial effect on numerous bureaus and offices.

Neither does it include many broken detail assignments (upward of 200) or the follow-on impact of posts and bureaus that have lost employees scheduled to rotate into their new positions this summer.

Demographics. Of the 194 respondents, 96 are female, 96 are male, and the remainder did not specify. Thirteen identified as Black (7 percent), 17 identified as Asian (8 percent), 18 identified as Hispanic (9 percent), 131 identified as white (68 percent), six identified as multiracial (3 percent), and the remainder had other responses. Twenty self-identified as veterans.

Workforce Distribution. Among respondents, 166 are generalists and 26 are specialists. This is a much higher percentage of generalists than found in the broader State population, where the usual breakdown is roughly 60/40 percent between the two groups.

Among the generalists who responded, 26 were consular coned, 40 were economic coned, 20 were management coned, 48 were public diplomacy (PD) coned, 30 were political coned, and the remainder had other responses.

Compared with the breakdown of the actual generalist population, the number of consular respondents was lower (16 percent of survey respondents versus 20 percent of the overall workforce), management respondents were also slightly lower (12 percent of survey versus 15 percent overall), the number of political respondents was quite a bit lower (18 percent of survey versus 27 percent

overall), the number of economic respondents was slightly higher (24 percent of survey versus 19 percent overall), and PD was several points higher (29 percent of survey versus 19 percent overall).

The higher numbers for economic and PD officers are consistent with the offices that were eliminated, which were largely economics and energy offices together with the public affairs sections in several bureaus.

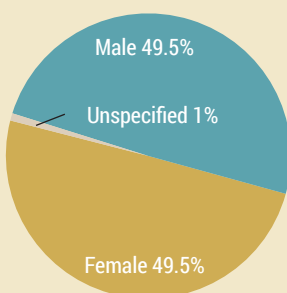
Among the specialists, 10 were diplomatic technology (DT; 38 percent of the respondents versus 17 percent of the FS population), five were office management specialists (OMS; 19 percent versus 13 percent), and seven were security engineering officers (SEO; 27 percent versus 8 percent). The remainder were spread among several other specialties.

These suggest that the numbers in DT and SEO were disproportionate to the specialist population, but it should be noted that the number of specialists who responded to the survey was low, so the results

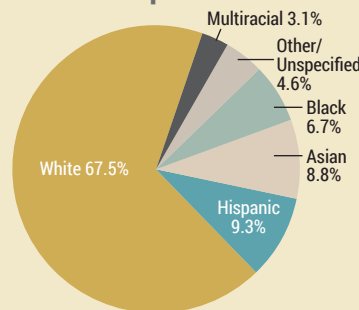
are based on limited data and may not accurately reflect the broader FS population.

In terms of grade distribution, 23 were Senior Foreign Service (OC, MC, and CM; 12 percent of survey versus 7 percent in the FS population), 48 were FS-1 (25 percent of

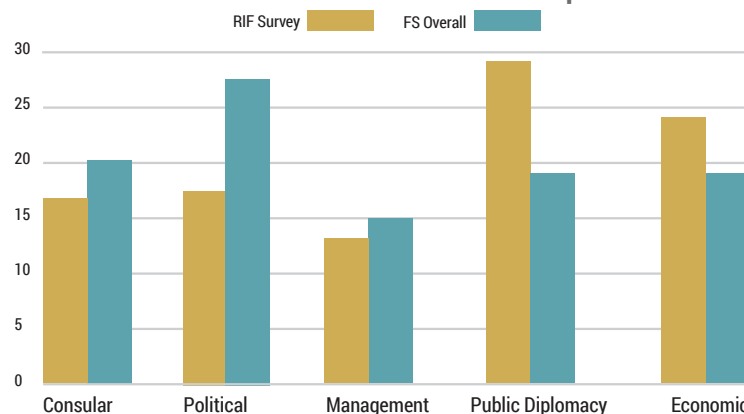
Gender Distribution of RIF Respondents



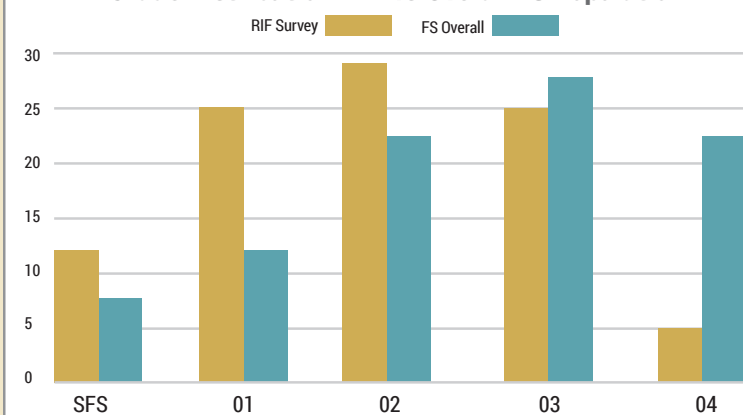
Race Distribution of RIF Respondents



Generalist Cones: RIF vs Overall FS Population



Grade Distribution: RIF vs Overall FS Population



survey versus 11 percent in population), 57 were FS-2 (29 percent of survey versus 22 percent in population), 48 were FS-3 (25 percent of survey versus 27 percent in population), and 10 were FS-4 (5 percent of survey versus 22 percent in population).

The net result is that SFS, FS-1, and FS-2 are overrepresented; this is consistent with a plan that did not target most specialists and also largely left out untenured officers.

Assignment Patterns. A common question we have heard at AFSA is whether employees on DETOs (domestic employees teleworking overseas), LWOP (leave without pay), or over-complement were more likely to be RIFed.

Among the 194 respondents, 19 were on DETOs, three were on LWOP, and one was reported to be on over-complement. While the number of DETOs seems high compared to the overall numbers at the department, those DETOs who identified an office were associated with bureaus/offices experiencing widespread cuts, making it unlikely that individuals on DETOs were specifically targeted.

Single RIF Groups. Only a few days before the original planned RIF date in late June, the department, without consultation with AFSA, unilaterally changed the RIF procedures that had been in place following extended consultations in the mid-1990s.

The pre-2025 procedures had developed a complicated point system for RIFs based on factors such as length of service, selection panel results, languages, and veteran status. These earlier procedures had specifically stated that RIFs “would not be limited to a specific post, region, or bureau.”

In the past, RIF groups were established based on skill codes, cones, and grades on a worldwide basis. The changes instituted in June threw out this system and made the office of assignment the key factor in determining competition groups.

More than half of respondents who received RIF letters

(118 or 61 percent) were the only members of their RIF competition groups, thus making a point system meaningless. If we remove the survey respondents who did not answer the question about the size of their RIF group, the percentage climbs to 69 percent. Thus, at least two-thirds were the only people in their RIF competition groups.

Most of the remaining respondents were in groups of two to four, and in most of these cases, all members of the group were RIFed.

Overall, then, the data does not back up department assertions, including Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Michael Rigas’ testimony before Congress on July 15 and 16, that RIF decisions were based on “merit system principles.” Instead, RIF groups were clearly so narrowly drawn to make RIFs in most cases inevitable.

Offices Not Notified to Congress. While the administration’s intentions to carry out RIFs in some offices—including in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO); Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM); Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL); and Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs (E Bureau)—were telegraphed well in advance, many offices were never flagged publicly or notified to Congress in any meaningful way.

AFSA has identified several offices (CA/EX, EB/IFD/OMA, EB/TPN/MTA, GTM/ER, GTM/TAC/TEC, DS/CTW/TIE, and OBO/OPS/AM) that were listed in the Congressional Notification (CN) as due for “No Significant Change” but that nevertheless experienced substantial FS layoffs. Unofficial data AFSA has seen confirms there were substantial Civil Service layoffs in these same offices.

(AFSA has also heard from numerous offices reporting that they were informally told that their jobs would be preserved despite planned mergers with other offices, but this sadly proved not to be the case. The nature of these reports, however, is such that they cannot be confirmed with published sources.)

Conclusion. AFSA’s data provide only a partial picture of the July 11 RIFs. As the State Department is unwilling to share its data, the picture will necessarily be incomplete. There have been anecdotes of specific functions being cut precipitously, including the Office of Casualty Assistance and offices that process transfer orders, the Management Support Unit, and Diplomats in Residence.

The real effect on the operations of the department, as well as the influence on U.S. foreign policy, will play out in the coming months and years.

—Lisa Heller,
AFSA Director of Professional Policy Issues

AFSA Announces 2025 High School Essay Contest Winner

AFSA is proud to announce that Jackson Simmons-Furlati, a rising junior in the Dos Pueblos Engineering Academy in Goleta, Calif., is the winner of the 2025 AFSA National High School Essay Contest. The prize includes a funded Semester at Sea in college, \$2,500, and a trip to Washington, D.C.

His essay, “Vietnam’s Foreign Service Legacy: Shaping Trump’s 2025 Diplomacy,” explores the Vietnam War as a turning point in U.S. foreign policy and examines how its diplomatic lessons continue to inform, and sometimes clash with, current approaches to global challenges.

Outside the classroom, Jackson is passionate about food justice and environmental policy. He leads a student initiative that grows hydroponic lettuce and delivers 100 free salads each week to his school community.

