

THE **FOREIGN SERVICE** JOURNAL

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HONORING EXCELLENCE AND CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT



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January-February 2026 Volume 103, No. 1

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ON THE COVER: Design by Caryn Suko Smith/Driven by Design. Photos courtesy of the award winners.

Above and Beyond Partisanship

BY JOHN “DINK” DINKELMAN

Meeting a deadline more than six weeks before publication is no easy task, and writing this column in late November reminds me why I never liked playing the stock market—I’m terrible at predicting the future. Given the “dynamic” nature of the past six weeks, I’m hesitant to even try to picture conditions in the new year.

While I wish that by January the “Ship of State” would begin to steady itself, I hold out little hope that things will improve for the Foreign Service anytime soon. I reluctantly must conclude that we have no choice but to hunker down for the foreseeable future—both individually and collectively.

The sad truth is that **in 2025 Washington, any criticism is seen as opposition and any opponent is treated as an enemy.** Dissent is not welcome and can lead to retribution. Such an environment does not bode well for Foreign Service professionals, whose greatest “value added” has historically been to point out unwelcome truths not easily seen from inside the Beltway; to play “devil’s advocate” and question conventional wisdom; and even to advocate for (and, when necessary, dissent from) contemplated courses of action.



The year 2025 has turned into a “bear market” for diplomacy, and the administration is simply not buying our products.

Nevertheless, I’m playing the long game on the investment in our profession and encourage you not to issue a “sell order” on diplomacy, at least not just yet.

In preparation for a continued disruptive period for our nation and profession over the coming year, I want to reaffirm AFSA’s intention to maintain active and vociferous engagement on the broad spectrum of issues affecting the Foreign Service, while remaining nonpartisan. (See <https://bit.ly/AFSA-statement>.) I will do my best to ensure that such engagement is constructive and open, and hope that it will be received that way.

For decades, AFSA worked directly with agency leadership to advocate for the Foreign Service. As those channels are now largely closed, we are adapting to this new reality and will be taking more aggressive public positions when necessary to register concerns and draw attention to problems confronting the Service.

AFSA will be calling out executive overreach, judicial failures, and legislative inaction when they threaten the safety of FS families, undermine working conditions, or compromise our ability to serve the national interest. This isn’t about politics. It’s about protecting the people who carry out U.S. foreign policy and ensuring they can do their jobs effectively.

We will also address the increasingly divisive tone of discourse *within* the Foreign Service, which now mirrors the tone that has infected much of our nation’s public exchanges. How can we reasonably expect foreign interlocutors to see us as credible diplomats representing our

nation when the tone of public interaction between and among our own ranks is anything but diplomatic?

AFSA looks forward to partnering with like-minded elements within the foreign affairs community to (re)build dialogue among our ranks. This is more than just advocating for professional courtesies; it is a matter of whether we can continue to constructively apply the very skills for which we were hired.

We must demonstrate these skills for the next generation entering the Foreign Service, who view the present situation as the norm. They need to see a workplace where our differences—be they points of view, educational or socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic origins, race, gender, or even political opinions—create a stronger whole, enabling the effective implementation of our nation’s foreign policy.

We must provide space for all. Overseas, our children play together and attend the same schools, our spouses socialize together, and we live cheek to jowl in government housing, often in adverse conditions. We must not allow external forces of partisanship to damage our community or diminish the professionalism that underpins our work for the American people.

Watch for more of this discussion—from me and others—on these pages in the coming year. Please add *your* voice by submitting a letter or article to the *Journal* (journal@afsa.org).

I wish you all nothing but the best in 2026. May the year see a return to civility—and diplomacy. ■

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

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Looking to the Year Ahead

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Welcome to the new year. Despite all the challenges facing AFSA and its members, the entire FS community, and the country, we look ahead to 2026 with hope and resolve.

The value of the Foreign Service is in its people, on the front lines of diplomacy around the world 24/7. Members of the Foreign Service swear an oath to the Constitution and are duty-bound to speak honestly and dissent (within the system) when necessary.

But today, the freedom to provide honest input and constructive dissent is threatened. If we lose the space for principled dissent and erode the protections that allow FS members to speak truth to power, we will lose not only good policy—we will lose the very character of the Service.

AFSA's unique awards program has been honoring dissent from within the system for more than 50 years. In this edition, we are delighted to celebrate the Foreign Service members and champions who received the 2025 AFSA awards, not only for constructive dissent, but also for outstanding performance and lifetime contributions to American diplomacy.

May these stories, beginning with the interview with Lifetime Contributions recipient Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, serve as an antidote to



the interview with Lifetime Contributions recipient Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, serve as an antidote to

the barrage of disturbing news that will likely continue into 2026.

While the *FSJ* is in leaner times, publishing six bimonthly editions this year with a reduction in staff time, we will home in on what matters most to the foreign affairs community at this time. We will continue to publish strong voices on big topics, because that's what the *Journal* does.

One primary issue of concern is the politicization of the Foreign Service. When the administration prioritizes "loyalty" and "fidelity" above all else, publicly goes after members of one political party, and denigrates public service and the federal workforce, this is not business as usual. See the AFSA president's column, "Above and Beyond Partisanship," for the latest on how AFSA is engaging on this.

AFSA's "State of the Foreign Service" survey and resulting report, "At the Breaking Point," illuminate a Service in crisis. See State VP Ro Nepal's column and Director of Professional Policy Issues Lisa Heller's article in AFSA News for more.

As we go to press in mid-December, the survey report—released December 3—is still getting attention and inspiring reporting and responses in *The New York Times*, *Axios*, *NPR*, *CNN*, and elsewhere. May this attention raise awareness of the realities facing federal employees in 2026 and spur action to protect the professional, nonpartisan Foreign Service.

This edition includes two Speaking Out articles. Troy Fitrell and Jamie Bay Nishi outline "State's Opportunity Ahead for Global Health," and John Fer writes

2026 Focus Topics

March-April

Nuclear Diplomacy

May-June

AI, Tech, and Diplomacy

July-August

**Celebrating 250:
The U.S. in the World**

September-October

USAID: One Year Later

November-December

FS Writing and Publishing

on "Measuring and Mitigating Cognitive Dissonance in Public Diplomacy."

In this month's Service Disrupted collection, find FS voices on "The Costs of the Government Shutdown," for the record. And Ambassador Stephen McFarland illustrates the value of understanding your enemy in his feature story, "Like Lightning from a Clear Sky: Watching Guerrillas Recruit in Peru."

In FS Know-How, Eileen Smith offers tips and resources on "Turning Your Favorite FS Skills into Your Next Career." FSO Noah Rose takes us "Off-Road with the Foreign Service: A First-Tour Foray into Eastern Türkiye."

For those of you thinking ahead to summer, Melissa Mathews offers the inside scoop on summer camps abroad in "International Summer Camps Take an American Tradition Overseas."

In Reflections, Dick Virden tells his story of "Logrolling in Rural Thailand." And in the Local Lens, FSO Julia Wohlers shares a Lunar New Year dance from Datong, China.

We want to hear from you. Please consider writing for the *Journal* in 2026. Send a letter to the editor (journal@afsa.org). Review the Focus topics for inspiration (see box) or send a pitch or article on another relevant topic. Stay in touch and be well. ■

Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

A Love Letter to the FSJ

AFSA is the voice—the independent voice—of the Foreign Service. With the cutback in *The Foreign Service Journal*—AFSA's flagship publication—to six issues a year, it is worth remembering what the *Journal* is and does, and why we need it. The *Journal* keeps alive the intellectual and emotional connection that Foreign Service members, past and present, have to the Service and to each other.

Now, when the State Department and the president are engaged in a campaign to destroy the apolitical Service, the *Journal* is a trail guide and user manual for maligned and abused Foreign Service members seeking redress or rescue.

The *Journal* is especially adapted to long-form articles, essays, and opinion pieces. It is a unique source for the preservation of a historical record that is at risk of being lost, distorted, or falsified.

The Service as it existed for 100 years is gone and will not return. What will rise in its place? We can look to the *Journal* as the forum and platform for ideas from the people who know the Service best.

The *Journal* is our present, our past, and our future. I can't wait to see the next issue.

Harry Kopp

FSO, retired

Baltimore, Maryland

Peacebuilding Architecture

The November-December *FSJ* is masterful. It comes across as the professional journal it has always been, never whiny or complaining, just the facts ma'am. It's a great reminder for all of us of what our legacy is and what we stand to lose if we continue down the current path.

I loved Dink's opening remarks in President's Views, and I can't put the rest of the magazine down. Keep it up.

I found John Mongan's article on the closing of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), "Don't Let Stabilization Expertise Go," particularly timely and helpful (although I would leave out the offer to help with the occupation of Panama and Greenland, some bad raisins

need to simply fall off the vine).

Mongan raises two (relatively) minor issues and one (very) major issue. The loss of expertise and learning when bureaus, agencies, and institutes are eliminated is tragically short-sighted. Forty years of peacebuilding experi-

ence was lost when the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) was taken down by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), and 60 years of experience lost with the elimination of USAID.

CSO may be able to save some of its research, lessons learned, and analysis as some functions gravitate elsewhere, but the loss is truly medieval.

A second issue is functional versus regional bureaus. This administration is partial to regional bureaus, but anyone who has worked in both a regional and functional bureau recognizes why both are needed.

Regional bureaus are trains; functional bureaus are stations. The train just wants to get from point A to point B, heaving coal into the boiler as fast as muscle and shovel permit.

At the station, meanwhile, the more technical and specialized work can be done, such that when the train pulls into the station it can get repaired,

adjust course, receive guidance on track conditions. Over the decades this relationship has worked reasonably well.

CSO has been caught up in this scrum, as with so much of government reorg today, driven by individuals who have had no real touch with what they are "reforming" and are rewarded not by what they build but by what they tear down.

But the major issue is the U.S. architecture for peacebuilding and stabilization. Four key organizations were working this: CSO, USAID, the International Organizations Bureau coordinating UN operations, and USIP.

The number of places in the world where threats of force and high-level diplomacy are being used to bring about peace is noteworthy, and President Trump deserves high marks for much of it.

But in the cases I am most familiar with, the real issue now is not whether the U.S. can drive a lasting bargain between contending sides (as in Gaza), intimidate an oppressive government to allow a democratic transition (as in Venezuela), or push back gangs and restore order with a multinational force (as in Haiti).

Rather, success will require the much harder and long-term work of ensuring that initial agreement leads directly to a governing arrangement that allows the country to cohere and deliver on the key issues of inclusive governance, security, justice, and public services.

Only this will ultimately secure the peace. This is the work CSO, USAID, and USIP quietly did behind the scenes, anchoring the long-term peace that so often breaks down at the end of forced settlements. There is no one else really staged to pick it up.

Keith Mines

Senior FSO, retired

Washington, D.C. ■



Former Senior Diplomats Speak Out for Foreign Students

A coalition of more than 80 former senior State Department officials and ambassadors has issued a public letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Deputy Secretary Christopher Landau expressing “dismay” over recent U.S. government actions targeting foreign students and faculty for their speech, academic work, and lawful protest activity.

The letter, dated November 17, 2025, includes signatories who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, among them Ambassadors Wendy Sherman, Thomas Shannon, Eric Rubin, Aurelia Brazeal, and Barbara Bodine.

The group argues that visa revocations, arrests, and deportations based on protected expression represent a sharp break with long-standing U.S. commitments to free speech and undermine America’s global reputation as a center for open discourse and higher education. Citing economic, academic, and diplomatic consequences, the signatories urged State to “halt the targeting of foreign students and faculty” and restore U.S. leadership on democratic values.

The full letter, including all signatories, is available at <https://bit.ly/diplomat-letter>.

Administration Adds Roadblocks to Entry

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has instructed U.S. diplomats to consider obesity and a wide range of chronic health conditions as grounds for denying U.S. visas, expanding the administration’s interpretation of the “public charge” rule to an unprecedented degree.

The November 6, 2025, cable, first reported by KFF Health News and later verified by *The Washington Post* and

Politico, directs consular officers to weigh conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, metabolic disorders, and mental health conditions when determining whether an applicant might impose future financial burdens on U.S. taxpayers. The guidance, drafted by political leadership and issued without the normal review process, marks a significant expansion in consular discretion.

White House and State Department spokespeople framed the directive as part of a broader effort to “put Americans first” and more aggressively enforce long-standing statutory authority to deny visas to those who may require publicly funded care. Immigration attorneys, however, described the shift as sweeping, noting that many of the listed conditions have never been treated as disqualifying in their own right.

Diplomats who received the cable said the new framework gives officers “more reasons not to issue a visa,” coming at a time when the administration is tightening both legal and illegal immigration pathways and pushing for historically high deportation targets.

The change comes amid a series of other restrictive measures. The administration has begun implementing its September 2025 proclamation imposing a \$100,000 fee on many H-1B petitions, an action now the subject of multiple federal lawsuits. Employers must pay the fee before filing appeals, and exceptions are available only under what the Department of Homeland Security has called “extraordinarily rare” circumstances.

Immigration advocates warn that the cost will effectively cut off access to the H-1B program for many U.S. employers, particularly in medicine, research, and education, while discouraging recruitment of high-skilled workers who traditionally bolster the U.S. economy.

Similarly, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a nongovernmental organization (NGO), warned in an October 20, 2025, analysis that the administration’s emerging posture toward refugees and asylum seekers marks a fundamental break from decades of bipartisan policy.

At a UN General Assembly side event, senior State Department officials including Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau outlined principles that sharply narrow asylum eligibility, emphasize national sovereignty, and reframe refugee status as explicitly temporary, all while asserting widespread “abuse” of the system without supporting evidence.

USCRI cautioned that the approach departs from long-standing U.S. commitments under the Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the Refugee Act of 1980, and risks weakening global norms at a time of unprecedented displacement. More than 260 NGOs have joined USCRI in urging UN member states to reaffirm refugee protections.

Significantly, on November 28, 2025, following the shooting of two National Guard members by an Afghan asylee, the Trump administration announced a pause on all asylum decisions and a freeze on the Special Immigrant Visa program for Afghans who assisted the U.S. during the war in Afghanistan.

These developments paint a picture of a U.S. immigration landscape in which the federal government is steadily and deliberately closing its doors.

Talking Points offers a snapshot of recent developments affecting the Foreign Service. The following items were finalized for publication on December 12, 2025.

Contemporary Quote

“ I took an oath to this country. This is a lifetime oath to do the right thing and to obey the Constitution and to enforce the Constitution. And no threats and intimidation by the president are ever going to stop me from carrying out that oath. **”**

—Representative (D-Colo.) and former Army Ranger Jason Crow on NPR on November 21, 2025, responding to President Trump’s threat to have him and five other members of Congress executed for their role in creating a video reminding military members that they are required to refuse unlawful orders.

Release of “America First Global Health Strategy”

After nine months of cuts to global health programs, the Trump administration has released its first comprehensive blueprint for the future of U.S. foreign assistance in the sector. “America First Global Health Strategy,” a 35-page document issued by the State Department in September 2025, lays out a dramatic shift in how the United States intends to deliver global health support, negotiate with partner governments, and position U.S. engagement abroad.

In a letter accompanying the strategy, Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote that the administration must “keep what is good about our health foreign assistance programs while rapidly fixing what is broken.” He argued that decades of U.S. investment have saved millions of lives yet also created “inefficiency, waste, and dependency.”

The document calls for shifting major programs into bilateral government-to-government agreements, with the goal of transitioning many countries toward greater self-reliance and national owner-

ship. It also proposes consolidating U.S. global health efforts by moving away from disease-specific initiatives and integrating data systems, supply chains, and service delivery.

The strategy states that funding for frontline health workers and essential medical commodities will be maintained, while technical assistance and overhead costs will be significantly reduced. It also positions global health engagement as a means of strengthening bilateral relationships and expanding international markets for U.S. medical and pharmaceutical products. The department aims to complete most bilateral agreements by the end of 2025 and begin implementation in April 2026.

Global health experts have raised concerns about the strategy, including Stanford researchers Ana Maria Crawford and Michele Barry, who argue that the plan focuses only on how much is spent and not on health outcomes. They note that despite high expenditures,

Site of the Month: *The Steady State*

This month, we highlight The Steady State, an organization of more than 340 former U.S. national security professionals spanning intelligence, defense, diplomacy, and homeland security who have united around a simple mandate: defend the U.S. Constitution over partisan politics.

Founded in 2016 amid growing concern about authoritarian drift in U.S. governance, the group continues to publish sober, expert-driven analysis on national security, rule of law, and democratic resilience. Their membership includes former senior officials from across the national security community, and their work ranges from legal filings and congressional letters to public statements, open letters, and policy commentary.

The Steady State recently released “Accelerating Authoritarian Dynamics: Assessment of Democratic Decline,” a sweeping, intelligence-style analysis authored

by former U.S. intelligence officers. Drawing on open-source indicators and structured analytic tradecraft, the report concludes that the United States is on a trajectory toward “competitive authoritarianism,” where democratic institutions persist in form but are increasingly manipulated to entrench executive power.

The document examines trends including executive overreach, judicial erosion, politicization of the Civil Service and intelligence community, weakening congressional oversight, and sustained assaults on public trust and civil society.

With its steady stream of resources, the organization has become a wellspring for readers seeking principled, fact-based assessments during a period of accelerating institutional strain. Visit <https://thesteadystate.org/> for more.



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the U.S. health system underperforms on life expectancy and maternal mortality, which proves that financial outlays alone do not produce strong outcomes.

Critics warn that the strategy's shift to bilateral agreements comes amid deep disruptions caused by earlier aid cuts and the dismantling of USAID. Many NGOs have already reduced or closed programs, raising doubts about whether health ministries alone can maintain services. As one senior aid worker told CNN, activities now labeled "overhead" are often "the things that make the essential functions work."

Analysts also note the strategy's narrow focus on a limited set of diseases and its more transactional posture. Concerns include long-term data-sharing requirements that may advantage U.S. industry and the risk that poorer countries will struggle to meet compact terms. One official told CNN the approach "feels like we're leaning into" the kind of highly transactional aid model the United States has historically criticized abroad.

U.S. Designates European Leftist Groups as Terrorist Organizations

The Trump administration has designated four far-left European groups as "specially designated global terrorists," with plans to formally add them to the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list later this month. U.S. officials accuse members of the groups—Antifa Ost (Germany), the Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front (Italy), Armed Proletarian Justice (Greece), and Revolutionary Class Self-Defense (Greece)—of fomenting violent attacks across Europe.

The move is part of what the State Department described as a global campaign to target "antifa [anti-fascist] groups across the globe." Jason Blazakis, the former head of the State Department

50 Years Ago

A Life of Challenge and Adventure

Generalizing from the 220 answers received and from the statistical analysis reported above, it seems that Foreign Service wives as a group are hardy and self-sufficient with a positive orientation toward the Foreign Service way of life. Many enjoy the life just because it is adventurous and challenging. As some of them expressed it, "There is no substitute for being there, smelling the smells, hearing the sounds ..."

—Katharine Gratwick Baker in "Mobility and Foreign Service Wives" in the February 1976 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*.



office that oversees FTO designations, noted that the four groups "wouldn't really typically merit an FTO designation because they hadn't been responsible for fatalities," adding that they lack the capability associated with organizations such as ISIS or al-Qaida.

The designations carry sanctions risk for U.S. individuals or entities that engage with the groups. But analysts say the move appears aimed less at European militancy than at domestic politics. "The administration has really been interested lately in identifying domestic terrorists in connection with antifa," NPR's Odette Yousef reported, even though antifa in the United States is a decentralized movement without formal leadership.

As journalist Patrick Strickland observed, ties between U.S. and European anti-fascist groups amount mostly to "putting out a statement in solidarity," far from the "material support" required for terrorism prosecutions.

Rubio Agrees to Return MS-13 Informants to El Salvador

An October 2025 *Washington Post* investigation reveals that Secretary of State Marco Rubio agreed to return nine MS-13 leaders in U.S. custody, including several protected informants, to El Salvador as part of a deal to secure access

to the country's CECOT (Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, or Terrorism Confinement Center) megaprison for U.S. deportation operations.

In an interview with NPR, *Washington Post* reporter John Hudson noted that "a core part of an informant relationship is that the United States says ... we're not going to turn around and send you to the very government that you are giving us information about."

Reneging on that protection, he added, risks undermining years of U.S. law-enforcement work and damaging the government's ability to recruit future informants.

El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele sought custody of the nine men in part because several had provided information about alleged secret dealings between his administration and MS-13. For the Trump administration, the agreement helped facilitate the transfer of hundreds of Venezuelan migrants through El Salvador as part of its broader deportation strategy.

As of December 1, 2025, only one of the nine men had been returned to El Salvador, with legal challenges preventing additional transfers. A federal judge has questioned the government's lack of transparency around the agreement and raised concerns about potential torture or disappearance if the remaining detainees are deported.

Trump Welcomes Saudi Crown Prince

President Donald Trump hosted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) at the White House on November 18, 2025, offering an elaborate welcome that included a military flyover, red-carpet ceremony, and an evening black-tie dinner attended by U.S. business leaders. It was MBS' first visit to Washington since the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

President Trump announced that the United States would proceed with the potential sale of F-35 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia and confirmed Riyadh's new designation as a major non-NATO ally. U.S. officials also highlighted new cooperation on AI infrastructure, civil nuclear energy, and the release of advanced Nvidia chips to Saudi firms.

MBS, for his part, pledged to increase planned Saudi investments in the United States from \$600 billion toward \$1 trillion—though some critics pointed to the fact that the country's entire GDP is just \$1.24 trillion.

According to Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Program, many of the deals touted during the trip are preliminary or symbolic, with significant details still to be negotiated. Analysts note that the most tangible outcome for MBS may be reputational: a highly visible return to the White House after years of strained ties, complete with presidential praise and a public reaffirmation of the U.S.-Saudi partnership.

Human rights concerns remained a point of tension, with reporters pressing both leaders on Khashoggi's killing and broader rights issues documented in the State Department's 2024 country report. Trump defended the crown prince and criticized media questioning, while MBS called the journalist's death "painful" and "a huge mistake."

Analysts caution that while the White House sought to emphasize economic and security cooperation, several key Saudi priorities, such as a nuclear cooperation agreement, remain unresolved, and congressional skepticism toward MBS persists across party lines.

COP30 Concludes with Divisions Over Fossil Fuels

The 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP30), held in Belém, Brazil, on November 10–21, 2025, ended with one of the most divisive conclusions in the conference's three-decade history. Framed as a summit of implementation, the meeting focused on translating existing climate commitments into concrete action. But the final agreement, made up of 29 formal decisions known as the Belém Package, exposed stark fractures over the future of global climate governance.

The Trump administration did not participate in the summit. California Governor Gavin Newsom emerged as the highest-ranking U.S. official at COP30, using the platform to sharply criticize President Donald Trump's absence and his administration's rollback of climate policies. Newsom condemned newly reported plans to open California's coast-

line to oil and gas drilling, saying such efforts would be "dead on arrival."

Leading an alternate U.S. delegation of more than 100 state and local officials, Newsom argued that Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and support for expanded fossil fuel production undermine both U.S. credibility and economic competitiveness, handing a strategic advantage to China in clean-energy manufacturing.

He also urged subnational leaders to "assert ourselves" in the vacuum left by the federal government, viewing local action as essential to maintaining U.S. climate leadership.

Brazil's presidency secured a deal that triples adaptation finance by 2035, adopts 59 global indicators to measure progress under the Global Goal on Adaptation, launches a Global Implementation Accelerator for NDC (nationally determined contributions) delivery, and establishes a new Just Transition Mechanism to support countries facing social and economic risks from decarbonization. COP30 also unveiled major forest and maritime initiatives.

Yet divisions over fossil fuels dominated the summit. More than 80 delegates, including those from Colombia, Panama, Uruguay, and the European

NSS: A Radical Reordering of U.S. Strategy

As we go to press, the Trump administration released its new National Security Strategy (NSS) on December 4, 2025, sharply redefining U.S. foreign policy and elevating the Western Hemisphere as Washington's top priority in what it terms a "Trump Corollary" to the 1823 Monroe Doctrine.

Early analysis from experts at the nonpartisan Council on Foreign Relations and Brookings suggests that the NSS abandons the previous framework of "great-power competition" with China and Russia, instead casting economics as the "ultimate stakes" and treating China primarily as an economic competitor. Initial criticism indicates the strategy is more ideological manifesto than road map and lacks the focus on a rules-based international order contained in past NSS documents.

The full strategy document is available at <https://bit.ly/25NSS>.

Union (EU), pressed for a binding global road map to transition away from coal, oil, and gas. Major oil-producing states, supported tacitly by China and more directly by Russia and Saudi Arabia, blocked any such language.

With talks teetering on collapse, Brazil introduced voluntary side texts on fossil fuel transition and deforestation, issued by the presidency rather than adopted by all parties, leaving them politically symbolic but legally uncertain.

The outcome left many negotiators frustrated. Colombia warned that a deal without fossil-fuel language “could not be supported,” while UN Secretary-General António Guterres cautioned that “the gap between where we are and what science demands remains dangerously wide.”

Sierra Leone criticized newly approved adaptation indicators as “unclear” and “unmeasurable,” and the EU, cornered after agreeing to extend the finance tripling target to 2035, admitted it had achieved little on mitigation ambition.

Observers pointed to the widening geopolitical divides and growing doubts about the COP model itself. Amid tense all-night negotiations, questions resurfaced about whether a consensus-based process can still deliver meaningful progress in a rapidly warming world.

Trade also emerged for the first time as a major negotiating theme, prompting COP30 to launch a new dialogue on aligning climate and trade policies ahead of future talks.

Despite the tensions, the maritime

sector saw notable advances: new green shipping corridors, accelerated methanol-fueled fleet deployment, commitments to reduce black carbon, and the launch of an Oceans Task Force integrating marine solutions into national climate plans.

Looking ahead, parties agreed that COP31 will be hosted by Türkiye in Antalya, with Australia assuming the presidency.

COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago said Belém must be remembered not as an endpoint but as “the beginning of a decade of turning the game,” even as many participants left uncertain about the path forward. ■

This issue of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.

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RACHEL TODA

State's Opportunity Ahead for Global Health

BY TROY FITRELL AND JAMIE BAY NISHI

A “tumultuous” year doesn’t begin to describe the impact on lives, livelihoods, and global health initiatives of the dismantling of USAID, the pulling back from multilateral partnerships, and budget cuts across public health and research. The global health community’s cry that these disruptions have cost lives and set back health initiatives for years is not an understatement: We cannot easily replace USAID’s expertise or that of the global health implementer community.

It is not enough to simply shift the burden onto fragile countries themselves or pass the responsibility solely to international and regional organizations. If we cannot do things as we did, we must plan to conduct health diplomacy in a new way. Even with decreased U.S. funding, the State Department must protect and advance the gains already achieved in global health while implementing the administration’s policies.

State’s Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy recently released its strategy for the new era of U.S. contri-

butions to global health programming, which is intended to empower partner country governments, improve health outcomes, and promote durability and self-reliance in local health systems while ensuring U.S. health security.

We appreciate our colleagues’ efforts, noting—as they did on the release of the strategy—that there is much left to do to implement the broad strategic approach. We hope our suggestions in this piece will complement the strategy and keep us all directed toward better global health outcomes.

An Opportunity for Health Diplomacy

Going forward, chiefs of mission and their country teams will need greater understanding of the complexities of health challenges in the countries where they serve as they inherit the responsibility to engage continually on health, a task previously owned by USAID counterparts.

They must advance bilateral conversations with significantly diminished resident expertise. Further, the State

Department will need to quickly acquire the know-how for contract and grant authority to fill gaps that are deemed priorities in terms of U.S. strategic interests.

There is appropriate concern within the global health community about State Department generalists’ ability to absorb global health programmatic activities, but there is a difference between implementing health programming and integrating global health into the overall conduct of diplomacy.

The State Department will not be able to advance its work without engaging technical health expertise, but at the same time the department has a fresh opportunity to collaborate with partner countries to consider health activities within a broader socioeconomic context.

Within the health arena, State can now reshape activities formerly undertaken by USAID’s Global Health Bureau and consider health impact outside siloed efforts run largely through disease-specific vertical programs.

Integrated Approaches vs. Silos

For years, and across political administrations, global health stakeholders have noted the need for integrated approaches to delivering health outcomes but often felt constrained by long-established programs aligned to specific appropriated funding lines.

Traditionally, there were eight health-area silos: HIV/AIDS, largely facilitated through PEPFAR; the President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI), jointly



Troy Fitrell retired in September 2025 after 30 years in the U.S. Foreign Service. He led the Bureau of African Affairs through the changes reflected in this article and earlier served as ambassador to the Republic of Guinea, in addition to assignments in Africa, Europe, and Latin America.