He is also a pianist in a classical trio, a Yale Young Global Scholar, and a Carnegie Young Leaders for Civic Preparedness fellow. This past summer, he spoke at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice as part of Refuse and Reuse, a youth-led group working to eliminate single-use plastics in schools.

During his award trip to Washington, D.C., Jackson met with Ambassador Daniel J. Kritenbrink, former U.S.



Jackson Simmons-Furlati

ambassador to Vietnam and assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He also visited the Embassy of Vietnam for a briefing with Chief Political Officer Tran Chi Trung.

In addition, his schedule included a Foreign Service 101 session with AFSA Board Member Julie Nutter, lunch at Viet Kitchen with AFSA President John “Dink” Dinkelman, and a tour of DACOR Bacon House.

“Wisdom, experience, and facts should never be sidelined, canceled, or brushed off. In a world of hot takes, I’m learning to value honest conversation. The kind that asks more than it answers,” Jackson reflected on his win in a LinkedIn post.

This year’s runner-up is Anne Lee, and the judges also recognized eight honorable mentions: Alex Cox, Jack Zhang, James Obasiolu, Gilberto Moreno Flores, Atharv Gupta, Steven Jiang, Ethan Bai, and Jake Silberstein.

AFSA thanks all students who entered this year’s



Jackson meets with former Ambassador to Vietnam Daniel J. Kritenbrink.

contest as well as our valued educational partners, the National Student Leadership Conference and Semester at Sea.

You can read Jackson’s winning essay at <https://afsa.org/2025-high-school-essay-contest-winning-essay>. ■



Chief Political Officer Tran Chi Trung hosts Jackson at the Embassy of Vietnam.

Editorial Board Welcomes New Co-Chairs and Members



Jennifer Galt



Lynette Behnke



Lisa Venbrux



Kelly Adams-Smith



Katherine Ntiamoah

The Foreign Service Journal is pleased to announce that Ambassador Jennifer Zimdahl Galt and Lynette Behnke have been named co-chairs of the FSJ Editorial Board. Both bring extensive leadership experience and deep knowledge of the Foreign Service and the *FSJ* to their new roles.

We also warmly welcome three new members to the board: Kelly Adams-Smith, Lisa Venbrux, and Katherine Ntiamoah.

Amb. Galt previously served as U.S. ambassador to Mongolia and as principal officer in Guangzhou, among many other assignments across Asia and Europe since joining the Foreign Service in 1989. Before retiring in 2024, she served on the Board of Examiners in Washington, D.C. She has been a member of the FSJ Editorial Board since May 2024.

Lynette Behnke, a career Foreign Service officer since 2006, has been posted to Kyiv, London, Hungary,

and Haiti. She was head of the Republic of Korea and Mongolia unit in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2022 to 2024. From 2023 to 2025, she served as the AFSA Governing Board liaison to the FSJ Editorial Board before being elected earlier this year to join the editorial board as a regular member.

Kelly Adams-Smith, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, most recently served as deputy chief of mission (DCM) at the U.S. Mission to the European Union in Brussels.

She has also been chargé d'affaires and DCM in Prague, economic counselor in London, and deputy executive secretary at the White House National Security Council, in addition to earlier tours in Bulgaria, Estonia, and Russia. From 2019 to 2021, she was on the faculty of the National War College. A New Jersey native, she previously served on the FSJ Editorial Board from 2010

to 2011 and has contributed to two editions of AFSA's *Inside a U.S. Embassy* book.

Lisa Venbrux, currently cultural coordinator in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, has served overseas in Brasília, Mumbai, Beijing, and Tegucigalpa. Before joining the Foreign Service in 2010, she was a journalist in Brussels and Prague, covering technology, privacy, and global health issues, and leading the news division of *The Prague Post*. She holds degrees from New York University and the London School of Economics.

Katherine Ntiamoah served as a public diplomacy officer from September 2011 to September 2025. She held assignments in Mexico, Brunei, Belgium, Benin, Ghana, Pakistan, Singapore, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and at the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

She is married and a mother of three toddlers

and writes about identity, diplomacy, and the everyday moments that shape us at her Substack, *Still I Notice Everything*. A first-generation Ghanaian-American, she holds degrees from Indiana University Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies and the Josef Korbel School of Global and Public Affairs at the University of Denver. She speaks French and Spanish, and dabbles in Arabic.

We look forward to the leadership of Jennifer and Lynette as co-chairs, and to the insights and experience that Kelly, Lisa, and Katherine will contribute.

The *FSJ* would also like to thank outgoing board members David Bargueño and chair Vivian Walker for their years of service on the board.

In connection with her outstanding service to AFSA and the FSJ Editorial Board, Walker was this year's recipient of the AFSA Achievement and Contributions to the Association Award. ■

AFSA President Speaks at FARNOVA

At the September 18 Foreign Affairs Retirees of Northern Virginia (FARNOVA) luncheon in Fairfax, Va., AFSA President John “Dink” Dinkelman thanked members for their support during a time of extraordinary upheaval across foreign affairs agencies.

Since March, he noted, USAID has been dismantled, USAGM gutted, and on July 11 the State Department carried out its largest-ever single-day layoff, abruptly dismissing roughly 1,300 employees.

“The department targeted entire offices and officers ... no matter their tenure, performance, [or] whether they had an onward assignment,” Dinkelman recalled.

Dinkelman also told the audience about AFSA’s ongoing fight against a March executive order ending official union activity at State and USAID. With dues deductions halted, AFSA has been working to shift members to direct payment.

“Even if you are retired, you can make a difference in the profession to which we all dedicated our lives,” Dinkelman concluded. “AFSA needs you now to show that the Foreign Service is still worth fighting for.”

To rejoin AFSA, go to <https://afsa.org/stay-with-afsa>. ■

Service Disrupted Webinar Disorganized Diplomacy

AFSA’s “Service Disrupted” webinar series returned in September with a State Department–focused discussion on the scale and consequences of recent workforce cuts. Hosted by AFSA Communications and Outreach Director Nikki Gamer, the program featured AFSA President John “Dink” Dinkelman and AFSA State VP Rohit “Ro” Nepal.

Dinkelman and Nepal reviewed agency closures and department layoffs from earlier in the year, pointing out the human

impact (e.g., abrupt separations, loss of institutional knowledge and language skills), operational effects (e.g., disrupted handovers and “brain drain” in core functions), and the morale challenge for colleagues who remained.

Both speakers raised concerns about perceived politicization and cautioned that fear of reprisal may chill frank reporting.

The speakers also contrasted what Congress was told about a reorganization with the breadth of positions

ultimately affected, including functions far beyond the announced focus areas. Looking ahead, panelists warned of risks to consular readiness, crisis response, and regional expertise if attrition continues.

AFSA leaders outlined ongoing actions: litigation related to workforce rights, individual member representation, continued Hill engagement, and public education through AFSA’s

Service Disrupted campaign.

The program closed with a call to service and civic engagement. Dinkelman and Nepal encouraged members to share their stories, brief visiting congressional delegations, and help the public understand what diplomats do and why it matters.

A recording of the discussion is available on AFSA’s YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@AFSAtube>. ■

NEWS BRIEF

Protecting Members’ Rights

On October 10, AFSA’s Office of the General Counsel released information about protecting yourself from overly zealous disciplinary actions by the State Department.

To read this guidance, visit <https://afsa.org/recent-afsa-messages>. ■



AFSA Receives “Clean” Audit for Record 16th Year

Following another detailed audit process conducted by the accounting firm Gross Mendelsohn, AFSA is pleased to report its 16th straight audit result with an unmodified opinion, commonly referred to as a “clean” audit. The auditors presented the report at the Governing Board’s August meeting.

AFSA is not required to undergo annual audits by any laws or regulations, but we believe that being able to point to sound financial management and integrity in operations is important for both our members and any external stakeholders.

As AFSA enters a turbulent financial period, with plans to engage outside donors for significant support for the first time in the association’s history, this record will stand us in good stead as we make the case for the importance of helping AFSA stand up for the Foreign Service.

AFSA Executive Director Ásgeir Sigfússon said: “At this fraught moment, this confirmation of AFSA’s determination to shepherd our resources wisely and remain accountable to our members is very welcome. I expect that we will extend the streak to 17 years in 2026.”

AFSA will post the Form 990 tax documents and other relevant resources on its website in December. ■

AFSA Webinar

Understanding Market Volatility

On July 30, AFSA hosted a webinar on navigating today’s uncertain financial environment. The third in a series offered this year concerning member finances, the program was titled “Managing Emotions During Market Volatility.”

Organized by AFSA’s then-Counselor for Retirees Dolores Brown, the event featured financial planner William Carrington, who shared reflections on how Foreign Service members and retirees alike can approach market swings with confidence.

The discussion emphasized big-picture themes: the long-term nature of investing, the value of diversification, and the importance of aligning financial choices with personal goals and risk tolerance rather than reacting to headlines.

Members also heard practical considerations for retirement planning and how to keep perspective when markets fluctuate.

Carrington stressed that while volatility can be unsettling, it is also a normal part of the investing cycle. By staying disciplined and informed, members can better position themselves for long-term financial stability.

A recording of the full program is available to AFSA members at <https://afsa.org/afsa-videos>. ■

AFSA Webinar

MSPB Appeals 101

On August 14, AFSA hosted a practical webinar on navigating Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) appeals without counsel, moderated by AFSA Deputy General Counsel Raeka Safai and led by Danny Rosenthal of the law firm James & Hoffman.