Jamie Bay Nishi is the chief executive officer of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the largest international scientific organization of experts dedicated to reducing the worldwide burden of tropical infectious diseases and improving global health. As a Foreign Service dependent, she grew up in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Germany between postings back to Washington, D.C.

facilitated through USAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Tuberculosis; Maternal and Child Health (MCH); Family Planning/Reproductive Health; Nutrition; Neglected Tropical Diseases; and Global Health Security.

But today, if a country indicates that they are seeing better HIV outcomes thanks to decades of PEPFAR support, and their top concerns have shifted to maternal health and malaria, there is an opportunity to turn to other areas of U.S. expertise in which a ministry could most use support.

A reframed approach will also open new doors to more patient-centered approaches to health and programmatic efficiencies. If a pregnant woman presents at a clinic feeling ill, instead of offering a diagnostic for one disease, testing could be offered for a suite of diseases or health concerns, to reach a proper diagnosis more efficiently. Though this example appears simplistic, everyone involved in health diplomacy knows such situations are commonplace.

Chiefs of mission and their teams talk to many officials across government, and this interaction will benefit from engaging outside the often-siloed development assistance health dialogues. Shifting from health area verticals to bilateral cross-cutting health programming is a big challenge, but it offers an opportunity to reorient to a nimbler approach that is responsive to constantly evolving health priorities and can, perhaps, ultimately drive better health outcomes.

Building on Solid Foundations

Though some level of reorientation is needed, the State Department should build on the highly effective multisector models for global health already advanced

by USAID—for example, the Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) program. Two decades of U.S. leadership combating 21 NTDs that disproportionately affect the world's poorest communities through a mass drug administration campaign has achieved remarkable results.

More than 54 countries have eliminated at least one NTD, with 600 million people no longer requiring preventive treatment. These efforts have also served as a powerful example of effective public-private collaboration: Only \$115 million annually in government funding has leveraged more than \$1.1 billion in donated drugs from pharmaceutical companies.

Similarly, USAID's Center for Innovation and Impact spent years developing models of sustainable finance for health and models of data-driven health policy. Let's not allow that work to get lost but leverage it to ensure that unique American expertise in the fields of health innovation and life sciences, philanthropy, academia, and civil society is engaged.

This includes working with the non-health private sector that employs Americans to work in nearly every country in the world and wants to ensure the well-being of their workforces. We have more than 5 million Americans working and living abroad, and improved global health means better access to health care for them as well.

Using Comparative Advantage

In the consolidation at State, U.S. national interests such as epidemiology and the overall detection, management, and control of various emerging infectious disease threats should remain a priority.

Far from being external niche programs, these should become more central and intrinsic to the State Department's global strategic planning. Part of

the United States' comparative advantage is the ability to rely on the critical inter-agency expertise that remains following this year's significant reductions in force.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plays a vital role in strengthening global health systems through disease surveillance, outbreak response, laboratory capacity building, workforce training, and pandemic preparedness.

A notable example of successful inter-agency collaboration was the response to the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa in 2014, when tens of thousands perished, threatening the globe.

The response led to significant investment in national and regional epidemiology, field service capacity strengthening, and creation of the Africa CDC, modeled after the gold-standard U.S. CDC. In 2021, when Ebola reared its ugly head again in a manner similar in scope and distribution to 2014, only a few dozen perished thanks to the new structures the United States created.

Looking to Increased Local Capacity

Significantly, this increased domestic capacity is applicable to the range of emerging infectious diseases—e.g., mPox, Marburg, Lassa fever, Ebola—protecting not only local communities but the entire globe. We are currently watching a new Ebola outbreak unfold in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with little to no U.S. engagement around the response, which is testing bilateral country ties in new ways.

While the United States should maintain some level of bilateral engagement during an emerging infectious disease, increased local capacity aligns with an America First agenda and accesses American comparative advantages.



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Decades of U.S. contributions to health implementation programs, public health, and health research have strengthened the capabilities of most countries to facilitate more of this work, and we are at a point where the United States should robustly engage on health diplomacy to have more nuanced dialogue around what will make individual countries and the United States safer, healthier, and economically more secure.

Recommendations

As we consult with countries to design and implement the way forward, based on the administration's new strategy, we submit the following recommendations to State leadership:

1. Empower and resource posts.

Ambassadors and their country teams must absorb the responsibility to map the priorities, integrate the capabilities, and convene and advise stakeholders in host countries. We must recognize that posts do not have this capacity currently and need both the instruction and investment to make it a reality.

2. Have the right operational tools.

In the short term, State must rapidly build its contracting authority to be able to issue contracts and grants to support direct global health programmatic work moving forward and, ideally, assign contracting authority to posts. Even with a smaller budget, this capacity is critical.

3. Build on success. Recognizing the essential contributions and successes

of PEPFAR, PMI, and the USAID Global Health Bureau, as well as the fact that the world has continued to evolve with new enduring and emerging health challenges, programs should now build on that proven infrastructure and consider multiple health areas concurrently.

4. Persevere with multisector

engagement. The State Department and missions should encourage all sectors the United States represents, including the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, academia, and civil society, to advise them on how to drive the best return on investment working with more limited public sector funding, prioritizing capabilities the U.S. can uniquely offer to fill gaps and improve health outcomes.

5. Rely on whole-of-government

expertise. The State Department does not have, and never will have, deep technical expertise related to global health. It is imperative that the department reinstate interagency agreements, in particular with the CDC, to have the ability to deploy the best in the U.S. government's capacities to tackle health challenges. This is specifically the role of diplomacy versus subject matter expertise.

Underpinning any recommendations to the State Department, congressional appropriators must recognize the new responsibilities and requirements and fund them appropriately. This means preserving and building on PEPFAR's capacities while concurrently supporting a shift away from siloed funding and offering flexible health funding to achieve maximum impact.

The newly reorganized Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy faces countless challenges. If successful in adopting refreshed and collaborative approaches, we may see strengthened bilateral relationships and improved health outcomes globally. ■

Measuring and Mitigating Cognitive Dissonance in Public Diplomacy

BY JOHN FER

Cognitive dissonance—the discomfort of holding conflicting thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially during decisions or change—is a powerful force that U.S. government messaging often overlooks. This blind spot is one our adversaries are quick to exploit, as I’ve seen firsthand in my work as a public diplomacy officer.

For example, in July 2021, a friend in Tbilisi noted what he saw as U.S. hypocrisy: Washington appeared tougher on Georgia over LGBTQ+ issues than on oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia, which President Biden had just visited to address energy concerns. “Would you lay off if we had oil?” my friend quipped.

Russia and its allies wasted no time amplifying such perceptions. Less than a year later, Russia’s Orthodox Patriarch claimed the U.S. supported Ukraine so Kyiv could hold Pride parades—a message that resonated in Georgia, a country where at the time 84 percent of the public believed homosexuality was “always wrong.”

Domestically, U.S. messaging at the start of the war in Ukraine emphasized sanctions as a tool to pressure Russia into changing its behavior. Yet two years later, reports that Russia’s economy had not only weathered sanctions but was

projected to outpace Group of 7 (G7) growth undermined confidence in that strategy. This may have contributed to delays in approving further military aid.

Policymaking and its associated messaging often involve inherent inconsistencies, yet we seldom assess the impact of the dissonance these inconsistencies create. Left unmeasured and unchecked, this dissonance risks alienating audiences—and if it happens often enough, we may lose them entirely. This doesn’t mean abandoning our values, but it does mean systematically analyzing how much dissonance our messages create and how long specific audiences can tolerate it.

By recognizing cognitive dissonance as a fundamental part of communication and assessing its effects before, during, and after messaging, we can mitigate its harm and better advance U.S. strategic objectives. This requires a deliberate acknowledgment that prolonged exposure to dissonance erodes trust—and once trust is lost, it is nearly impossible to regain.

A Hardwired Phenomenon

While not unique to diplomacy, cognitive dissonance in our field provides a powerful lens to examine how professionals confront and reduce this tension.

Cognitive dissonance is a hardwired phenomenon we ignore at our own risk.

Leon Festinger, who pioneered the concept at Stanford in 1958, wrote: “Just as hunger leads to activity aimed at hunger reduction, cognitive dissonance leads to activity aimed at dissonance reduction.”

Physiologically, we are wired to seek consonance, the opposite of dissonance. Even as infants, we instinctively seek harmony when confronted with discordant sounds. At every level, humans are drawn toward coherence.

Just as immune cells, when reacting to inflammation, release cytokines to rally defenses, the brain works to restore cognitive balance by adjusting beliefs, behaviors, or justifications. If resolved, the system calms; if not, chronic stress can fuel anxiety, depression, or unhealthy coping.

Our challenge as diplomats is to reflect that instinct toward coherence and to better consider our audiences in the stories we tell the world. As public diplomacy practitioners, we must think about how our messaging affects foreign audiences. Are we minimizing the dissonance our narratives create—or deepening it?

And at the very least, are we *measuring* it?

A Historical Perspective

In the 1960s, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara led a wave of technocratic governance, applying quantitative methods to major institutions—most infamously, the Vietnam War. By 1995 he admitted in his memoir, “We were



John Fer is the planning and coordination officer for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs in Washington, D.C. He joined the State Department Foreign Service in 2009 and has served in New Delhi, Managua, Moscow, Riga, and Tbilisi. He is an Air Force veteran and a returned Peace Corps volunteer (Nepal). He and his wife, Victoria, have two sons. The views expressed are those of the author, not necessarily those of the U.S. government.

wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why.”

Ironically, McNamara’s “whiz kids” never accounted for the cognitive dissonance their policies would produce. They promoted body counts as the primary measure of success, a metric that not only dehumanized the conflict but also arguably deepened public skepticism. By 1970 most Americans already believed Vietnam was a mistake, and within a year, nearly three-quarters supported a full withdrawal.

The official tally—58,000 U.S. dead versus as many as 3 million Vietnamese—only underscored the imbalance and further alienated audiences on every side of the debate. From that point forward, public trust in government entered the long decline that defined the post-Vietnam era.

Day-to-day public diplomacy may not rival the gravity of Vietnam-era decisions, but it is no less essential to measure, analyze, and address inconsistencies between our messaging and our stated values in this work.

Cognitive dissonance is inevitable—but ignoring it, as we often do, alienates audiences and undermines foreign policy goals. We damage our credibility when we fail to present nuanced arguments, dodge accusations of hypocrisy, or dismiss those who challenge us.

Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, in *Changing Minds* (2004), notes that “making sense is a deep human motivator” but cautions that coherence isn’t the same as truth. People will go to great lengths to reconcile conflicting information with their core beliefs.

Consider Preemptive Analysis

In public diplomacy, we often address uncomfortable truths at odds with our message only when our inter-

locutors bring them up—but by then, the damage is done. Audiences have already noticed the gap between our rhetoric and actions and formed their judgments. This erosion of trust undermines our core goals: to inform, engage, and influence.

When we do respond, it’s often with generic lines: “There are trade-offs in international relations” or “We work with countries where we can.” While technically valid, such statements rarely reverse the narrative, much less the gradual increase in dissonance. By that point, many have tuned out or hardened themselves to believe that the United States says one thing and does another.

Preemptive analysis could help. By anticipating where our messages might trigger dissonance, and proactively messaging on the disconnects between stated values and actions, we stand a better chance of keeping skeptical audiences open to our explanations.

Gardner also describes the “equity principle”—a deep-seated human expectation that fairness should be evenly distributed. When reality violates this instinct, as it often does in geopolitics, dissonance spikes.

This isn’t a partisan problem; it’s structural and recurring. The key is to confront it early. Rather than reactively patching over contradictions, we should assess and address them in advance to limit long-term reputational cost.

Case Study: Climate Change

With today’s analytical tools, we can—and should—anticipate cognitive dissonance before, during, and after messaging to foreign audiences. Take, for instance, the issue of climate change.

We could measure variables like public belief, drawing from opinion surveys; we

could also quantify policy action by tracking major policy actions. Because conversations pervade the media space, it should be our role to measure the impact of competing narratives on foreign audiences.

For example, when we signed the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016, how did the following articles (one a “fact check” by *The Washington Post*, and the other a rebuttal by AEI, the American Enterprise Institute) move the needle of public opinion? Each article claims to debunk the other, offering little space for nuance or the audience’s cognitive reconciliation.

What if audiences were convinced, for example, by AEI’s argument that gross polluters like China and India had ostensibly agreed to nothing in the Paris Climate Accords? What if they believed *The Washington Post*’s accusations that President Trump did not tell the truth?

The point isn’t whether climate change is real—it’s whether we’ve done enough to manage the dissonance that impedes policy traction. For PD officers in any administration, knowing how U.S. government messaging is landing and being processed should be one of our primary responsibilities.

Beyond climate messaging, issues like human rights, LGBTQ+ protections, and the perception of selective application also foment significant dissonance. These topics have limited elasticity in shaping belief—once trust erodes, it’s difficult to recover. If we fail to monitor and mitigate the dissonance we generate, we risk losing entire audience segments permanently.

By applying the skills of quantitative professionals, we could achieve more substantive and effective analysis. We might, for instance, examine the “levels of information entropy,” Claude Shannon’s famous measure of uncertainty in communications.

The key point is not that we should change our policies or avoid difficult or nuanced topics, but that we should consider dissonance in our strategic messaging and evaluation.

Time to Embrace Uncertainty, at Least in the Planning Process

It's easy to see how audiences grow weary of the gap between our stated values and our behavior.

Like a spring stretched too often, cognitive elasticity wears down. If exposed to constant dissonance, cognitive resilience (or stiffness) decays over time; and, as resilience decreases, cognitive dissonance (or strain) accumulates more rapidly.

If we keep testing that limit—by

sidestepping nuance, dodging charges of hypocrisy, or dismissing criticism as “whataboutism”—we risk lasting damage to American credibility.

Before we criticize China on human rights, perhaps we should start by acknowledging our own struggles. Similarly, before lecturing one country on LGBTQ+ protections, we might recognize that we don't even address the issue in certain other countries. This approach wouldn't change our policies but could soften our stance and reduce dissonance.

International relations are complex, and aligning perceived values with actions is challenging. We can, however, make a greater effort to analyze potential cognitive dissonance in foreign audiences and mitigate its long-term effects by acknowl-

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edging its existence and admitting that our actions sometimes exacerbate it.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell once said, “One of the biggest problems with the world is that fools are always so sure and certain about everything and intelligent people are so full of doubts and uncertainties.”

It might be time to embrace the uncertainties in our messaging—it could make us the smartest players in the room. ■



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The People's Ambassador



A Conversation with Linda Thomas-Greenfield

*Recipient of the
2025 AFSA Award
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to American Diplomacy*



Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield became the 31st winner of AFSA's Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award in an October 1, 2025, ceremony at Georgetown University. She was honored for her deep commitment to the Foreign Service, mentorship, and leadership throughout an eminent diplomatic career, and for her continuing work to promote American global leadership, a strong Foreign Service, and State Department improvement.

AFSA's highest tribute, the Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award is given annually to recognize an individual's lifetime devotion to the work of diplomacy and to its practitioners. Past recipients include such luminaries as George H.W. Bush, Thomas Pickering, Ruth A. Davis, George Shultz, Richard Lugar, Joan Clark, Ronald Neumann, Nancy Powell, William C. Harrop, Thomas Boyatt, Edward Perkins, John D. Negroponte, Anne Patterson, and Marc Grossman.



AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield receives AFSA's 2025 Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy from AFSA President John Dinkelman on October 1, 2025, at Georgetown University. From left: Dinkelman, Dean of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service Joel Hellman, Thomas-Greenfield, and Director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Ambassador Barbara Bodine.

As a career diplomat from 1982 to 2017, Linda Thomas-Greenfield had a wide range of important assignments for six presidents, both Republican and Democrat. She served as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (2013-2017), where she led U.S. policy development for sub-Saharan Africa and played a critical role in the U.S. response to Ebola. And she served as Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources (2012-2013), overseeing the department's 70,000-strong workforce.

In 2008 Thomas-Greenfield was named U.S. ambassador to Liberia, where she served until 2012, supporting programs that rebuilt the country's social and physical infrastructure and restored the rule of law. Other notable overseas roles include postings in Switzerland, Pakistan, Kenya, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Jamaica. In Washington, D.C., she also served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs (2006-2008) and as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (2004-2006).

Most recently, Thomas-Greenfield served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations (UN) and U.S. representative at the

UN Security Council (2021-2025), called out of retirement to do so. She also served as a member of the president's Cabinet and the National Security Council during that time.

At the United Nations, Amb. Thomas-Greenfield undertook a robust agenda to help restore and strengthen American global leadership and mobilize the international community to address global challenges. As part of her work, she rallied bipartisan and worldwide support for Ukrainian sovereignty and held Russia to account for violating international laws and norms.

She secured establishment of the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (now the Gang Suppression Force) to address gang violence and restore long-term stability. She highlighted the need for increased humanitarian aid to Gaza while emphasizing Israel's right to self-defense after the October 7, 2023, events. Additionally, she highlighted the urgency of the crisis in Sudan, mobilizing aid and personally assessing the humanitarian response during a trip to Chad.

Amb. Thomas-Greenfield is widely regarded as a trailblazer in the foreign affairs community. When she joined the U.S. Foreign



Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield greets Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf before her meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., on February 27, 2015.

Service in 1982, few Black women were in its ranks. She grew up in segregated Louisiana, the eldest of eight children to hard-working but poor parents, and became a first-generation high school graduate in 1970. She graduated from Louisiana State University in 1974, one of the few Black students in her class. She went on to earn a master's degree in public administration in 1975 at the University of Wisconsin (UW), where she also pursued doctoral studies, and then taught political science at Bucknell before joining the Foreign Service.

Thomas-Greenfield is known for her relationship-building and problem-solving acumen and her leadership skills. In the course of overcoming challenges in her life and career, she developed what she calls "adversity muscles," namely the ability to grow stronger in the face of hardship. She also learned to lead with kindness and compassion, and in her remarks at the AFSA ceremony, she called her unique approach "gumbo diplomacy," which emphasizes building relationships through shared experiences—much like the process of creating the classic Louisiana dish. "Treating people well matters," she says. "It will outlive the work we do."

Over the years, her strong community outreach and ability to connect with locals earned her the accolade "The People's Ambassador" by local media in Liberia. "She has never met someone she cannot turn into a friend," Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.) observed during Thomas-Greenfield's January 2021 confirmation for the post of ambassador to the United Nations, adding: "She is also battle tested and tough as nails, having



Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and President Ellen Sirleaf enjoy a private chat in Monrovia. Thomas-Greenfield served as U.S. ambassador to Liberia from 2008 to 2012.

overseen our responses in nations to some of the most complex and grinding crises in the world."

In retirement, Amb. Thomas-Greenfield joined the Albright Stonebridge Group as head of the Africa Practice and served as Distinguished Resident Fellow in African Studies at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (2017-2019). She also co-chaired an advisory committee for the Council on Foreign Relations special report, "Revitalizing the State Department and American Diplomacy" (2020). Based on her own experience, she believes the U.S. Foreign Service should better reflect America and find strength in diversity.

Throughout her Foreign Service career, as well as in retirement, Amb. Thomas-Greenfield has also been a devoted mentor, sharing her passion for diplomacy, her appreciation for the support of her own mentors, and her insight into overcoming challenges with young colleagues, students, and potential future diplomats. She credits her experience at UW for preparing her to succeed on the world stage, citing the school's academic rigor, its international reach, and the ways it pushed

her beyond her comfort zone—and she remained connected to the campus and its students throughout her career, returning often to speak and participate in various programs.

Amb. Thomas-Greenfield is the recipient of the Secretary's Distinguished Service Award and other State Department honors. She is married to Lafayette Greenfield, a retired Foreign Service specialist, and the couple has two grown children, daughter Lindsay (a former Foreign Service specialist) and son Lafayette, known as "Deuce" (an attorney), and three grandchildren, Lydia, Luca, and Lola.

Following are the ambassador's responses to our questions.

—Editor in Chief Shawn Dorman

Foreign Service Journal: *Congratulations on being the 2025 recipient of AFSA's Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy. This is so well deserved. Your remarks at the ceremony on October 1 were inspiring. Could you start us off here by saying a bit about what this award means to you personally and professionally?*

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield: Thank you so much. I was so honored to receive this award. For me, it was an affirmation of all the work that I have done over my entire 40-year career in the Foreign Service. It was also a recognition that to succeed in the Foreign Service, you don't have to have a "normal" career, one that checks all the boxes to get to the top, because I did not check the boxes: I did work that was very people-centric. I did work that supported refugees. I did humanitarian work. I was told over and over and over again, every single time I took a position working on refugees, that I would not get promoted and that my career would be finished. Receiving this award affirms for me that the directions I took were the right directions for me.

FSJ: *What was it like joining the Foreign Service in the early 1980s as a Black woman in a still largely white male institution like the State Department? Did you feel supported or isolated, and were there peers or mentors who helped you navigate in those early years?*



Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield speaks with an official from the Independent National Electoral Commission as voters wait to be registered at the Abuja Federal Capital Territory Area 1 polling center in Nigeria on March 28, 2015.



WHITE HOUSE/LAWRENCE JACKSON

Vice President Kamala Harris swears-in Linda Thomas-Greenfield as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, February 24, 2021, in the Vice President's Ceremonial Office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building at the White House.

LTG: When I came in in 1982, the State Department was being sued by women Foreign Service officers in *Palmer v. U.S. Department of State* and by Black Foreign Service members in *Thomas v. U.S. Department of State*. That Thomas was not me; it was Walter Thomas. But I felt a bit intimidated to come into service where the two identities that I represented were suing the organization I was joining. And I didn't quite understand it.

You asked if I felt supported or isolated: I truly felt isolated. I felt that I was out of my depth seeing the backgrounds of many of the people who were at State with me. There were a lot who were Yale, pale, and male; but there were also a lot of women who were pale and Yale, and there were *not* a lot of people of color.

I came from Louisiana State University, a state college that didn't really have a big name except for in athletics and football,

so I was out of place and I was isolated. I eventually found my place. I found people I could relate to, and I had mentors who certainly helped me get through the first couple of years, which were extraordinarily difficult for me.

Lessons in Leadership

FSJ: You subsequently held important roles at the department. Given your leadership in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration from 2004 to 2006, how do you view current efforts to shrink and restructure the bureau, and what advice would you offer to the administration on maintaining U.S. leadership on refugee issues?

LTG: You know, one of the things I was so proud of throughout my career—in particular during the period when I worked on refugee affairs, and that leadership role was my fifth refugee job—



U.S. EMBASSY GHANA/ARCHIBALD SACKEY

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield visited Ghana August 5-6, 2022, to discuss U.S.-Africa partnership, continued bilateral cooperation, and food security with government and civil society leaders.



Above: U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield in talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky during her visit to Ukraine in November 2022. At right: Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield greets President Zelensky.

was the U.S. leadership in this area. I was committed to our programs and to the bipartisan promise that the U.S. made to refugees. So what is happening today is extraordinarily disappointing, and it's almost alarming to me that we've gone from the country that was the most committed to refugees, with numbers up to 120,000 per year, to the country least committed to refugees, with plans to bring in only 7,500 in Fiscal Year 2026, prioritizing white Afrikaners from South Africa.

These numbers show the lack of caring and the real lack of commitment to supporting the people who are the most vulnerable, the most needy, in the world. That sends a message to the world that the United States is no longer there, that we no longer care about refugee issues.

FSJ: *You arrived back in Liberia in 2008 at a critical time in its postwar recovery. What are you proud of from that period, and what lessons did it offer for U.S. diplomacy in fragile states?*

LTG: Well, let me just start by saying being ambassador to Liberia was a big deal for me. Most people don't know that I lived and studied in Liberia in the 1970s. I met my husband in Liberia. He was already in the Foreign Service and was working at the embassy in Monrovia. And so going to Liberia as the ambassador 30 years after I had been there as a student doing research was the ultimate gift. I can't even give you the words to describe my feelings when I received that appointment, and it came at a time when Liberia was still coming out of the ashes of a horrific civil war and people were still traumatized.

But Liberia had done something that no other country in Africa had ever done: They elected a woman as president, and I happened to know her, so I was really welcomed to Liberia with open arms. I went with a mandate from Secretary of State Con-



doleezza Rice, and that was to help the president and the people of Liberia succeed. With that mandate in my hand, I felt that I had to commit to doing a great job, and I tried my best to get to know *all* the people.

During my first year there, one of the local newspapers dubbed me "The People's Ambassador." It was a title I carried very proudly. "She doesn't just sit in offices talking to government leaders," they said. "She goes to the marketplace to meet with the market women, she goes to tea shops and talks to unemployed teachers. She goes to schools and talks to students. She's the people's ambassador." So if there were any accomplishments, and there were many, I think for me, the most important was to be recognized as someone who cared about the people of Liberia. To have a job that allowed me to work with the extraordinary "Iron Lady," President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and help her to help Liberia succeed, was the accomplishment of a lifetime.

Addressing a Crisis of Confidence

FSJ: *Shifting now from your time in Liberia to your tenure as the 31st United States ambassador to the United Nations and as a member of President Joe Biden's Cabinet [2021-2025]. What, in your view, should the new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations be focused on?*



WHITE HOUSE/ADAM SCHULTZ

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield greets President Joe Biden at United Nations Headquarters for the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2023, in New York City.

LTG: When I arrived in New York in 2021, I found a UN that was very uncomfortable about where the United States was as a member state. During the first Trump administration, the U.S. had pulled out of the World Health Organization. We had pulled out of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. We had pulled out of the Paris Agreement. And we had pulled out of the Human Rights Commission. I was charged with rebuilding confidence in the United States' commitment to the UN, and over the course of four years I think I was able to achieve that.

The new U.S. ambassador to the UN is walking a very, very tight rope of keeping U.S. leadership at the table and ensuring that our priorities are addressed—all while having a president who does not have confidence in the United Nations and has indicated in many conversations that the UN does not serve a purpose. I always advocated for a UN that is fit for purpose to deal with the crises of the world including Sudan, Gaza, and Ukraine. To do this, the United States must be at the forefront and in a leadership role, so the ambassador is going to have to figure out how to thread this needle that he has been given, to keep the U.S. in the forefront and also be loyal to the priorities of the president.

FSJ: *Switching gears a bit, how can AFSA best serve the Foreign Service community at a time when its union status is under challenge?*

LTG: AFSA is our representative. It is the organization that we look to in good times and bad times. We're facing some very difficult times now, and it is more important than ever that AFSA be there for its members. We need AFSA. We need AFSA today, and we will need AFSA tomorrow.

The Role of Diplomacy and Diplomats

FSJ: *What do you wish more Americans understood about the role of diplomacy and the U.S. Foreign Service?*

LTG: The truth is that most Americans don't understand the role of the U.S. Foreign Service and most Americans don't know what Foreign Service officers [FSOs] do to represent the United States overseas. They may find out if they're traveling, but the vast majority of Americans are not traveling.

We are there to protect American citizens who are overseas. We're also there to represent the interest of our government and our people. Many American farmers, for example, are dealing with issues of their products not being bought. It is diplomats, working with the leadership of the White House, who will address those issues with foreign countries.

Americans who travel overseas and get arrested know that they can depend on a U.S. diplomat. Earlier in my career as an FSO, I visited many American citizens who had been arrested and ensured that their rights were preserved. I assisted American citizens who had relatives pass away overseas and needed



U.S. EMBASSY MONROVIA

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield visits her eponymous school in Margibi County in Liberia, January 2024.

to start the process of transporting the remains of their loved ones back to the United States. If we're not there, no one will take care of those issues for them; they are left to their own devices.

Finally, American companies, I think, do appreciate the role of U.S. diplomats overseas in terms of representing them and their interest with governments. I think it's important that diplomats get out to their communities and talk about what they're doing. We used to have a hometown diplomat program that the State Department sponsored. I don't know if it's still in existence, but that allowed for members of the Foreign Service to go home and tell people what they were doing.

I can tell you that nobody in Louisiana in my community would have a clue what diplomacy was—I don't think most people I grew up with even had a passport—so I think I contributed a great deal in my home state and in my community in sharing the important role that U.S. diplomats overseas play for American citizens. And I think more can be done in that area. I think our Congress needs to be brought into the picture; we diplomats should be meeting with members of our state delegations to let them know what we're doing and make sure they support the work of the Foreign Service in the future.

FSJ: *I'm going to end by asking you to elaborate a bit on what qualities you believe the most effective diplomats possess?*

LTG: That is an extraordinarily interesting question. I think in the old days, when you asked someone that question, they would

want someone who was absolutely brilliant. They would want amazing writers. They didn't necessarily look for people who understood people; they didn't want managers.