Designed for Foreign Service members pursuing pro se appeals—instances in which

individuals represent themselves without an attorney—the session focused on how to start an appeal and what to expect after filing.

Rosenthal walked through the basics: using the MSPB’s e-Appeal system, the importance of filing within 30 days of separation, and the roles of administrative judges and the board. He highlighted

what typically follows an initial filing, such as discovery, pre-hearing conferences, and virtual hearings.

During the Q&A, members asked about timelines, consolidation of similar appeals, potential remedies (such as reinstatement, back pay, and restoration of benefits), and the possibility of securing counsel after filing.

Rosenthal concluded by pointing attendees to procedural resources, such as the MSPB rules and the *Judges’ Handbook*, to help pro se appellants prepare effectively.

A full recording of the event is available to AFSA members at <https://afsa.org/afsa-videos>. ■

Foreign Policy Insights at Chautauqua

From September 22 to 26, 2025, AFSA partnered with the Road Scholar program to present a weeklong series of foreign policy lectures at the historic Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York.

The 2025 program drew more than 140 participants from 25 U.S. states, with one traveler journeying from as far away as Perth, Australia.

Set against the backdrop of Chautauqua's rich tradition of intellectual engagement and the scenic lake of the same name, the series explored pressing global issues including U.S. foreign assistance, turmoil in the Middle East, Russia's aggres-

sion, and the realities of life in the Foreign Service.

This year's speakers included former AFSA President Ambassador Eric Rubin, Ambassador Eric Whitaker, Ambassador Jimmy Kolker, Molly Williamson, Roberta Mahoney, and Steve Herman, who returned for the third consecutive September to lecture on presidential-press relations from Washington to Trump and on the dire fate of U.S. public diplomacy.

The series remains a cornerstone of AFSA's outreach efforts to strengthen public understanding of the vital work performed by America's career diplomats. ■



Speakers at the 2025 AFSA–Road Scholar Chautauqua program. From left: Ambassador Eric Whitaker, Ambassador Eric Rubin, Roberta Mahoney, Ambassador Jimmy Kolker, Molly Williamson, and Steve Herman.

AFSA Hosts Member Meetup

On September 17, AFSA welcomed more than 150 members to headquarters for an evening of community and connection. The fall member mixer drew a lively crowd who gathered to enjoy themed cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and conversation with colleagues from across the Foreign Service community.

In addition to networking, attendees had the opportunity to sit for free professional headshots courtesy of AFSA.

AFSA President John “Dink” Dinkelman offered brief remarks during the event, highlighting the vital role of the Foreign Service and the resilience of its community, and emphasizing AFSA's ongoing commitment to supporting its members.

AFSA thanks the State Department Federal Credit Union for generously sponsoring the event, which made this gathering possible. We look forward to hosting more member meetups in the months ahead. ■



AFSA President John Dinkelman offers remarks to attendees on September 17, 2025.

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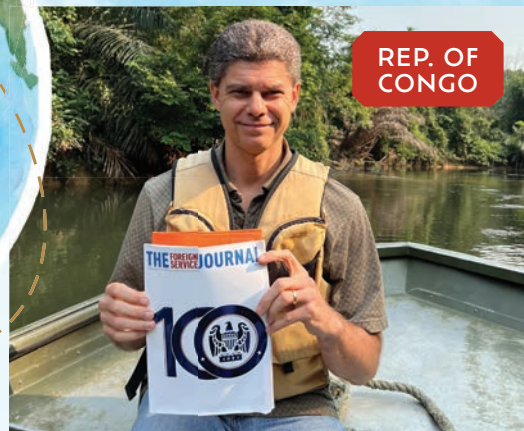
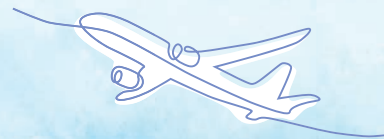
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Returning to U.S. Schools

A Guide to Transcripts and Smooth Transitions

Here's what's involved in aligning international school transcripts with the requirements of a U.S. public school.

BY REBECCA MCPHERSON

Transitions are familiar territory for Foreign Service families: packing up household items, attending farewell gatherings, and preparing for new assignments. These transitions come with a range of challenges such as choosing the right school for your children or trying to register without a permanent address.

One major concern can be aligning international school transcripts with the requirements of a U.S. public school, particularly for high school students.

The Global Community Liaison Office (GCLO) education and youth team understands the importance of facilitat-

ing a smooth academic transition and the complexities of placing students in the appropriate courses and grade levels upon their return to the United States.

The team took the opportunity to talk with administrators in Northern Virginia school districts as well as international guidance counselor Ryan Haynes and Regional Education Officer (REO) Andrew Hoover in the Office of Overseas Schools to provide guidance and tips to maneuver the transcript and transfer process successfully.

Understanding Transcripts

Academic transcripts serve as the official record of a student's academic journey and include course titles,

grades, credits earned, verification of course completion, standardized test scores, cumulative grade point average (GPA), and honors and award distinctions. They provide a chronological academic history of a student.

"It is important to note that transcripts don't necessarily tell the *whole* story of a student," notes Katie Server, family partnerships specialist for Fairfax County Public Schools. Server recommends that students share additional information that can help a school understand the larger picture of who they are as a student, such as asking teachers to write recommendation letters and providing details of extracurricular interests.

Creating a portfolio of the topics covered during a semester shows what was covered beyond the test scores; even submitting a sample of completed work can be helpful.

Being proactive by collecting and providing this information even before the international school sends the official



Rebecca McPherson has been a Foreign Service family member for 10 years, serving both overseas and domestically. She joined the Global Community Liaison Office in January 2020, first as the support services specialist and, in September 2021, as the education and youth program specialist. Prior to that, she was a biometrics facilitator in Manila and a community liaison office coordinator in Lusaka. She is currently on a domestic employees teleworking overseas (DETO) assignment while posted to Angola.

transcript can help with the enrollment process. Server adds that schools will also want to see attendance and disciplinary records.

Andrew Hoover, REO for East Asia and the Pacific, says it is important to understand the difference between official transcripts, which are produced after a semester is finished, and unofficial transcripts.

The official transcript reflects the student's completion of their courses of study. So, if the student leaves prior to the end of a semester, the transcript will be incomplete, and the student may get only a progress report or an "unofficial transcript" to take with them.

REOs and guidance counselors advise families to be flexible as the receiving

school will have to resolve any issues with course credits.

Transcript Evaluation

Since there is no universal system for translating and evaluating transcripts, aligning curriculum standards and coursework between international schools and U.S. public school systems can present complications.

The evaluation process often involves deciphering different grading systems. Grades can be letter-based or percentage-based, strictly pass/fail, narrative, or standards-based, and grading practices can vary depending on the policies of individual schools or teachers, as well as the overall academic performance of the class. These differences can complicate the

evaluation of an international transcript when transferring and assigning credits and determining appropriate course or grade placements in a U.S. school.

Course equivalency determinations and verification of the completed coursework, credit transfer limitations, and noted gaps in the sequential learning process, especially in math and foreign languages, are common challenges that can affect the student's placement outcome.

If the student is arriving from an international school in the Southern Hemisphere or is a midyear transfer, there may be questions as to the appropriate grade level to place them in. Standardized test scores may be missing, and records may be incomplete or delayed, causing a lapse in obtaining the official transcripts.



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The Role of Guidance Counselors and Regional Education REOs

Early and frequent communication with both sending and receiving schools is crucial for a smooth transition and for parents and students to advocate for proper credit assignment and class placement.

Working closely with guidance counselors from both schools and understanding their roles is vital. Counselors at the receiving school in the U.S. will review the core subjects (typically math, science, social studies, and language arts) to ensure they align with U.S.

Working closely with guidance counselors from both schools and understanding their roles is vital.

standards. They will also assess grades and test results to confirm whether the student has made appropriate progress and demonstrated academic growth.

Additionally, they will verify that the sending school is U.S.-accredited or that the transcript and academic records are authenticated by another educational

authority to validate the student's credentials.

Guidance counselors also look at attendance records, extracurricular involvement, standardized test scores, and evidence of consistent academic performance. Any evidence of disciplinary actions is also considered.

FROM THE JUNE 2025 FSJ EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

Earning American Credentials Abroad: The Options for Staying Overseas for College

BY LAUREN STEED

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

Or maybe you're not interested in spending four years to earn a degree you could in three or spending \$200,000 for a degree in the U.S. that could be nearly free overseas. ... Whatever your motivation, you're considering applying to universities outside the United States. But you're also worried about taking this road less traveled. And you worry that your international degree might not translate to a career in the United States.

There are several ways to enjoy an American university experience abroad while earning U.S.-recognized credentials. The most common option is to study abroad for one year or one semester as part

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

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

- Schools like the American University of Paris (AUP) or John Cabot University in Rome are private universities purposefully created to provide postsecondary American education options outside the United States. ...
- At the time of writing, 66 universities outside the U.S. offer degrees in English (or in host-country languages) that are accredited by one of the six Council for Higher Education Accreditation-recognized accrediting bodies in the U.S. ...

Lauren Steed, PhD, is an independent college consultant with more than 20 years of experience in postsecondary education. A Foreign Service family member, she is the author of College Conversations: 25 Discussions for High School Juniors and Their Families.



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They will review supplementary instructional materials and discuss concerns with the family before making a final evaluation and recommendation.

Ryan Haynes, director of Upper School Personal and Academic Counseling at Taipei American School, advises students to go a step further and communicate with the receiving school the courses they were planning to take the following year and share the course catalog and course descriptions.

If there are questions about course titles or content, Rebecca Sharp, executive director of student services in Falls Church City Public Schools (FCCPS), notes that providing a course syllabus or curriculum plan and course outline can help confirm the rigor and depth

REOs can help coordinate with international school counselors to facilitate the transcript transition.

of a subject and whether it is grade-appropriate.

The REOs can help coordinate with international school counselors to facilitate the transcript transition. As Andrew Hoover states, “We recognize there are transcript translation challenges—if you transition to the U.S., you, as the parent, may be responsible for managing the translation of the transcripts, and I don’t mean from a foreign language.”

The REOs meet with counselors during post visits and will consult with families so they know what questions to ask and how to prepare. In some cases, according to Hoover, the origin school may arrange for a high school student who leaves midsemester to do some kind of extended learning so that the student can enroll in a U.S. public high school and yet receive the final course credit from the origin school.

He also notes that it may be helpful

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ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH													
Fairfax Christian School, The	97	330	50/50	15	20	PK-12	AP	N	Limited	3	Y	Y	60,100-68,150 ^{abdeg}
Riverstone International School	97	315	52/48	32	12	PK-12	IB	Y	Y	9	Y	Y	18,000-55,000 ^b
Rochambeau The French International School	94	1295	46/54	NA	30	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	26,890-32,505 ^{ab}
JUNIOR HIGH/SENIOR HIGH													
New England Innovation Academy	94	120	67/32	25	12	6-12	NA	Y	Limited	40	Y	Limited	45,500-73,000 ^{ab}
Webb School, The	97	400	51/49	30	60	6-12	AP	Y	Limited	50	Y	N	57,100 ^{abc}
SENIOR HIGH													
Christchurch School	IFC	230	57/43	70	30	9-12	AP	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	68,200 ^d
EF Academy New York	88	250	40/60	98	90	9-12	AP/IB	N	Y	40.5	Y	N	46,200-76,100 ^{ab}
EF Academy Pasadena	88	250	54/46	85	75	9-12	AP	N	Y	32	Y	N	46,200-76,100 ^{ab}
Fountain Valley School of Colorado	99	230	50/50	70	27	9-12	AP	Y	Limited	80	Y	Limited	75,900 ^b
Foxcroft School	99	168	ALL GIRLS	70	20	9-12, PG	AP	Y	Y	43	Y	N	75,200 ^b
Madeira School, The	95	338	ALL GIRLS	51	13	9-PG	AP	y	Limited	14	N	N	74,500 ^b
St. Andrew's School	95	320	50/50	100	11	9-12	NA	Y	Limited	49	Y	Limited	66,400 ^{pdf}
St. Stephen's School	91	305	45/55	20	64	9-12	IB	Y	Limited	30	Y	Y	65,898 ^{abcf}
OVERSEAS													
Berlin Brandenburg International School	89	900	50/50	10	70	K-12	IB	N	Y	22	Y	N	52,500 ^c
EF Academy Oxford	88	125	42/58	100	100	11-12	IB	N	Limited	43	Y	N	65,000 ^b
Frankfurt International School	99	1800	50/50	NA	80	K-12	IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	11,744-29,608 ^{bc}
Leysin American School in Switzerland	89	300	50/50	100	85	7-12, PG	AP/IB	N	Limited	75	Y	N	128,000 ^{abd}
TASIS The American School in England	91	650	50/50	30	41	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	8	Y	N	68,000 ^{bcd}
HIGHER EDUCATION: COLLEGE/GRADUATE													
Chapman University	86	15	20/80	NA	20	PG	NA	Y	Y	40	Y	N	54,158 ^b
OTHER													
AAFSW	64	Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide: Publisher of <i>Raising Kids in the Foreign Service</i> . A volunteer organization that supports Foreign Service employees, spouses, partners, and members of household. Visit www.aafsw.org and FSHub.org.											
DACOR Bacon House Foundation	97	DACOR Bacon House Foundation offers Dreyfus Scholarships to children and grandchildren of Foreign Service officers and specialists studying at Yale or Hotchkiss. Contact dacor@dacorbacon.org or go to www.dacorbacon.oeg/scholarships_fellowships .											
FSYF	66	Foreign Service Youth Foundation: A support network for U.S. Foreign Service youth worldwide. Go to www.fsyf.org .											
GCLO	66	Global Community Liaison Office: Information and resources for Foreign Service families. Contact GCLOAskEducation@state.gov .											

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^eGap year ^fNeed-blind admissions; will meet full financial need ^gHost families

to share the origin school's high school profile to show what the learning experience is like as additional information for the new school.

IBDP and AP Considerations

For students coming from an IB Diploma Program (IBDP), careful examination is needed to align courses with those available at the new school. There could be continuity challenges if a student is in the middle of an IBDP because there are often differences between course offerings at schools.

Also, higher-level IBDP courses last for two years, so careful consideration must be made to ensure continuity.

Most AP classes are one year, so they do not pose a challenge to transcripts

Overall, when moving during high school, connecting early with the guidance counselor is highly recommended.

unless the student is moving during the school year.

If a student is planning to take several AP classes during high school, it is important to confirm the offering at the new school. If a school does *not* offer the course, it might be possible to find an authorized online AP course.

Overall, when moving during high school, connecting early with the guidance counselor to discuss these situa-

tions is highly recommended.

For families in the bidding process, Haynes suggests researching schools that have pivoted from traditional IB methods of integrated math and science to the U.S. standards of learning, where the courses are stand-alone (e.g., geometry, algebra 1 or 2, and sciences such as biology and chemistry).

This makes it easier should the student return to the U.S.



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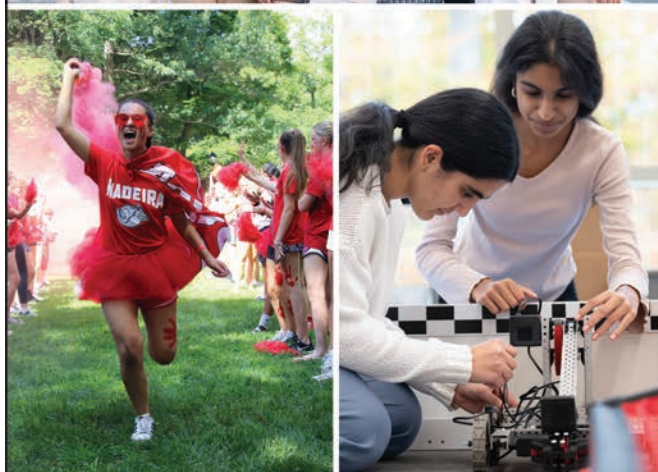
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Impact and Support

It is important to recognize the impact that these challenges may have on a student. Feeling pressure to adapt to a new school setting and prove their academic competency is not uncommon. Parents and schools can provide support by acknowledging how the transition affects the student. Academic advising and student support services are available to help.

Haynes points out that the goal is “leaving well to arrive well,” and that many schools offer transition programs or dedicated orientations to help both the students and parents. International guidance counselors familiar with Foreign Service students may share the principles of the stages of transition and the importance of building a RAFT or using a RAKE.

The RAFT is about leaving well: Reconciliation, Affirmations, Farewells, and Think Destination. It involves making time to resolve any conflicts or unfinished projects, showing gratitude and saying thank you, prioritizing proper goodbyes, getting excited for a new experience, and preparing for what lies ahead.

Using the RAKE model—Reconciliation, Affirmation, Keep in Touch, and Explore—helps guide and encourage students and parents to arrive well.

“The three most important things to provide a receiving school in the U.S. are the names of courses, credits awarded, and grades earned,” says Sharp. “It is also imperative for parents and students to review the state graduation requirements to make sure the student is in line for an on-time graduation.”

Sharp also notes that FCCPS, for example, will start the registration process without a permanent address on file since they are accustomed to working with Foreign Service families.

Parents can begin communicating with FCCPS schools two to four

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weeks ahead of the official registration date, and students may opt to apply to and attend an IB school if there is no program within the boundary they are zoned for, if space is available.

In March 2025, Senate Bill 1244 became law in the state of Virginia. The bill, which went into effect on July 1, provides additional support to ease transitions for returning families and expands the provisions of law relating to educational opportunities for students of certain federal employees who are transferring from a school in a foreign country to a school division in the Commonwealth by establishing definitions for the terms “foreign education agency” and “sending country.” (See page 67 of the April-May *FSJ* for more.)

The bill amends Virginia’s education code to simplify school enrollment for children of federal employees returning from abroad, allowing provisional enrollment with unofficial records, honoring previous educational placements, and promoting the on-time graduation of students if similar coursework has been completed in the sending country.

School transitions and transcript evaluations can be successfully maneuvered with proactive communication from students and parents and support from both schools involved in the process.