Over my 40-year career, I've determined that people are the greatest tool in our diplomatic toolbox. When I served as the Director General of the Foreign Service and the director of personnel during the Obama administration, I got to really get out and see people doing their jobs in the field, whether it was the locally engaged staff [also known as Foreign Service Nationals] who work for us in the various countries we work in or whether it was our spouses and our children—because the Foreign Service is not just about the FSOs, it is about their families and the important role that they play as representatives of the American people to the countries that we are in.

So when I'm asked what the most important qualities of an effective diplomat are, I think it's being able to communicate to the people you are working with and being able to share with them the important values that are a part of us as Americans. Those same diplomats are great writers, those diplomats are extraordinary intellectuals; but with all of that, they must be kind and compassionate and communicative to everyday people.

FSJ: *Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, thank you for sharing your candid responses, and congratulations again on being the 2025 recipient of AFSA's Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award.*

LTG: Thank you very much. I will always cherish this award. ■

2025 AFSA AWARD Winners

William R. Rivkin Award for Constructive Dissent by a Mid-Level Officer

Eric Burkett, Andrea Capellán,
Andrea Cristancho, Jessica Carlson,
Abtin Forghani, Heather Wirick,
Meghan Waters, Joshua Schramm,
R. Clark Pearson, and Sam Kraegel

DEFENDING DEVELOPMENT

In March 2025, a coalition of USAID and Department of State Foreign Service officers—Eric Burkett, Andrea Capellán, Andrea Cristancho, Jessica Carlson, Abtin Forghani, Heather Wirick, Meghan Waters, Joshua Schramm, R. Clark Pearson, and Sam Kraegel—submitted a Dissent Channel cable opposing the dismantling of USAID, the termination of foreign assistance programs, and improper reduction-in-force (RIF) actions.

For this act of constructive dissent, they have received the 2025 William R. Rivkin Award, which recognizes mid-level Foreign Service officers (FS-3 to FS-1) who have demonstrated intellectual courage and integrity in addressing substantive foreign policy or management issues.

This group formulated their opposition in a well-reasoned, fact-based cable, providing concrete examples of how the elimination of USAID and

Award winner profiles compiled by Associate Editor Mark Parkhomenko. All images are courtesy of the award winners, unless otherwise specified.



Winners of the 2025 William R. Rivkin Award for constructive dissent by a mid-level Foreign Service officer at the October 1, 2025, AFSA Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C. From left: Meghan Waters; Andrea Cristancho; Abtin Forghani; Ambassador William H. Rivkin, who presented the awards; Jessica Carlson; Heather Wirick; R. Clark Pearson; Joshua Schramm; and Sam Kaegel. Eric Burkett and Andrea Capellán were unable to attend.

foreign assistance programs would jeopardize national security, endanger U.S. personnel, undermine U.S. economic and diplomatic strength, violate the legal protections of federal employees, and exacerbate ongoing humanitarian crises.

The Dissent Channel message sparked essential discussions within the U.S. government, increasing scrutiny of decisions to dismantle USAID and halt foreign assistance. It prompted congressional inquiries and strengthened the discourse on the importance of U.S. leadership in global development and diplomacy.

Eric Burkett, who served as attaché at the U.S. embassy in Kyiv when the dissent was sent, said, “It makes me feel proud to have stood against the tide, no matter how fruitless it appears to have been, to stand up for my FS colleagues’ careers, their honorable service, and against the destructive way with which USAID was dismantled.” A member of the Foreign Service since 2011, Burkett’s career has included assignments in Washington, D.C. (twice), Fort Lauderdale, Mexico City, Islamabad, Matamoros, Hermosillo, and Kyiv, with Porto Alegre next on his schedule. A former Coast Guard reservist, he joined the Foreign Service after realizing he wanted to continue serving the American people while experiencing the cultures of the world through federal service.

Andrea Capellán, supervisory contracting and agreement officer at USAID/Mexico at the time of the dissent, reflected: “The whole group is incredibly humbled and grateful to receive this award because the cable’s existence was publicly denied by the Secretary of State. ... Receiving the Rivkin Award is an extraordinary honor—one that affirms the value of speaking

truth to power, especially when the stakes are high.” Capellán joined the Foreign Service in 2012 after serving in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic, where she found her calling to a life of public service. Her USAID

career has included assignments in Dakar, Lima, Washington, D.C., and Mexico City.

“Receiving the 2025 William R. Rivkin Award is one of the most meaningful honors of my career,” said Andrea Cristancho, contracting

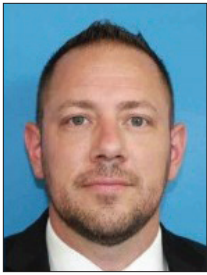
and agreement officer at USAID/Mexico at the time the Dissent Channel message was sent. “It’s a profound recognition of the belief that principled dissent—when rooted in integrity, humility, and care—can be an act of commitment, not conflict.” Cristancho, an international development professional with more than a decade of experience in program management and procurement strategy, has served as vice president of the Hispanic Employee Council of Foreign Affairs Agencies and is an alumna of the International Career Advancement Program.

Jessica Carlson, who was deputy director of the Office of Acquisition and Assistance at USAID/Ukraine, has more than 14 years of experience managing federal funds and modernizing agency systems. “Doing the right thing, the just thing, is not easy,” she said. “Risk-taking, together with an incredible group of courageous FSOs, is worth the possible repercussions of speaking out. Transparency is fundamental to democracy.” Carlson recently returned from a 16-month unaccompanied tour in Kyiv, where she supported Ukraine’s wartime operations and efforts to build long-term resilience.

Abtin Forghani, who was at FSI preparing for his onward assignment as deputy director of the Office of Assistance and



AWARDS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT



Eric Burkett



Andrea Capellán



Andrea Cristancho



Jessica Carlson



Abtin Forghani



Heather Wirick



Meghan Waters



Joshua Schramm



R. Clark Pearson



Sam Kraegel

“It represents recognition that I stood up for my beliefs and values, fighting for my agency and for the people we serve. The goodwill and growth we create abroad return tenfold to the American people.”

—Sam Kraegel

Acquisition for USAID/Dominican Republic and Eastern Caribbean when he was RIFed, said: “It is deeply meaningful to know that our institutions still uphold the values we swore to defend: fairness, diverse perspectives, and the power of constructive dissent. It is a reminder that integrity still matters.” Forghani, born in Iran and raised in California, has 15 years of experience in oversight and procurement roles at USAID, the State Department, and NASA Offices of Inspector General.

“In a time of fear, repression, and surveillance, I am proud to be one of the few voices who stood up for my beliefs and values in support of an agency I love,” said Heather Wirick, team lead and contracting and agreement officer at USAID/Southern Africa when the dissent message was submitted. “USAID’s Foreign Service is one of our country’s smartest investments in national security, economic strength, and global stability.” Wirick joined USAID as a Foreign Service officer in 2016 after supporting global humanitarian crises as a civil servant and serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Benin. She served in Haiti, Colombia, and South Africa.

Meghan Waters, a USAID contracting and agreement officer who served in Peru and Uganda, said, “This award reminds me that I have the ability to stand up for what I know is right, even when it’s difficult. It reassures me that I stood on the right side of history.” During her service, Waters managed portfolios for multiple South American countries, coordinated U.S. responses

to Peru’s largest oil spill, and led emergency assistance efforts for LGBTQ+ communities in Uganda.

For Joshua Schramm, contracting and agreements officer with the USAID Management Bureau’s Office of Acquisition and Assistance at the time, the award “means recognition of the value of standing up for one’s values amid the torrent of fear, greed, and confusion that was the dissolution of USAID.” Schramm has served in Liberia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, and Washington, D.C., and is a returned Peace Corps volunteer from Mongolia.

“I’m honored to be included with such an impressive group of contracting officers who stayed true to their integrity, regardless of the personal risk,” said R. Clark Pearson, who was supervisory contracting officer with USAID/Ukraine when the dissent message was sent. Pearson has served as supervisory contracting officer in Colombia, Central Asia, Iraq, and Ukraine over his 16-year career as an FSO. “Development should be firewalled from politics and diplomacy. The world’s greatest country should help others because it can, independent of whether or not it serves a specific political agenda,” he added.

Sam Kraegel, then deputy director of the Regional Contracting Office at USAID/Caucasus, reflected, “It represents recognition that I stood up for my beliefs and values, fighting for my agency and for the people we serve. The goodwill and growth we create abroad return tenfold to the American people.”

The dissenting group's efforts embody the Foreign Service ideal of integrity in service to mission and law. By using the Dissent Channel to defend their agency and their colleagues, they demonstrated the intellectual courage to challenge—within the system—decisions that still threaten the effectiveness and legitimacy of U.S. foreign assistance.

In honoring Eric Burkett, Andrea Capellán, Andrea Cristancho, Jessica Carlson, Abtin Forghani, Heather Wirick, Meghan Waters, Joshua Schramm, R. Clark Pearson, and Sam Kraegel, AFSA recognizes their commitment to the values of transparency, accountability, and the public trust that underpins U.S. diplomacy and development.

Christian A. Herter Award for Constructive Dissent by a Member of the Senior Foreign Service

Carrie Muntean SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER TO STRENGTHEN THE SERVICE

Throughout her nearly 25-year diplomatic career, Carrie Muntean demonstrated the courage to question entrenched systems and her conviction that the Foreign Service can, and must, do better. After decades in consular and public diplomacy assignments worldwide, she concluded her career not with quiet retirement but with a call to action, urging the State Department to re-examine how it develops, manages, and supports its people. At the October 1 AFSA awards ceremony, she received the association's 2025 Christian A. Herter Award for Constructive Dissent by a Member of the Senior Foreign Service.

Muntean's act of dissent began after an abrupt removal from her post serving as principal officer in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In the months that followed, she heard from other senior colleagues, deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers, who had faced similar involuntary curtailments with little transparency or recourse. Her personal reflection evolved into a departmentwide effort to improve accountability and leadership culture.

Drawing on her experience as a Senior Foreign Service officer



Carrie Muntean



Carrie Muntean and several state secretaries of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, cutting the ribbon for the U.S. booth at Expointer, the largest agricultural fair in South America, August 2024.

and former director of the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of ICA: Leadership, Management, and Innovation, responsible for developing leadership and management skills for more than 15,000 consular employees, Muntean convened a working group of Foreign Service, Civil Service, locally employed staff, and family member colleagues to identify systemic fixes. Together, they produced a 20-page white paper titled "Improving Leadership and Culture at State," which Muntean circulated throughout the department's seventh floor shortly before retiring in April 2025.

The paper proposed practical, forward-looking reforms: requiring committee approval for curtailment of deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers; expanding mandatory leadership training; instituting annual 360-degree feedback for all senior leaders; and mandating professional coaching for those in top positions. Recognizing resource constraints, Muntean also advocated for establishing an Employee Support Unit as a hub to guide employees to the right offices for issues ranging from harassment and workplace conflict to emergency travel logistics. She envisioned an AI-based triage interface to streamline inquiries and save valuable staff time.

"It became obvious that State lacks a good structure for constructive dissent focused on people-related processes," she later noted. "The Dissent Channel exists only for policy concerns—another example of the department undervaluing its most precious resource, our people."

Her proposals, though welcomed by many, met predictable resistance from some senior officials. Muntean persisted, confident that institutional improvement depends on honest self-examination. "Dissent," she emphasized, "does not mean disloyalty or disobedience."

AFSA honors her for modeling the essence of constructive dissent at the Senior Foreign Service level: advocating systemic change with integrity, intellectual rigor, and respect for the institution. Her approach was collaborative, not confrontational. She gathered wide input and built what she described as “a true coalition for change.”

Her nominator observed, “Carrie could have chosen to quietly finish her career. Instead, she challenged long-standing assumptions about leadership accountability, pushed for safeguards to protect her colleagues, and presented solutions that, if adopted, could transform workplace culture.”

Muntean joined the Foreign Service in 2001 after earning degrees from Adelphi University and The George Washington University, serving overseas in Luanda, London, Panama City, Moscow, and Managua, and leading the U.S. consulate in Porto Alegre. Domestically, she held multiple roles in the Bureau of Consular Affairs and served as deputy director for Central American Affairs. Over the years she received more than 10 Superior Honor Awards and meritorious step increases.

Since retiring with the rank of Counselor, she has continued her lifelong commitment to leadership development by coaching with the Foreign Service Institute and contracting with ESGI Potomac to help federal employees transition to the private sector.

At the October 1 AFSA awards ceremony, Muntean expressed gratitude to colleagues Maura Harty, Laura Dogu, Hugo Rodriguez, Marta Youth, Johanna Villalobos, and Stacy Williams, who were among those who inspired her dedication to leadership reform, and to her family for their patience with her passion for leadership development.

“Dissent does not mean disloyalty or disobedience.”

—Carrie Muntean

She encouraged current Foreign Service members to stay engaged: “Keep your heads down and your eyes and ears open for opportunities.” Reflecting on the award, she said, “It is validation that there was value in my efforts in the final year before I retired, even if the powers that be did not see it.”

Carrie Muntean’s work reminds us that dissent is a form of stewardship. By confronting uncomfortable truths about leadership accountability and employee well-being, she captured the spirit of the Christian A. Herter Award.



POSTHUMOUS AWARDS FOR DISSENT

HONORING MORAL COURAGE IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE

This year AFSA is honoring 12 U.S. career diplomats whose moral courage during the Holocaust exemplified the highest ideals of constructive dissent. Working individually under extraordinary pressure, and often at great personal risk, these men stood against indifference and bureaucratic paralysis to save lives, resist persecution of others, and uphold humanitarian principles.

AFSA created this special Posthumous Dissent recognition to honor Foreign Service members whose actions met the bar for constructive dissent, choosing duty to humanitarian principle when policy fell short. The nominations came from historian Eric Saul, who first approached AFSA years ago with extensive research and later submitted specific cases that clearly evidenced dissent. This year’s honorees follow in the path of Hiram “Harry” Bingham IV, whom AFSA recognized in 2002 for similar rescue efforts during the Holocaust.

In Moscow and later in Ankara, **Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt (1892-1950)** used every diplomatic and personal resource available to him to save lives. One of America’s most experienced envoys, Steinhardt served in Sweden, Peru, the Soviet Union, Türkiye, Czechoslovakia, and Canada. While posted to Moscow and Ankara during the height of Nazi persecution, he worked with the War Refugee Board, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the Vatican’s Monsignor Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) to coordinate the rescue and transit of thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe. His correspondence and instructions to his staff reflected a deliberate choice to use diplomacy as a tool of compassion, even when official channels offered little guidance or support.