With the right resources and timely preparation, families can experience smoother transitions and help their children to succeed in a new academic environment. ■

Resources

- GCLO Education and Youth web pages: <https://www.state.gov/global-community-liaison-office/education-and-youth/>
- Office of Overseas Schools Parent Resources: <https://www.state.gov/resources-office-of-overseas-schools#parents>
- Senate Bill (SB 1244) Expansion of Policies to Students Transferring from Foreign Countries: <https://legiscan.com/VA/text/SB1244/2025>
- *Third Culture Kids* (3rd ed.), by David C. Pollock, Ruth Van Reken, and Michael Pollock: <https://amzn.to/49cxpBK>



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- Public and Private Schools in the DC Area

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College Options: Community College with a Guaranteed Transfer Program
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THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

A Hero of Our Time

WILLIAM CALDWELL HARROP

1929-2025

BY TOM BOYATT

In the 50 years since the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), under the leadership of Chairman Bill Harrop, defeated the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) to become the Foreign Service union, scores of AFSA leaders and supporters have worked to strengthen AFSA in all its dimensions. The goal was and is to have the means to protect AFSA and the U.S. Foreign Service against any “existential threat.” That term was never precisely defined, so no one had a clear picture of what it would look like. Now we know.

In late March of this year, the Trump administration published a presidential executive order (EO), “Exclusions from Federal Labor-Management Relations Programs,” that purports to exclude all subdivisions of the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development from Chapter 10 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, pertaining to labor management relations, based on alleged national security reasons. The EO led to the “decertification” of AFSA as the union for State and USAID Foreign Service employees, eliminated dues check-off, and asserted that all union contracts with AFSA were null and void.

AFSA immediately sued on the basis that the Trump administration’s actions were illegal and unconstitutional. In passing Chapter 10 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, both houses of Congress, as well as the then president who signed the law, deemed that collective bargaining and representation by a union were in the public interest. It can only be nullified or amended by the same due process of law. An executive order alone does not have the force of law since the legislative branch is excluded from the process. The EO is thus manifestly unconstitutional.

The D.C. Federal District Court granted AFSA a preliminary injunction, finding that the EO was likely to cause irreparable harm to AFSA and that AFSA was likely to prevail on the merits of its case. The administration appealed that decision to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, and it was temporarily stayed. AFSA appealed to the full Court of Appeals, which unfortunately upheld the stay. The fight continues, and a decision is expected later this year. The case will very likely go to the Supreme Court.

Fortunately, AFSA is not completely outgunned in this fight. In fact, we are a powerhouse. AFSA has a multimillion-dollar war chest to support its legal and public relations efforts, and the ability to raise much more if necessary. We have a strong congressional advocacy program, and we are also a professional association well respected among the professional and educational institutions dealing with foreign affairs.

Understanding how AFSA achieved this status over five decades starts with a testimonial to one Foreign Service officer: the late William Caldwell Harrop.



A career FSO and five-time ambassador who retired in 1984 with the rank of Career Minister, Bill Harrop was the leader of the “Young Turks” and their official inspiration during his time as chairman of AFSA (1969-1973) and then, informally, for the rest of his life.



From 1970 through 2019, Ambassador Thomas Boyatt served on various AFSA Governing Boards as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer (multiple times), retiree vice president, and retiree representative. An FSO from 1959 until 1985, he served as ambassador to Colombia and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and chargé d'affaires in Chile, in addition to postings in Nicosia, Luxembourg, Antofagasta (Chile), and Washington, D.C. Since retiring in 1985, he has been vice president of a large company, president of a small company, and a trustee of Princeton University, currently serving as chair of the Academy of Diplomacy's Finance Committee.

The “Young Turks,” a group of aggressive, reform-minded middle- and junior-grade officers, controlled AFSA for three years at the beginning of the 1970s with the avowed goal of “reforming the Foreign Service.” Until then, there had been much discussion and no action. In fact, senior administrators had made it clear that AFSA was *not* going to dictate Foreign Service personnel policy. There was no clear path for enacting change.

Then, in October 1969, President Richard Nixon announced he would establish unions in the federal service. It was a bombshell. Neither federal managers nor employee organizations knew exactly how to react. Nevertheless, EO 11491, “Labor Relations Management in the Federal Service,” was drafted and sent to all agencies.

When Secretary of State Bill Rogers learned that the EO would make the Foreign Service part of an employee-management system under the Secretary of Labor, he demanded a separate system for the Foreign Service, reporting to the Secretary of State. The issue is said to have gone to the president, who supported Secretary Rogers.

At this point Harrop was vice chair of AFSA. He would soon become chair, when Charlie Bray resigned to become the State Department’s press spokesman. Harrop understood the enormity of the opportunity. If AFSA could become the union of the Foreign Service, we could negotiate with management to achieve desired reforms, which would then become part of official State Department regulations.

In 1970, under Harrop’s leadership, AFSA conducted a worldwide referendum to settle the question of whether a majority of AFSA members wanted to become the union of the foreign affairs agencies. Voter participation was high, and a clear majority favored unionization.

The Department of Labor was directed to supervise talks involving primarily State management and AFSA to produce a separate executive order that would establish employee-management systems for the Foreign Services of State, USAID, and the U.S. Information Agency. The resulting EO 11636 established employee-management systems in these agencies and called for union representation elections.

The provisions of EO 11636 were included in the text of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and have been the law of the land ever since.

Establishing AFSA’s Framework and Goals

The protagonists in the union elections of 1971-1973 were AFSA (20,000 members) and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the 200,000-member Civil Service union. AFSA won all three representation elections by wide



William C. Harrop and his wife, Ann Delavan, in Meru National Park, Kenya, in October 1981.



William C. Harrop, right, in his role as inspector general of the Department of State and the Foreign Service, meets with Secretary of State George Shultz in December 1983.



William C. Harrop with current and former Secretaries of State during the September 2014 groundbreaking event for the United States Diplomacy Center. From left: Henry Kissinger, James Baker, John Kerry, Harrop, Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright, and Colin Powell.



William C. Harrop, center, with President George H.W. Bush (left) and Yitzhak Rabin in Kennebunkport, Maine, on July 10, 1982.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIAM C. HARROP/FSI/SEPTEMBER 2015

margins. AFSA Chairman Harrop was formally notified by the agency heads that AFSA was the certified union in each of their agencies.

Harrop quickly initiated development activities in four critical areas, which have endured and evolved over the last 50 years to give AFSA a good chance of success in meeting the challenges of today. Those areas are robust negotiations; political power; financial independence and strength—a fortress balance sheet; and maintenance of professional and Foreign Service imperatives.

Robust negotiations. Uniquely among federal unions, AFSA negotiates personnel policies and procedures agencywide. That includes bread-and-butter issues, like language incentive pay, as well as major professional issues such as promotion precepts.

Further, the broad negotiating mandate in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 enables AFSA to defend the act's special Foreign Service provisions (e.g., “robust and impartial” entrance procedures, peer performance reviews, worldwide service, rank in person, and promotion up/selection out) from efforts by personnel bureaucrats to alter these provisions or shift decision-making power to themselves.

For 50 years, beginning under Chairman Harrop, AFSA has pursued negotiations with management to produce the most effective diplomacy possible to serve the American people.

Political power. After AFSA's representation election victories, Harrop testified in the Senate against the confirmation of an unqualified politically appointed ambassador. From there, AFSA moved on to participating informally in the authorization and appropriation processes in both houses of Congress. Today AFSA has a fully staffed office to deal with Senate and House staff as well as our own political action committee (AFSAPAC), which facilitates personal contact with members of Congress.

In terms of wholesale politics, AFSA has significant public outreach, including a speakers program supplemented by similar efforts by other Foreign Service groups such as the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Financial independence and strength. At Harrop's direction, AFSA's initial negotiations included a member dues check-off. In the 50 years since then until April this year, management collected AFSA dues at the end of every two-week pay period and sent the funds to AFSA. In addition, since the 1990s, AFSA has been governed by private-sector management norms. Our objective is an excess of annual income over costs. These “profits” are then deposited in the General Fund, which serves as a war chest and a general financial reserve. The General Fund, currently at about \$4 million, is there to confront the existential threat we now face.

Maintenance of professional and Foreign Service imperatives. When it became clear in 1970 that AFSA would compete in union representation elections, the membership divided sharply over whether AFSA should compete exclusively as a union or in its dual capacity as a union *and* professional organization. The 1971 AFSA Governing Board elections were fought over this issue.

Harrop formed the “Participation Slate,” which argued forcefully that the union and professional dimensions would be mutually reinforcing and make AFSA the strongest possible voice of the Foreign Service. The other slate argued that the union and professional organizations should go their separate ways. In the event, the Harrop slate won every AFSA board seat. The new AFSA board promptly and unanimously elected Harrop the chairman and CEO of AFSA, and filled the other officer and committee chair positions with members of his slate, mostly “Young Turks.”

A Time of Heroes

Over the last half century, Harrop ensured that AFSA's actions and statements met the highest standards of professionalism and service. Actions do speak louder than words. For the last 50 years, AFSA members in their union negotiations activities have strongly defended the promotion up/selection out system, which guarantees that about 65 percent of the same members will not reach their highest aspirations for rank and income. Think about that.

A few years ago, then-AFSA President Eric Rubin declared that the decade of the 1970s was AFSA's “Heroic Age.” The comment stimulated my thoughts about an earlier heroic age described by a series of poet/singers around 1000 BC in *The Iliad*. Late in that song, after the Greeks had prevailed over the Trojans, Odysseus, the wisest of the Greek warlords, sacrificed to the gods and gave thanks. He did not give thanks for victory; nor did he give thanks for his survival. He gave thanks that the gods had caused him to live in a time of heroes. Odysseus exalts, “I lived in the time of Ajax. I lived in the time of Hector. I lived in the time of Achilles.”

And so I give thanks and exult that I have lived in a time of Foreign Service heroes. I lived in the time of Charlie Bray. I lived in the time of Tex Harris. And I lived in the time of Bill Harrop. ■

■ **Robert R. LaGamma**, 86, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on August 25, 2025, in Reston, Va.

Mr. LaGamma was born on July 30, 1939, in New York City and raised in the shadow of Yankee Stadium.

An alumnus of Stuyvesant High School, he embarked on his first ambitious trip beyond New York City at age 18 with his lifelong friend Jerry Levkov. The two hiked Rocky Mountain National Park and the Grand Canyon, developing an enduring love for the majesty of national parks.

He graduated from Brooklyn College and then earned a master's degree in international relations from Boston University.

In 1963 Mr. LaGamma entered the Foreign Service with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), serving abroad in Italy, Zambia, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria, and South Africa. He was USIA's director for African affairs during Nelson Mandela's presidency.

His superior achievement over the course of his 35 years in the Foreign Service culminated in promotion to the rank of Minister Counselor. He was also recognized with the Edward R. Murrow Award for Public Diplomacy.

Following retirement from the State Department in 1998, Mr. LaGamma led civil society democracy initiatives as director of the Council for the Community of Democracies and on behalf of the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center.

In a recent op-ed, he reflected on the idealism from the Kennedy administration that had fueled his role in public diplomacy: "The stories that we told over and over again dealt with American democracy, free press, human rights, rule of law, and free and fair elections. It was our profound belief that the U.S.

experience was a beneficial message to much of the world. ...

"I thought it was the best job imaginable: to help the world understand the humanity, justice, and steadfastness of America. And we did this by simply telling the truth."

Mr. LaGamma explored the world with his wife, Anita Vitacolonna. Their arrival in Africa coincided with the euphoria of the transition to independence and the formation of new nations.

Their lives were enriched with awe for the wondrous cultural achievements, past and present, and by places of extraordinary natural beauty that they encountered during their career overseas. Highlights included pilgrimages to view Giotto's frescoes of Saint Francis in Assisi, Donatello's sculptures in Florence, the creations of female weavers in the center of Akwete in Nigeria, and visits to Sequoia National Park and the Drakensberg Mountains.

Mr. LaGamma was predeceased by his wife of 58 years in 2022. He is survived by his children, Alisa, Matthew, Therese, Adrian, and Florence, and grandchildren Christopher, Patrick, Nicolas, Joseph, Ariana, and Laura.

He joins Anita at their place of rest in Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Va.

Remembrances may be made in the form of contributions to the Carter Center's Democracy Programs and National Park Foundation.

■ **Julia Nelson Easley Mak**, 97, a Foreign Service spouse, died of cardiovascular disease on July 22, 2025, at Grand Oaks in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Mak was born in Washington, D.C., and spent her early childhood in Lewisburg, W.Va., where her father was the local attorney for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad for many years.

She was a descendant of George Mason, who wrote the Virginia Bill of Rights on which the U.S. Bill of Rights is based. Ms. Mak's grandparents founded the Washington-based Gunston Hall School for Girls, which she attended until the school's closure at the start of World War II. She completed her high school at Mount Vernon Seminary in Washington, D.C., and graduated from Sweet Briar College in 1949.

Her early work experience was as a copy editor for *The Washington Post*, where she wrote several travel articles during the summer of 1949.

As a prelude to her life as a Foreign Service spouse, Ms. Mak embarked on her first overseas adventure traveling alone to Italy on a Norwegian cargo ship to visit cousins who were stationed in Genoa. Her love of antiquities and archaeology was sparked as she traveled by bus to various towns and sites throughout the country.

During her travels, she met her future husband, Foreign Service Officer Dayton S. Mak, who was on a brief leave from his assignment in Saudi Arabia. Married in March 1951, the couple traveled to their first posting together in Tripoli.

Ms. Mak then accompanied her husband to assignments in England, Kuwait, and Lebanon. Living in the Middle East enabled her to travel extensively to visit archaeological sites throughout the region.

After her husband's retirement from the State Department as a Senior Foreign Service officer in 1970, the Maks lived for a short time in Waterloo, Iowa, where they assisted Mr. Mak's ailing parents.

Upon returning to Washington, D.C., Ms. Mak enjoyed many years working in real estate, concentrating on the Georgetown area, until her retirement in 2015.

She is lovingly remembered by her family for her regular attendance at her grandchildren's sporting events and her weekly handwritten letters and news

clippings to her grandchildren once they moved away from Washington, D.C.

Ms. Mak was predeceased by her husband in 2018. She is survived by her daughter, Helen “Holly” Dayton Mak, and her husband, Marc Hersh; grandchildren Emma C. Hersh (and her husband, Jean Doyle) and Christopher J. Hersh (and his wife, Tammy Saah); and four great-grandchildren, Aiden Doyle-Hersh, Cullen Doyle-Hersh, Charlotte Hersh, and Marcella Hersh.

■ **Thomas Glenn Martin**, 88, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on June 17, 2025, in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

Mr. Martin was born on February 28, 1937, in Clarksville, Tenn. He and his elder brother Jack were raised by their mother, Glenavis Rice—an English professor and librarian at the University of Alabama—and her parents in Northport, Ala.

He spent his summers in Plantersville, Ala., at the family home of his father, Marvin Oscar. Encouraged to excel in school, he grew up surrounded by books.

At age 18, Mr. Martin served two years in the U.S. Army in Hawaii.

After serving, he studied at the University of Alabama, where he met his wife, Laura “Lolly” Spencer. In 1960 they married after each had graduated, he with a degree in history.

Lolly, his lifelong muse and occasional director, urged Mr. Martin to take the Foreign Service test after a professor suggested that a career as a diplomat might suit his intellect and curiosity about the world beyond Alabama.

In 1963 Mr. Martin entered the Foreign Service. It was at a pivotal moment in history shaped by Vietnam protests, the Kennedy and King assassinations, and civil rights activism.

In 1964, fresh out of Portuguese lan-

guage school, he was assigned to Rio de Janeiro. After this first post, the Martins, now with a young son, went on to more than a dozen postings, including Trinidad and Tobago (1966-1967), Mozambique (1967-1969), the Netherlands (1974-1977), Türkiye (1979-1981), Brazil (again in 1981-1984), Guyana (1984-1986), Belgium (1986-1989), Austria (1992-1995), Alabama (1995-1996), and several tours in Washington, D.C. (1969-1974; 1977-1979; 1989-1992). Along the way, they welcomed two daughters.

Regarded by peers as an exceptional diplomat, Mr. Martin was observant, ethical, and unflappable under pressure. He also spoke Dutch and Turkish.

Mr. Martin said the writing and editing skills he gained as a young journalist in the Army served him well in the Foreign Service, where he reported on political and labor issues and interviewed parliamentarians and union leaders.

His last assignments included positions as deputy chief of mission in Georgetown (Guyana), consul general in Antwerp, and deputy chief of mission to the United Nations Organizations in Vienna.

At every overseas post, Mr. Martin and Lolly made deep, lasting friendships. Wherever they lived, the Martins created welcoming homes, where good food and conversation were in abundance.

As a father and grandfather, he attended every concert, game, recital, and graduation he could. He never hesitated to jump on a sled, run into the surf, play golf, or throw a disc.

In 1996 Mr. Martin retired from the State Department. He was a mentor to many and beloved by colleagues.

His adventures around the world continued. He and Lolly often exchanged or rented houses for months at a time, inviting friends and family to join. They were expert guides, leading visitors to

museums, archaeological sites, rural roads, and more.

At home, he brewed beer, baked crusty loaves of bread, and made preserves from the garden. His grandchildren recall countless Scrabble games in which he ruthlessly challenged perfectly fine words like “garteling” and “cherp” while commanding the triple-word tiles.

The Martins retired to Shepherdstown, W.Va., where Mr. Martin served on the board of Friends of the Shepherdstown Library and used his diplomatic skills during two terms on the town council.

In their 70s, the couple relocated to Cheraw, S.C., settling in Enfield, a circa-1815 “upcountry farmhouse.” For the next decade, they rose early to wander among azaleas, gardenias, crepe myrtles, and fruit trees.

Mr. Martin is survived by his spouse, Lolly, and their three children, Thomas Glenn Jr. (and spouse Maria), Anne Holt (and spouse Tyler), Susan Akpınar (and spouse Bahadır); grandchildren William, Cameron, Lillian, Daniel, Theodore, and Alexander; and many nieces and nephews.

In honor of Mr. Martin, consider donating to your local public broadcasting station.

■ **Andrew Charles Parker**, 74, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer, passed away on December 23, 2024, in Miami Beach after a long struggle with myelofibrosis.

The eldest child of Martin and Caroline Parker, Mr. Parker was born on August 9, 1950, in Briarcliff Manor, Westchester, N.Y. He attended Briarcliff High School before transferring to Wilbraham Academy to complete his high school studies.

Mr. Parker went on to study at Duke University, where he was a political activist, writing for the Duke *Chronicle* and

participating in anti-Vietnam and other political and countercultural movements.

In 1972 Mr. Parker graduated from Duke with a degree in history. He moved to San Francisco and enrolled in the University of San Francisco Law School in 1977. Following law school, he became a member of the State Bar of California and worked for Common Cause.