Affidavit for Eva Feigl signed by Myles Standish.

From the U.S. consulate in Tangier, **Rives Childs (1887-1987)** risked his career to save more than 1,200 Jews fleeing Vichy and Nazi persecution. A veteran of World War I and a seasoned Foreign Service officer, Childs persuaded Spanish authorities to issue transit visas and established safe houses for Jewish families until Allied forces reached North Africa. He worked quietly with Renée Reichmann of the Joint Distribution Committee to coordinate relief under the cover of diplomatic activity, defying strict limitations on immigration and refugee assistance.

Few U.S. diplomats confronted the Nazi regime as directly as **Raymond Geist (1885-1955)**, who served as U.S. consul general in Berlin. Geist intervened personally with German officials to secure the release of Jews from concentration camps and ensured that every available U.S. visa under the German quota was issued between 1938 and 1939. His office became a refuge for desperate families seeking a path to safety, and his insistence that Germany's visa allotment not be redistributed to other posts resulted in thousands of lives saved. Geist's tenure in Berlin stands as one of the most consequential examples of principled action within the constraints of prewar U.S. immigration policy.

In Switzerland, **Ambassador Leland Harrison (1883-1951)** turned his position into a lifeline for victims of persecution.

A career diplomat with postings in Sweden, Romania, and Switzerland, Harrison relayed early reports of Nazi atrocities to Washington, supporting Gerhardt Riegner's detailed accounts of mass killings. Despite bureaucratic resistance in the State Department, he championed the efforts of relief agencies, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the International Red

COURTESY OF SCOTTWOLERY-PRICE



COURTESY OF SCOTTWOLERY-PRICE

Myles Standish (front row second from right) and Hiram Bingham (front row left) with consular staff in Marseilles.

Cross, and facilitated communication between the War Refugee Board and Jewish organizations operating in Europe. His dispatches from Bern helped ensure that the full scope of Nazi crimes reached Allied policymakers.

Ambassador Herschel Johnson (1894-1966), U.S. minister to Sweden from 1941 to 1946, likewise refused to let virtuous action be muted by overly cautious diplomatic policy. In Stockholm, he pressed Washington to take more active measures to protect Jewish refugees, reported on Swedish rescue operations for Danish and Norwegian Jews, and worked to build public and political support for humanitarian action. Johnson's recommendation that the War Refugee Board send Raoul Wallenberg to Budapest as Sweden's special envoy would ultimately save tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews; Wallenberg himself issued protective passports and sheltered Jews in buildings he declared Swedish territory before he was detained by the Soviets and disappeared.

COURTESY OF SCOTTWOLERY-PRICE



World War II refugees lined up at the U.S. consulate in Marseilles in 1941.

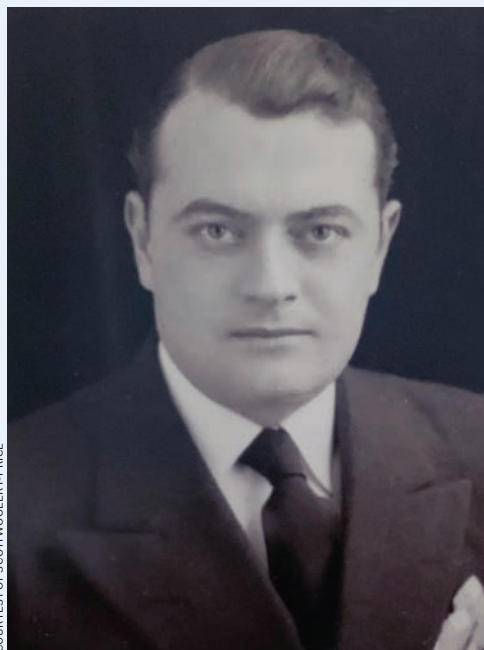
Working in Geneva as the War Refugee Board's representative, **Roswell McClelland (1914-1995)** became one of the central figures in the Allied relief effort. A former Red Cross representative, McClelland managed \$10 million in aid for humanitarian operations across occupied Europe, channeling funds to support Jewish refugees and coordinate relief convoys. His collaboration with Swiss, Vatican,

and neutral diplomats provided critical escape routes and shelter for children who otherwise would have perished. Though his work was largely unheralded during his lifetime, McClelland's reports offer an extraordinary record of determination, empathy, and effective dissent through action.

Among the earliest to sound the alarm about Hitler's rise, **George Messersmith (1883-1960)** used his position as U.S. consul general in Berlin to chronicle, in vivid terms, the Nazi regime's escalating brutality. He issued warnings to Washington as early as 1933, condemned Nazi abuses in a series of detailed memoranda, and advocated strongly for a more forceful American response following the November 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom. Messersmith's moral vision and staunch criticism of appeasement made him one of the most outspoken figures in the Foreign Service during the interwar period.

Paul Squire (1903-1972), serving as U.S. consul in Bern, became the crucial link between the European resistance and Washington when he transmitted the now-historic Riegner Telegram in August 1942. The cable conveyed the first reliable intelligence of Hitler's plan to exterminate Europe's Jews. Squire's insistence on verifying and forwarding the report, despite skepticism in Washington, ensured that the evidence reached policymakers and Jewish organizations abroad. His persistence helped force the issue of genocide into the official record at a time when denial and disbelief were widespread.

In southern France, **Vice Consul Myles Standish (1909-1979)** carried out one of the most daring acts of diplomatic humanitarianism of the war. Stationed in Marseille from 1937 to 1941, he worked closely with the Emergency Rescue Committee and the American Friends Service Committee to secure exit visas, travel documents, and transport for Jewish and political refugees. Among those he aided were artist Marc Chagall and writer Lion Feuchtwanger. Defying restrictive immigration quotas and orders to cease such activities, Standish personally escorted refugees to the border and organized clandestine departures. Later, he worked for the War Refugee Board, where he was responsible for developing escape routes. He organized escapes from the Axis-held territory for political and religious refugees behind enemy lines. He was particularly active in the efforts to rescue abandoned children. He also compiled the first U.S. government list of war criminals.



COURTESY OF SCOTT WOOLERY-PRICE

Myles Standish in the early 1940s.

Envoy **Myron Taylor (1874-1959)**

brought to his role as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal representative to the Vatican a keen sense of moral leadership. A prominent businessman before becoming involved in diplomatic efforts during World War II at the request of Roosevelt, Taylor used his influence to confront Nazi atrocities directly with Pope Pius XII. His memoranda and private appeals urged the Vatican to take a public stand on deportations, and his advocacy contributed to papal statements condemning racial persecution. Taylor's mission helped keep international attention focused on the plight of Europe's Jews during

the darkest years of the war.

As chargé d'affaires in Vichy France, **Pinkney Tuck (1896-1993)** confronted French Prime Minister Pierre Laval to protest the deportation of Jewish children and petitioned Washington to grant them U.S. entry. Tuck's dispatches revealed the human toll of the collaborationist regime and pressed for a stronger American response. His persistent advocacy led to the rescue of hundreds of refugees and earned him wide admiration among humanitarian and diplomatic circles after the war.

Finally, **George Waller (1892-1962)**, U.S. chargé d'affaires in Luxembourg, used his limited authority to great effect. When Nazi occupation engulfed the country, Waller expedited visas and travel documents for Jewish families desperate to flee. His quick action and willingness to bend restrictive rules enabled numerous escapes from the advancing German army. For his humanitarian service, Waller was later awarded the Luxembourg War Cross; the military decoration was created by Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxembourg on April 17, 1945, to recognize extraordinary feats of military service and bravery.

Working individually, often without support or against the wishes of the U.S. government, these 12 diplomats transformed the instruments of diplomacy—visas, cables, and reports—into instruments of conscience. In standing against indifference and fear, they affirmed that dissent, when guided by humanity and principle, is not disloyalty but devotion to the moral core of U.S. service. Their example continues to guide the U.S. Foreign Service today, reminding us that quiet courage can change the course of history.

Nelson B. Delavan Award for a Foreign Service Office Management Specialist

Mina M. Raass-Dana

BRIDGING MISSIONS, BUILDING ALLIANCES

While serving as the political-military office management specialist (OMS) at U.S.

Embassy Tokyo, Mina M. Raass-Dana made efforts that surpassed her official duties. She strengthened embassy operations and the U.S.-Japan alliance through her initiative, precision, and leadership. Balancing dual responsibilities as political-military and senior political OMS, Raass-Dana provided critical administrative and logistical support to senior leadership, coordinated seamlessly across agencies, and earned a reputation as one of Mission Japan's most capable and trusted colleagues. For all this and more, she has received AFSA's 2025 Nelson B. Delavan Award.

One of Raass-Dana's most significant accomplishments was spearheading the first-ever "Embassy Day" for the U.S. Forces Japan Commanders' Conference, a daylong program bringing together 35 generals, admirals, and senior enlisted advisers for strategic discussions, resulting in improved collaboration between the embassy and U.S. military leadership in Japan. She personally designed and managed the program, venues, and schedule, orchestrating a 10-agency roundtable at the ambassador's residence and policy "deep-dives" that delivered what one colleague described as "a high-impact day that advanced the alliance."

"There was a 'before Mina' and an 'after Mina,'" her nominator for the award reflected. "Her departure left a definite gap in the mission."

Recognized for her professionalism and composure under pressure, Raass-Dana was frequently called on to manage the embassy's most complex, high-profile events—roles that were rarely entrusted to an OMS. She served as liaison to the U.S. Secret Service during a 2022 VIP visit and as deputy control



Mina M. Raass-Dana

officer for First Lady Jill Biden at the 2023 G7 Hiroshima Summit. She coordinated security and logistics, finalized programming, and ensured seamless cooperation among the First Lady's team, Secret Service, and Japanese counterparts. Her efforts earned praise from senior leadership for "quick-witted resolution to professional situations." She became the go-to choice for special projects requiring both tact and operational mastery.

In addition to her technical excellence, Raass-Dana distinguished herself as a mentor and advocate. She championed a junior locally employed (LE) staff member's inclusion in VIP visit planning. This opportunity allowed that colleague to take on a lead role as deputy control officer for the Secretary at the G7 Hiroshima Summit. By identifying and promoting emerging talent, Raass-Dana helped strengthen the mission's bench and fostered an environment where initiative was recognized and rewarded.

A dedicated volunteer, Raass-Dana served on the Employee Welfare Association Board, was a voting member of the Housing Board at one of the world's largest embassies, and was one of the founding members of the Tokyo Women's Diplomatic Network, a cross-mission initiative to build connection and mentorship among women in diplomacy.

Colleagues credit Raass-Dana's success to her deep understanding of the mission's interagency ecosystem and her ability to make complex coordination look effortless. She consistently balanced competing demands, managing schedules for both the ambassador and deputy chief of mission while arranging secure communications with the Pentagon and White House. The embassy's limited country team meetings under her watch were described by her nominator as the "gold standard" for preparation and execution.

"Mina always made the mission stronger. She worked tirelessly behind the scenes, ensuring that operations ran smoothly so that others could focus on policy. Her leadership and morale-building touched every corner of the embassy," the nominator wrote.

Raass-Dana's commitment to excellence is rooted in values instilled early in life. In her remarks at the awards ceremony, she recalled growing up in Nampa, Idaho, the daughter of two young immigrants from the island of Tonga who taught their five children to "always be the hardest-working people in the room."

Asked what inspired her to join the Foreign Service, Raass-Dana said, "To continue public service that began as an enlisted



AWARDS FOR EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE



Mina M. Raass-Dana (fourth from right) with Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Amy Rule (spouse of Ambassador Emanuel, second from right), and Embassy Tokyo colleagues at the ambassador's residence, 2022.

U.S. Air Force airman. My parents are immigrants to this country and taught us that service to their adopted country [is the best way to show] gratitude for the opportunities it has given me and my family."

She used her acceptance speech at the October 1 awards ceremony to thank mentors, colleagues, and LE staff throughout Mission Japan, from political officers and LE staff translators to RSO and GSO colleagues, whose teamwork made every high-level visit and initiative possible. She dedicated her award to her late father, Amanaki Raass, "who thought this was the greatest country in the world and would've been over the moon knowing his daughter was recognized for doing her job for this country he so loved."

"Recognizing me," she said, "is recognizing the nearly 800 OMSs serving in more than 200 U.S. missions around the world whose portfolios and the support they provide mirror the same things, in varying degrees, that I've been recognized for. My name is on this wonderfully generous award, but it also recognizes all the colleagues whose collaboration and professional courtesies help me do my job."

Through her leadership, mentorship, and commitment to the mission, Mina M. Raass-Dana has embodied the very best of the office management specialist corps: building bridges between agencies, empowering colleagues, and advancing the U.S.-Japan alliance with professionalism and heart.

M. Juanita Guess Award for a Community Liaison Office Coordinator

Jiana Leonard

STEADFAST LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS

When crisis struck Dhaka in mid-2024, Jiana Leonard became the anchor that held the U.S. embassy community together.

As community liaison office coordinator (CLO), she guided employees and families through violent unrest, communication blackouts, and evacuations with resolve, empathy, and an unwavering focus on connection. Her leadership sustained morale and helped the mission emerge stronger and more united than before, earning her AFSA's 2025 M. Juanita Guess Award for a Community Liaison Office Coordinator.

Leonard arrived at post in September 2023 and joined the CLO team in May 2024, just as Bangladesh was entering a period of political upheaval. Within her first month, violent protests erupted across the country, and the government abruptly shut down all



Jiana Leonard



U.S. Embassy Dhaka's dedicated CLO team pauses for a festive moment with the jolliest visitor of the year in December 2024.

internet and data connections, cutting off communication for millions, including embassy staff.

With the city under lockdown and many newcomers still finding their footing, Leonard immediately reactivated and redesigned the residential warden system to function without internet access. She organized wardens to conduct daily check-ins by phone and in person, making sure every member of the mission community was accounted for. When families needed supplies or medication, she worked side by side with the regional medical officer and the Regional Security Office to deliver them personally.

"Jiana understood the need for proactive, consistent, and frequent communication during a crisis," wrote her nominator. "She didn't wait for instructions. She identified the gaps, filled them, and kept everyone connected."

As conditions deteriorated, the embassy entered authorized and later ordered departure. Despite being one of those evacuated, Leonard worked up to the very moment of departure to ensure every colleague and family had a safe plan to return home. Even after arriving back in the United States, she continued to support the community remotely, maintaining

morale through virtual events, checking on students' distance learning with the American International School, and keeping communication channels open with those who remained in Dhaka.