He then went to Washington, D.C., where he worked as an attorney adviser with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In 1981 Mr. Parker joined the Foreign Service. During nearly 33 years of service, he was posted to Haiti, Jamaica, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Mexico, Germany, Israel, Guyana, and Canada, as well as assignments in Washington, D.C.

Overseas, Mr. Parker served as labor attaché and deputy in the political section in Lagos, Nigeria; monitored elections in Haiti, Jamaica, and Guyana; and held consular positions in Haiti, Jamaica, and the Netherlands.

He was deputy chief of mission in Georgetown, Guyana (2000-2002), visa section chief in Mexico City (2003-2005), consular section chief in Frankfurt (2005-2008), consul general in Tel Aviv (2008-2011), and principal officer/consul general in Montreal (2011-2014).

In Washington, Mr. Parker's assignments included special assistant in the Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science; Zimbabwe desk officer; and supervisor of consular services for American citizens abroad.

In 2014 Mr. Parker retired from the Foreign Service with the rank of Minister Counselor.

Moving to Jamaica, he renewed his work in the fields of immigration law and consular practice. He also farmed coconuts and was an active member of the local Chamber of Commerce in his

adopted hometown of Black River, St. Elizabeth.

Mr. Parker's life was guided by his dedication to social justice, and throughout his career, he sought to be attentive to the needs of those less fortunate.

He was beloved by his many friends around the world, with whom he maintained close ties throughout his life. He will be missed very much.

Mr. Parker is survived by his wife, Sheryn; daughter Arielle; son Clay; grandsons Asher and Kai; granddaughter Eden; mother Caroline; and siblings Fred and Suzy.

■ **Harrison Brown Sherwood**, 92, a retired Foreign Service officer, died June 17, 2025, in Longstanton, Cambridgeshire, U.K.

Born in St. Paul, Minn., on January 5, 1933, and raised in St. Cloud, Minn., Mr. Sherwood was the third of four children born to Harrison Sr. and Lorna Sherwood. He enjoyed an idyllic childhood of duck hunting with his beloved father and playing basketball at St. Cloud Tech.

In 1954 Mr. Sherwood graduated from Macalester College with a bachelor's degree in political science. He was then drafted into the U.S. Army, where he served primarily in Germany, reaching the rank of technical specialist.

Upon completion of service, and having acquired a taste for living overseas, he returned to academia, earning his master's degree in international relations in 1958 from the University of Minnesota, with the aim of pursuing government service abroad.

Mr. Sherwood's federal government career began with an appointment to the International Cooperation Agency in 1958 and the U.S. Foreign Service in 1960. He served in Colombia, Finland,

Sweden, Chile, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Mexico.

He spoke six languages and worked primarily in the commercial section at U.S. embassies, ending his career with the Foreign Commercial Service.

Mr. Sherwood was especially proud of having served as chief steward of a labor union in the State Department in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He filed grievances based on the department's violations of its own written regulations, procedures, and policy statements. Among the cases he handled was the EEO complaint filed in 1968 by the women's rights pioneer FSO Alison Palmer, the first of its kind at State.

Upon retirement in 1993, Mr. Sherwood moved to Longstanton, where he enjoyed English village life and sang in the Cambridge Philharmonic choir.

A lifelong athlete and long-distance runner, Mr. Sherwood participated in marathons in many of the countries where he lived. In Finland, he developed an interest in cross-country skiing, eventually competing in many distance races in Europe, starting with the 90-km Vasaloppet in Sweden. He was still jogging around his neighborhood in Longstanton at age 90 until a broken hip limited his ability.

Mr. Sherwood was preceded in death by his first wife, Mary Zosel Sherwood, and second wife, Karin Willamowski Sherwood. He is survived by six children: Harrison, Nora, Robert, Colin, Lorna, and Henry, as well as three grandchildren, Emily, Chase, and Nissa.

A memorial service to celebrate Mr. Sherwood's life is being planned for May 2026 in Boston, Mass. Donations may be made to Arthur Rank Hospice, a charity close to his heart.

■ **Robert Hayes "Bob" Seibold**, 81, a retired Foreign Service officer, passed away on February 1, 2025, in Sharon,

Pa., after suffering from congestive heart failure and multiple myeloma.

Mr. Seibold was born on February 9, 1943, in Astoria, N.Y., to Dr. Frank Seibold, a veteran of World War II, and Marjorie Hayes Seibold. He attended Catholic schools in New York City and graduated from Hofstra University, earning a bachelor's degree in history. He pursued a PhD in history and worked at various times as a high school teacher and social worker.

In 1980 Mr. Seibold joined the U.S. Foreign Service as a political officer but soon switched to consular work. His first tour was in Seoul, where he returned for two more postings, retaining an abiding affection for Korea and its people.

His other postings included Bonn, Jerusalem, Manila, and Washington, D.C., at the State Department's Office of Fraud Prevention Programs.

After retiring in 2003, Mr. Seibold moved to Sharon, Pa., where he lived with and cared for his father until the latter's death in 2007. Mr. Seibold traveled occasionally and became an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown, Ohio, and a guest speaker for a Reform Jewish congregation there.

Mr. Seibold was also active in the Great Decisions group at the Sharon Library, frequently leading the discussion and sharing his extensive knowledge of history and foreign affairs.

Family and friends remember him as a good man and a loyal friend and will miss him greatly.

Mr. Seibold was married twice but not at the time of his death, and he had no children. He was preceded in death by his parents, younger brother Tom Seibold, and younger sister Jeanne McLaren.

■ **Sandra Louise Vogelgesang**, 83, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer and

ambassador, passed away on September 5, 2025, at her home in Ohio.

Ms. Vogelgesang was born on July 27, 1942, in Canton, Ohio, to Glenn Wesley Vogelgesang and Louise Forry Vogelgesang.

In 1960 she graduated as valedictorian of her class at Lehman High School in Canton, and in 1964 she graduated with honors in history from Cornell University. She pursued graduate education in international relations at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, receiving a master's degree in 1965, a master of arts in law and diplomacy (MALD) in 1966, and a PhD in 1971.

Ms. Vogelgesang entered the Foreign Service in 1965 but returned to the Fletcher School to complete her graduate classwork. She then took her first tour abroad with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), in Helsinki from 1967 to 1969. There she served as administrator for the U.S. Educational Exchange Program and assistant cultural attaché, subsequently returning to complete her PhD.

At Fletcher from 1969 to 1971, she was the first doctoral candidate with the then new Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy. Her thesis, "The Long Dark Night of the Soul: The American Intellectual Left and the Vietnam War," was published by Harper and Row in 1974.

Following her academic leave, Ms. Vogelgesang transferred from USIA to the U.S. Department of State, where she was appointed as an economic officer. After Swedish language training, she was assigned to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research as a Nordic analyst.

At the department, she became active in employee concerns, including the Junior Foreign Service Officers Club and the Secretary's Open Forum Panel (OFP), an organization set up within the foreign affairs agencies to foster constructive in-house dissent.

Elected OFP chair, Ms. Vogelgesang became the first full-time director from 1973 to 1974 while serving as editor in chief of the department's only regular economic publication, "Current Economic Developments." She also worked on U.S.-European community relations in the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs.

While serving as OFP chair, Ms. Vogelgesang was based in the office of the Secretary's Policy Planning Staff (S/P). The work with OFP led to ongoing assignments with S/P under the leadership of Winston Lord.

She remained with S/P for the first year of the next administration with Cyrus Vance as Secretary, serving on the S/P staff headed by Anthony Lake. Much of her work focused on human rights, a priority of the new Carter administration.

On detail at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, her research on U.S. human rights policy resulted in the book *American Dream, Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy*, published in 1980 by W.W. Norton.

Returning to Washington, she became deputy for policy planning for the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs (EUR) and then director of EUR's Office of Regional Political-Economic Affairs.

In 1982 she headed north to U.S. Embassy Ottawa as chief economic officer. That period marked the launch of negotiations with Canada that would lead to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

After the four-year tour in Canada, where her husband, Geoffrey Wolfe, was able to take up a part-time assignment in the Embassy Ottawa political section, Ms. Vogelgesang returned to Washington. She served as deputy assistant secretary of State in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. Her portfolio included U.S. participation in the UN's development

agencies and the technical and specialized agencies such as WHO and the IAEA.

This work proved ideal preparation for her next assignment, as principal deputy assistant administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Serving then-Administrator William Reilly, she helped launch a half-billion-dollar international program, establish the Regional Environmental Center in Budapest, and participate in the 1992 United Nations "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro.

Following the detail to EPA, from 1992 to 1993, Ms. Vogelgesang served as a senior author of "STATE 2000," a task force report to the Secretary of State defining new global priorities. Related to that work was her service as special adviser to the Administrator of the Agency for International Development (USAID).

Her concluding assignment in the Foreign Service was as ambassador to the Kingdom of Nepal from 1994 to 1997.

In retirement, Amb. Vogelgesang enjoyed writing and working on local community issues. She served on the board of several organizations, such as the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal Trust.

She was a civic activist, serving as president of her local community association. She and her spouse enjoyed travel after both retired from the Foreign Service. Their travels ranged from Canada and the Caribbean, and much of South America, to Western and Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, Africa, and the Middle East.