When ordered departure ended, Leonard played a pivotal role in rebuilding community cohesion. She organized welcome-back gatherings, family events, and cultural excursions, recognizing that many community members were anxious or disoriented after months away. The embassy community rediscovered a sense of stability and belonging through her careful planning.

Understanding the link between morale and mission effectiveness, Leonard organized sector-by-sector shopping excursions and cultural trips that became lifelines for those living under strict movement restrictions. She ensured essential trips aligned with community needs: a shopping outing before the Marine Ball, a movie theater visit timed to a long-awaited release, and heritage tours that gave colleagues a glimpse of Dhaka's rich history. "Frequently after an evacuation, it can take months or years for a community to come back together," her nominator noted. "Thanks to Jiana's leadership and empathy, Dhaka's community remained strong."

“The truth is, this award is not mine alone. My work as a CLO was only possible because of the unwavering support and collaboration of so many people ... from emergency wardens to volunteers across every section.”

—Jiana Leonard

Before her spouse joined the Foreign Service in 2023, Leonard spent nearly two decades serving others as a military spouse and community volunteer. She supported families through the Marine Corps’ LINKS program, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, and as a family readiness adviser in Japan. She also contributed to NATO’s family support efforts and the International Women’s Club in Portugal. With a degree in exercise sports science and professional experience in physical therapy and rehabilitation, she brings to her work a deep understanding of care, resilience, and well-being.

“As a military spouse for almost 20 years, I’ve seen how vital a supportive network is,” she said. “Becoming a CLO allowed me to help others feel connected and informed and to be part of something bigger than myself.”

For Leonard, the award reflects community, not individual achievement. In her remarks at the October 1 awards ceremony, she shared, “The truth is, this award is not mine alone. My work as a CLO was only possible because of the unwavering support and collaboration of so many people in Embassy Dhaka—from emergency wardens to volunteers across every section. None of this would have been possible without them.”

She also expressed gratitude to the Global Community Liaison Office for their guidance during the embassy’s departure and return, and to her husband, Major Ian Leonard, and daughter Mia, for their patience and encouragement throughout a year of constant challenge.

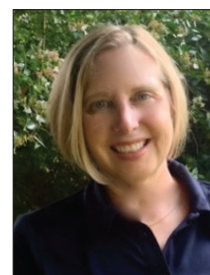
“This recognition is really a reflection of what we can achieve when we come together with one purpose—to support one another and create a community where everyone feels valued and included.”

Her favorite quote, by Steve Jobs, captures her philosophy: “The only way to do great work is to love what you do.” Through that love, and through her dedication to service, teamwork, and compassion, Jiana Leonard has shown what it means to lead with both courage and heart.

Avis Bohlen Award for a Foreign Service Family Member

Jane Krill Thompson **A HEART FOR SERVICE IN KATHMANDU**

During three years at post in Nepal, Jane Krill Thompson, spouse of Senior Foreign Service Officer and U.S. Ambassador to Nepal Dean Thompson, has embodied the spirit of service that defines the Avis Bohlen Award: quiet, sustained, and deeply human engagement that strengthens the bond between the U.S. mission and its host nation.



Jane Krill Thompson

Leveraging a lifetime of experience in special education and early childhood development, Thompson devoted herself to improving opportunities for children in some of Kathmandu’s most underserved neighborhoods. Twice each week, she volunteered with the Asha School, an elementary school run by the local NGO Asha Sansar that serves children from migrant and marginalized families.

Drawing on her decades of teaching and administrative experience, Thompson spent one day each week in the classroom and another training teachers to identify students needing additional support. She worked closely with staff to introduce inclusive education techniques, helping teachers adapt lessons for children with special needs. The colleague who nominated her noted that she “did not delegate; she rolled up her sleeves and did the work herself.”

Recognizing the need for sustained learning resources, Thompson successfully applied for a J. Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust grant, which enabled her to establish a school library. She personally oversaw the project from start to finish, designing the proposal, collecting and cataloging books, training a staff member to serve as librarian, and creating a quiet space where children could read and explore. Today, that library stands as a tangible legacy of her initiative and commitment.

“Jane has a very busy schedule as the ambassador’s spouse, but she goes out of her way to reach out to the underprivileged,” her nominator wrote. “She brings credit to the American post here in Nepal.”

At Christmastime, Thompson and her husband visited the school to distribute gifts to all 125 children. When they realized there would not be enough toys for everyone, they personally purchased more so that no child was left out. Her generosity, the nominator added, “made a lasting impression not only on the children but also on the school staff, who saw the sincerity of her care.”

Beyond Asha Sansar, Thompson has supported a range of local organizations and several NGOs serving Nepal’s special needs community. Her consistent engagement, from mentoring educators to advising NGOs on program design, has strengthened Embassy Kathmandu’s relationship with the Nepali public and demonstrated the goodwill of American diplomacy at its most personal level.

A special education professional by training, Thompson serves as the educational consultant for special needs, APAC, at Bennett International, continuing her lifelong work to support families and schools worldwide. In the United States, she previously directed early childhood and adult education programs in Montgomery County, Maryland, and led the Lourie Center Infant and Toddler Program. Overseas, she has worked with

“The Foreign Service and the programs they support are among the best investments per return that our country makes.”

—Jane Krill Thompson

international schools, NGOs, and early-intervention programs across South and Southeast Asia and chaired multiple international school boards. In 2020 she received the Secretary of State Award for Volunteerism Overseas (SOSA) for her long-standing community service.

Her dedication is rooted in both professional calling and personal conviction. Asked what the award means to her, Thompson said, “I am honored and humbled. My name may be on the award, but nothing was achieved by myself. There are others who are as or more deserving as I.”

Asked what led her to Foreign Service life, she said, “I guess I could say ‘love,’ as I agreed to come along for this amazing ride.” Since 1994, that “ride” has taken her and her family through Dhaka, Asunción, Colombo, Kolkata, Bucharest, Kuala Lumpur, and Kathmandu, as well as Washington, D.C. Along the way, she has raised three children, welcomed a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren, and shared the newest post with their energetic labradoodle, Bogey.

In her reflections, Thompson emphasized her admiration for the Foreign Service community. “The value the American people receive from those serving overseas is enormous. The economic, political, security, and goodwill benefit to our country cannot be overstated. The Foreign Service and the programs they support are among the best investments per return that our country makes,” she said.

She shared her guiding principle: “Be patient, be flexible, and always assume good intentions.”

From classrooms in Kathmandu’s most vulnerable neighborhoods to embassy partnerships that model compassion and inclusion, Jane Krill Thompson has shown how one person’s steady commitment can ripple outward and change lives, build bridges, and advance the spirit of American diplomacy far beyond official channels.



Jane Thompson (right) chats with a participant from the Youth in Policy and Government Program in the Karnali region.

Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy

Nora S. Brito

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY IN UKRAINE

While serving in Kyiv between September 2023 and October 2024, Nora S. Brito advanced U.S. strategic goals by ensuring that American security assistance in Ukraine delivered measurable, accountable results. As a program officer in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), Brito helped build institutions, protect war crime victims, and reinforce the integrity of U.S. assistance. She was recognized with AFSA's 2025 Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy for her creative and dedicated work.



Nora S. Brito

In the midst of Russia's full-scale invasion, Brito helped keep Ukraine's criminal justice system functional under extraordinary pressure. She led the creation of Ukraine's first-ever Victim Witness Coordination Center, which allowed survivors of war crimes to access professional, trauma-informed support. The center's creation addressed a critical gap in Ukraine's prosecu-

torial process: Previously, victims of torture or sexual violence often endured repeated, retraumatizing interviews. Brito and her team's initiative provided training for prosecutors and investigators to adopt a victim-centered approach, strengthening evidence collection while preserving victims' dignity.

Her efforts also revitalized Ukraine's Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) by ensuring that training, equipment, and oversight programs were tied to performance benchmarks. These measures produced an 80 percent increase in prosecutions from 2022 to 2023, including high-level corruption cases. Recognizing that success required more than capacity-building, Brito led the campaign to legally secure SAPO's independence. Drafting a letter on behalf of Group of 7 and European Union (EU) ambassadors, she urged the Ukrainian parliament to strengthen pending legislation. When President Volodymyr Zelensky received her letter, he intervened personally to make the stronger bill's passage certain. This change kept Ukraine aligned with IMF benchmarks and safeguarded billions in international budget support.

She coordinated with Washington and interagency partners to condition \$1.1 billion in U.S. assistance on verifiable governance reforms, reinforcing that American aid serves both partner and U.S. taxpayer interests. Her work directly supported U.S. efforts to ensure accountability, transparency, and measurable returns on investment in Ukraine's reconstruction.

These reforms, her supervisor noted in Brito's nomination, "played a pivotal role in the EU's decision to open accession

negotiations with Ukraine," marking a milestone for both U.S. policy and Ukraine's aspirations for integration with democratic Europe.

To protect U.S. resources and public trust, Brito introduced internal audits, external reviews, and FBI mentorship for Ukraine's anti-corruption bodies. Overseeing INL's \$60 million criminal justice budget, she implemented rigorous safeguards to ensure that every dollar advanced strategic goals. Her stewardship earned recognition for integrity and efficiency among missions of similar size.

Beyond Ukraine's immediate war environment, Brito and



Leaders of Ukrainian civil society organizations discuss their efforts to strengthen Ukrainian anti-corruption and criminal justice institutions with (from left) U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Nora Brito.

her team also looked to the nation's future reconstruction. She developed a training and mentorship program for a new generation of civil society leaders and investigative journalists, focused on local oversight of public procurement and infrastructure projects. In the future, when Ukraine's massive postwar rebuilding begins, these community watchdogs will be essential to preventing corruption and maintaining public confidence.

"Achieving results in Ukraine required more than training. It required revamping the systems that made independent investigations nearly impossible," her nominator said. "Nora understood the stakes and built the coalitions to make lasting reform possible."

Brito also led the embassy's effort to secure Ukraine's participation in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Working Group on Bribery, the first step toward full OECD membership. This milestone strengthened Ukraine's long-term democratic and economic stability, while signaling international confidence in its reform trajectory.

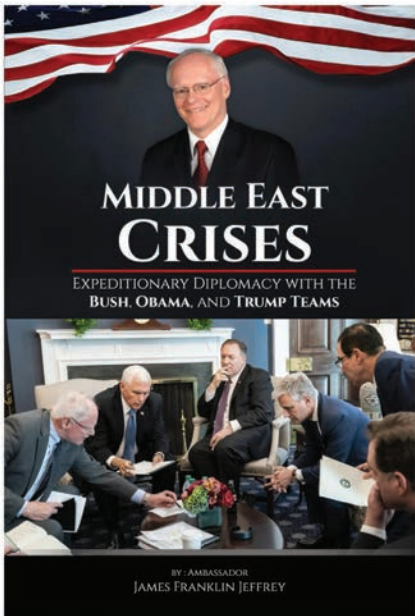
For Brito, democracy promotion is both a professional mission and a personal calling. In her remarks at the October 1 AFSA awards ceremony, she reflected: "Our mission was clear: to ensure U.S. assistance delivered results that served both the American people and the Ukrainian people."

She dedicated the award to her Ukrainian INL local staff, whose courage and professionalism, she said, "made real progress possible." She also thanked her family, especially her parents, José Brito and María Rosa Puente, who immigrated to the United States in pursuit of opportunity. "I joined the Foreign Service as my way of giving back to the country that gave them that chance," she said. "Every step of this journey honors both where I come from and the country that made it possible."

Remarkably, this is Brito's second Mark Palmer Award: She also received the accolade in 2019 for creating a space for the new generation of Venezuelan leaders to fight for democracy and freedom for all Venezuelans. Her career reflects the courage, imagination, and strategic acumen that the award celebrates: the ability to advance American values not only through policy advocacy but through institution-building that endures.

By combining disciplined management with vision and empathy with resolve, Brito has strengthened Ukraine's democratic foundations and reinforced the global credibility of U.S. diplomacy. Her work reminds us that even in wartime, democracy's advancement depends on those who ensure that justice, accountability, and hope take root.

Nora S. Brito joined the Foreign Service in 2014 and has served in Mexico, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Spain. She is currently serving as political chief at U.S. Embassy Santo Domingo.



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AFSA Achievement and Contributions to the Association Award

Vivian S. Walker CHAMPIONING THE VOICE OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE THROUGH THE FSJ

For six years, Vivian Walker was a steady and visionary force on the Editorial Board for *The Foreign Service Journal*, AFSA's flagship publication. First as a board member and then chair of the FSJ Editorial Board from 2023 to 2025, Walker helped shape the *Journal's* editorial direction during a pivotal era. For this inspired service, she has received the 2025 AFSA Achievement and Contributions to the Association Award.



Vivian S. Walker

During her tenure as chair, the *FSJ* celebrated the 100th anniversary of AFSA and the U.S. Foreign Service with year-long centennial coverage that captured the history, diversity, and evolving mission of diplomacy. The special May 2024 centennial edition, which featured reflections from leaders such as Hillary Clinton, James Baker, and Samantha Power, earned a silver Trendy Award in 2025—one of several national honors for excellence in professional journalism the *Journal* received during Walker's term, including a silver Trendy Award (2024) and a gold Tabbie Award (2023) for in-depth coverage of the Afghanistan evacuation.

Her colleagues describe her as principled yet pragmatic, a leader who listens as carefully as she speaks: "Vivian's leadership has helped ensure that Foreign Service voices remain strong and heard, even through disruption and uncertainty."

As board chair, Walker worked closely with Editor in Chief Shawn Dorman and the entire FSJ staff through a period of

rapid change for both AFSA and the *Journal*. She provided continuity and perspective, helping to align the *Journal's* editorial vision with AFSA's advocacy, legal defense, and membership work. Each issue under her guidance reinforced the *Journal's* unique mission: to chronicle, reflect, critique, and celebrate the profession of diplomacy.

At the October 1 AFSA Awards Ceremony, Walker remarked, "While I am deeply grateful to be recognized for my service through my work on the *Journal*, I want to honor the vision, courage, and tenacity of AFSA's dedicated leaders and members. At a profoundly existential moment for the future of the American Foreign Service, AFSA has risen to the challenge—advocating fiercely for the profession and for those who serve."

She added, "AFSA's role as the advocate for the Foreign Service has never been more important, and I am deeply honored to have been able to support the *Journal* in amplifying the voices of those who serve." Walker also paid tribute to the *Journal's* editorial team, saying that they are responsible for "the *Journal's* status as the preeminent voice—and conscience—of the Foreign Service."