Amb. Vogelgesang is predeceased by her husband, Geoffrey Wolfe, and survived by their two children, Christopher Glenn Wolfe (and wife Kim and granddaughter Summer) and Carolyn Louise Wolfe (and husband Satchel Kornfeld, grandson Forrest, and granddaughter Thalia) in the Washington, D.C., area.

She is also survived by brother Mark Wesley Vogelgesang (and wife Susan and children Christine Louise Oatey and James Vogelgesang) of Ohio.

■ **Melissa Foelsch Wells**, 92, a retired Foreign Service officer and ambassador with the rank of Minister Counselor, died peacefully at home in Potomac, Md., on July 12, 2025.

Ms. Wells was born on November 18, 1932, in Tallinn, Estonia, daughter of opera singer and film actress Miliza Korjus. In 1936 she immigrated to the U.S. with her parents and lived in Los Angeles, where her mother starred in the MGM production *The Great Waltz*.

In 1956 Ms. Wells received a bachelor's degree cum laude in Foreign Service from Georgetown University.

She joined the State Department in 1958 and started at the Austria desk. Her first foreign posting was in Port of Spain as political and consular officer (1961-1963). She then served as an economic officer at the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris (1964-1966) and as economic officer in London (1966-1970).

From 1971 to 1975, Ms. Wells lived in Washington, D.C., where she held the following posts: chief of the business relations branch in the Bureau of Economic Affairs (1972-1973); personnel officer for the Board of Examiners at the State Department; and deputy director for major export projects at the Department of Commerce (1973-1975).

In 1975-1976, Ms. Wells served as commercial counselor in Rio de Janeiro.

Her first post as ambassador was to Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde from 1976 to 1977. She was then named representative to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations from 1977 to 1979.



To submit an obituary for In Memory, please send the complete text (up to 500 words) to InMemory@afsa.org.

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, and details of the individual's Foreign Service career.

Submissions must come from, or be confirmed by, a next of kin or other family member.

Ambassador Wells was seconded to the United Nations, first as resident representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Uganda and special representative for emergency relief operations related to famine in Uganda (1979-1981), and then as director of the IMPACT Program to prevent disabilities in Geneva (1982-1986).

In 1986-1987, Amb. Wells lived in Washington when her nomination to be U.S. ambassador to Mozambique was held up a full year by Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). She served in Mozambique from 1987 until 1990, and then as ambassador to Zaire (now DRC) from 1991 to 1993.

In 1993 she worked for the UN again, as undersecretary general for administration and management. And in 1994 she returned to the State Department as the special representative in Sudan.

From 1995 to 1997, Amb. Wells was consul in São Paulo, and then from 1998 until the last day of her career, September 10, 2001, she was U.S. ambassador to her birth country of Estonia.

After retiring in 2001, Amb. Wells lived with her husband, Alfred Washburn Wells, in the small town of Agulo, on the island of La Gomera, in the Canary Islands, Spain. He had been a State FSO from 1941 to 1966 and then an architect until his death in 2014.

In 2021 she moved to Potomac, Md.

Amb. Wells and her husband are survived by their two sons, Christopher and Gregory, and three grandchildren, Anthony, Emory, and Marlie. ■



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Remembering Kenneth Wimmel: Diplomat, Writer, Historian

BY DON HAUSRATH

In 1991 my colleague and friend Foreign Service Officer Kenneth C. Wimmel retired from the U.S. Information Agency and launched a distinguished late career as a nonfiction writer. By the time of his passing nine years later, his work had earned a place in libraries worldwide, including Harvard and Oxford, and the national archives of France, China, and Germany.

A self-taught historian, Wimmel first demonstrated his research skills by winning a Naval War College prize for an essay on the strategic decision to establish a military base in the Indian Ocean.

Wimmel's diplomatic career took him across Asia, beginning in 1963 in New Delhi, where he married Arati Sinha. His overseas assignments included Dhaka, Saigon, Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, and beyond, stoking his interest in Asia.

Inspired to write a biography of American explorer Roy Chapman Andrews, famous for discovering a cache of dinosaur eggs in Mongolia in 1923, Wimmel had to pivot after Andrews' papers were reserved for an authorized biographer.



Don Hausrath entered the U.S. Information Agency as a Foreign Service librarian in 1971. He retired in 1995 with the rank of Counselor after opening U.S. Information Service libraries in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia.



From left, Kenneth Wimmel, travel writer Ella Maillart, Sydney Hausrath, and Don Hausrath in Geneva, Switzerland, in November 1994.

He repurposed his research into his first book, *The Alluring Target: In Search of the Secrets of Central Asia*.

During the book's development, Wimmel discovered that one of his subjects, 91-year-old Ella Maillart, was still alive. He met me in Vienna, and we traveled together to Geneva, stopping in Aix-en-Provence to visit the archives of another subject, Alexandra David-Néel.

In Geneva, Ella shared vivid recollections of camel, horseback, and mule journeys across Central Asia. "It can't happen today," she reflected. Struck by her words, Wimmel persuaded her to let them serve as the book's foreword.

With Ella's introduction, *The Alluring Target* was published in 1996 to strong sales and critical praise. A

Booklist review describes its vivid depictions of biplanes braving Himalayan gales, shootouts with Mongolian bandits, and Silk Road discoveries. Featuring figures like Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, adventurer Arnold Henry Savage Landor, and mystic David-Néel, Wimmel brought to life a world of intrigue and discovery.

Wimmel's second book, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet: American Sea Power Comes of Age* (2000), explored America's transformation into

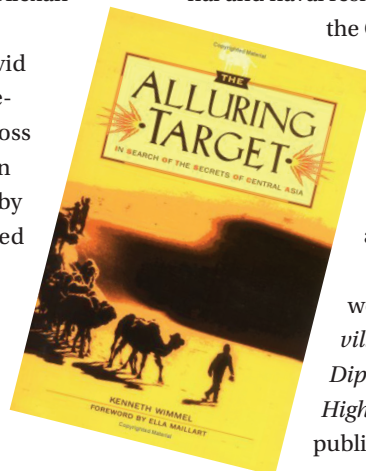
a global power. He chose a line from *Treasure Island*—"We can steer a course, but who's to set one?" Long John Silver asks—as the epigraph for an account of Roosevelt's push to modernize the U.S. Navy.

In 1880 the fleet was smaller than Peru's, but Roosevelt championed its revitalization by overcoming congressional and naval resistance. By 1909

the Great White Fleet—

16 coal-fired battleships—had completed a historic world tour, cementing the U.S. as a global force.

Wimmel's final work, *William Woodville Rockhill: Scholar-Diplomat of the Tibetan Highlands* (2003), was published in Bangkok



posthumously. The first new biography of Rockhill (1854-1914) in more than 50 years, it details his impact on U.S.-China relations.

Born in Philadelphia, Rockhill was educated in France, graduated at 19 from Saint-Cyr, France's West Point (where he studied Tibetan), and served two years as a French Foreign Legion officer before returning to the United States. After a brief ranching stint—likely the only New Mexico rancher to translate Tibetan sutras by lantern light—he entered diplomatic service.

Rockhill's career spanned postings in China, Russia, Türkiye, and Greece, though his heart

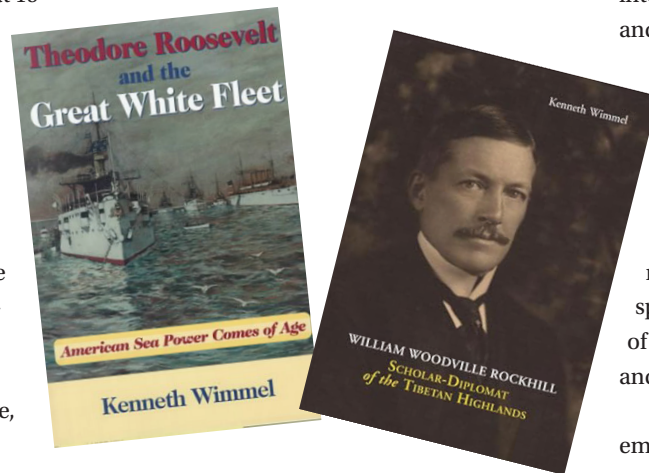
remained in Asia. In 1888 he temporarily left diplomacy to explore Mongolia and Tibet, collecting artifacts and manuscripts. He served as an assistant

secretary of State and as U.S. ambassador to China (1905-1909).

Ambassador Rockhill helped shape the U.S. Open Door Policy of 1899-1900, supporting U.S., Chinese, and East Asian interests. Thousands of his documents and artifacts remain in the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress.

In an October 1978 article for *The Foreign Service Journal* ("What Is Public Diplomacy?," page 31), Wimmel wrote that the U.S. government should "encourage, aid, and sponsor the broadest possible exchange of people and ideas between our country and other nations."

Like Rockhill, Kenneth Wimmel embodied this principle. ■



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LOCAL LENS



BY CURT WHITTAKER
■ HUACACHINA, PERU

Large sand dunes reaching up to 1,600 feet surround the small, artificially maintained oasis of Huacachina [see inset], a village in the Ica province of southwestern Peru. After riding dune buggies and sandboarding down the slopes, we were able to watch the sunset. I like how the photo captures the dunes, almost in motion, with the sun setting behind them. ■

Curt Whittaker is a Foreign Service management officer, currently serving as the supervisory general services officer in Lima. He will retire from this post at the end of November 2025. He took these photos on May 24, 2025, with an iPhone 16 Pro.



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

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