A retired Senior Foreign Service officer and PhD, and the spouse of an active-duty FSO, Walker brought her extensive background in public diplomacy and international education to the *Journal*. Drawing on a 26-year Foreign Service career that spanned seven overseas posts, including Croatia, Arme-

nia, Tunisia, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan, and such senior positions as deputy chief of mission in Croatia and Armenia and an office director in the Bureau of European Affairs, Walker had deep professional and academic networks that enriched the *Journal's* pages, helping to expand its book review section

and spotlighting emerging scholarship on global communication and diplomacy.

Walker says she approached her role at the *FSJ* in the spirit of T.S. Eliot's words from "Little Gidding"—"We shall not cease from exploration ... and know the place for the first time." She is dedicated to reexamining how diplomacy is practiced and narrated, and ensuring that each generation of readers rediscovers its meaning for their own time.

"The responsibility to speak truth to power, to be heard but also to listen, to be passionate but not self-righteous—these are

"At a profoundly existential moment for the future of the American Foreign Service, AFSA has risen to the challenge—advocating fiercely for the profession and for those who serve."

—Vivian S. Walker

the *Journal's* foundational principles,” she said at the AFSA ceremony. “It has been my honor to uphold them.”

Through her leadership on *The Foreign Service Journal*, Walker has strengthened AFSA's capacity to document and defend the profession of diplomacy. In celebrating her contributions, AFSA also celebrates the enduring vitality of the *Journal* she helped guide.

Vivian S. Walker served as executive director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy from 2019 to 2024. She now bridges the worlds of practice and scholarship as co-president of the Public Diplomacy Council of America, practitioner in residence at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, and faculty fellow at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. She also co-edits the Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy, contributes to academic journals and conferences worldwide, and mentors the next generation of public diplomacy professionals.



AFSA President John Dinkelman presents Vivian Walker with the AFSA Achievement and Contributions to the Association Award.

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Recipients of the 2025 AFSA Exemplary Performance Award. From left: Jahari Fraser, Kim Sullivan, Erin Oliver, Nadja Ruzica, Raeka Safai, Nikki Gamer, Sharon Papp, Christine Miele, and AFSA President John Dinkelman.

Group AFSA Exemplary Performance Award

AFSA's Crisis Response Team

PROTECTING THE FOREIGN SERVICE IN A TUMULTUOUS TIME

In the early days of 2025, as sweeping executive actions and policy reversals from an administration hostile to both unions and the work of the Foreign Service threatened the structure and stability of the U.S. Foreign Service, a small group at the American Foreign Service Association stepped forward to meet the moment. Working late nights, weekends, and holidays, they formed AFSA's Crisis Response Team: an internal task force dedicated to defending the Foreign Service and keeping members informed amid unprecedented political and institutional turmoil.

From January through May, the team coordinated AFSA's communications, media engagement, legal response, and member outreach at a relentless pace. They responded to events in real time, anticipated challenges, and ensured AFSA remained a stabilizing voice for the community it represents.

Other members of the AFSA staff were crucial to the success of these efforts, but these individuals formed the core group.

When AFSA created the task force on January 21, 2025, the association faced an onslaught of developments: executive orders curtailing elements of the Foreign Service, threats to USAID's structure and staffing, and uncertainty about pay and benefits. The Crisis Response Team crafted daily updates, managed media inquiries, and coordinated with Hill offices, all in support of the thousands of members seeking guidance and reassurance.

They were the first to arrive, the last to leave, and the ones holding the center when everything else felt uncertain.

The Crisis Response Team worked seven days a week from morning until night. They planned, drafted, and strategized as events unfolded, making sure members, the media, and Congress all understood what was happening and what AFSA was doing to defend the Foreign Service.

The team worked across departments to sustain a unified response. AFSA's leadership credits their collaboration with

keeping members connected, preserving the association's credibility, and shaping the public narrative around diplomacy. Their work enabled AFSA to issue timely statements, mobilize member advocacy, and preserve public trust in the Foreign Service when it mattered most.

The 2025 Group AFSA Exemplary Performance Award honors the members of this Crisis Response Team: Jahari Fraser, executive assistant to AFSA's president; Nikki Gamer, director of communications and outreach; Nadja Ruzica, deputy director of communications and outreach; Christine Miele, director of membership and programs; Erin Oliver, communications manager; Sharon Papp, general counsel; Raeka Safai, deputy general counsel; and Kim Sullivan, director of congressional advocacy.

They were the first to arrive, the last to leave, and the ones holding the center when everything else felt uncertain. The Group AFSA Exemplary Performance Award recognizes their extraordinary effort to represent, protect, and empower America's diplomats.



AWARD FOR FOREIGN SERVICE CHAMPIONS

Foreign Service Champions Award

Virginia State Senator Tara Durant
and Delegate Paul E. Krizek


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A FSA is proud to recognize Virginia State Senator Tara Durant (R-Fredericksburg) and Delegate Paul E. Krizek (D-Alexandria) with the 2025 Foreign Service Champions

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Tara Durant

Award for their bipartisan leadership in advancing legislation that strengthens and supports Foreign Service families in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Their work exemplifies how state-level policy can have a lasting impact on the lives of U.S. diplomats and their families serving around the world.



Paul E. Krizek

Sen. Durant, a former teacher and military spouse, has drawn on her own family's experience with military service to champion the unique educational needs of Foreign Service children. In 2023 she successfully passed Chapter 783 of the Code of Virginia, providing greater flexibility in school enrollment for the children of federal employees who relocate within the United States.

Building on that success, she expanded those protections through SB 1244 (2025), extending eligibility to Foreign Service families returning to Virginia from overseas posts.

She also voted in favor of HJ 206 in 2024, the joint resolution commemorating the Foreign Service centennial in the Virginia General Assembly.

"While our community rightfully acknowledges the sacrifices of military personnel serving overseas, the contributions of civil servants in similar roles are often less visible," Durant reflected. "It has been incredibly rewarding to help ease the transition for families returning to Virginia and to contribute, in some small way, to their successful reintegration."

Del. Krizek, the son of a Foreign Service officer, has long been a steadfast advocate for the diplomatic community. His introduction of HB 1936, now Chapter 329 of the Code of Virginia, established the 90-day rule for in-state tuition eligibility for Foreign Service families. This measure is critical in ensuring educational access and continuity for children whose parents frequently relocate due to overseas assignments. He also introduced HB 1975 and HB 518, aimed at achieving parity between Foreign Service and military retirees in Virginia.

In 2024 Krizek led the introduction and passage of HJ 206, formally recognizing the centennial of the U.S. Foreign Service and honoring its service and sacrifice.

"As the son of a Foreign Service officer, this award is deeply meaningful," Krizek said. "But even more important is the recognition it gives to our FSOs, who often serve in difficult and dangerous conditions. They and their families make incredible sacrifices in service to our nation, and they deserve our full support."

Through their efforts, Sen. Durant and Del. Krizek have forged a fruitful bipartisan partnership in support of America's diplomats, demonstrating that diplomacy is not a partisan cause but a national one. Their work has brought meaningful, tangible benefits to Foreign Service families in education and quality-of-life issues and has increased public awareness of the essential role diplomats play in advancing U.S. interests abroad.

The Foreign Service Champions Award celebrates their shared commitment to honoring and strengthening the Foreign Service, ensuring that Virginia remains a welcoming home for those who represent the United States overseas. Tara Durant and Paul Krizek have set an inspiring, bipartisan example of how state and local action can reinforce national service and uphold the values at the heart of American diplomacy. ■



AFSA President John Dinkelman presents Delegate Krizek and Senator Durant with the AFSA Foreign Service Champions Award.

AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

The Costs of the Government Shutdown

When the government shutdown began in October 2025, AFSA reached out to Foreign Service members to ask: With your team furloughed, what work is left undone? And how will this forced work stoppage affect the American people? Below are some of their replies, lightly edited for length and clarity. All responses are anonymous.

Security at Risk

Even as the resources diminish and work pauses, the security risks don't stop.

"A lack of funds to repair armored vehicles means we are using soft-skinned (e.g., non-armored) cars at a post that is rated critical for terrorism."

"Critical border security work is not being accomplished given the embassy's inability to backfill a consular role. Issuing visas is a vital screening tool for those wishing to enter the United States."

"America is less safe because of the shutdown. **Our competitors take every shutdown as an opportunity** to demonstrate the lack of American resolve and reliability."

"I cannot effectively keep up with IT requirements. We can't fix things that break, regular maintenance can't be done, and we can't buy replacements. Our society and our government depend on computers and the internet. **The Department of State and the U.S. are becoming more vulnerable to cyber-attack by the day.**"

"The U.S. federal government is facing a sharp increase in cyberattacks coinciding with the shutdown beginning October 1. Attackers are exploiting the financial stress and uncertainty of furloughed or unpaid government workers [and mounting more attacks]."

Americans Left Waiting

U.S. embassies continue to serve, but limited resources mean slower help for U.S. citizens abroad in need.

"We can't coordinate with foreign governments on crisis preparedness or assist Americans returning home who need emergency loans for plane tickets."

"As funding dries up, we may lose transportation to visit U.S. citizens in prison or hold off-site passport services for those far from our embassies."

"We can't have external meetings, so **we can't check on overdue airport runway repairs that impact hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizen tourists.**"

Losing Ground

The more constrained our diplomats are by furloughs and lack of resources, the more the vacuum opens for eager adversaries to fill.

“My department works on behalf of U.S. farmers, ranchers, and fisheries no matter which party is in power. We need Congress to pass a budget so that we can continue our work promoting American prosperity by ensuring access to overseas markets.”

“We help the farmers, small businesses, and everyday American survive and thrive in a competitive world. Trade shows with hundreds of American companies vying for opportunities to sell to global buyers are happening, and we aren’t able to support these companies with matchmaking, small business-tailored support, and other key services. We won’t hear their challenges with burdensome non-tariff trade barriers, or about the Chinese companies that are stealing their tech and ideas. **When shutdowns happen, small and medium American companies lose out.**”

“Our work directly benefits U.S. exporters and producers who are already struggling with uncertainty and loss of markets. With U.S. [staff] sidelined, that is one less advocate on their side in overseas markets that are key to their success.”

“I am ... serving in a country with a recent history of civil war and gross human rights violations. The U.S. is not at the table at multilateral discussions with our like-minded and international organizations. **This country also has a strong Chinese presence/influence, and we are ceding ground to them daily** by not being present and active.”

Training Interrupted

With training programs on hold, a generation of diplomats will arrive at posts unprepared.

“I am a consular officer assigned to one of our critical needs posts next year. I am ... assigned to learn the local language. Because I am furloughed, my language training has not yet started and the longer it goes on, the more difficult it will be for me to get to the proficiency I need to accurately interview people about their plans to visit the U.S. and detect fraud.”

“Overseas training in high-level Mandarin Chinese is required for positions that are currently deemed excepted. The instructors and the course have been prepaid, but the students are forbidden from studying, even without pay! Strong language skills are critical in engaging with any foreign country,

but especially so in China. **How are we supposed to work with our largest competitor if we aren’t equipped to communicate?”**

Operational Paralysis

When vital functions stop, inefficiency compounds. Projects stall, costs grow, and the government spends more fixing what neglect has broken.

“We have almost no support staff in our office, so anything related to budget, finance, or travel is on hold. With fewer people to handle the work that can still get done, even more piles up.”

“Instead of advancing the president’s priorities, my work has shifted to minimizing legal risk—making sure we’re not sued or fined for not paying local staff or utilities. **We’re negotiating with local utility companies just to keep the heat on.**”

Work Without Pay

Behind every unpaid paycheck is a person juggling financial stress and family duty. The emotional toll of the shutdown limbo is eroding a workforce already stretched thin.

“Despite the lapse, my embassy team continues to work long hours for the American people. We are supporting trade negotiations, upcoming official travel to my region, stopping illegal transfers of Iranian and Russian oil, fighting cyber scams that victimize Americans, and always prioritizing aid for American citizens who are ill, injured, become victims of crime, or even get arrested. **We are doing this without pay and under threat of never receiving back pay.**”

“We keep working to protect [our country], reunite families, and facilitate travel to stimulate the U.S. economy even during a shutdown. **Our day-to-day work has not changed, but the stress of a lack of paycheck, the burnout, and the systemic instability and fear have taken a serious toll.**”

“We are working without pay, without our families, in challenging, dangerous places to further U.S. interests. There is no part of this that is okay, and it is definitely making me rethink continuing in this career.”

“I am [posted] in the Middle East. We had an embassy vehicle break down outside town while returning from supporting [a high-level VIP] visit and were told that we would have to pay personally out of pocket to tow it back to the embassy.” ■

Like Lightning from a Clear Sky

WATCHING

GUERRILLAS

Recruit in Peru

To assess extremist non-state actors, you have to risk taking a “dance with the devil.”

BY STEPHEN G. MCFARLAND

You cannot defeat an enemy you do not understand.

Peru's elites had underestimated the Sendero Luminoso (“Shining Path”) guerrillas’ capabilities, intentions, motivation, and appeal. By 1988 the country was eight years into war with the Shining Path. More than 40,000 persons had died in this conflict that struck “like lightning from a clear sky,” historian Alberto

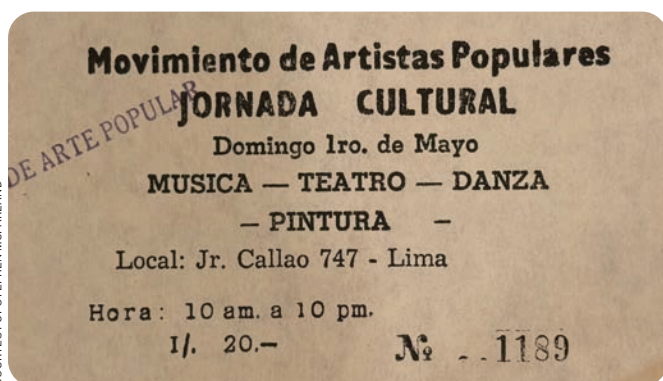
Flores Galindo wrote, taking by surprise the Peruvian government, the private sector, academics, and the gamut of political parties. In 1980 a democratically elected president, Fernando Belaunde, had returned to power after a leftist military coup 12 years earlier. Marxist parties, some of which had supported the military government, had abandoned calls for rebellion and instead contested the elections.

The Shining Path, however, had done the opposite. Based in Huamanga University in the mountain town of Ayacucho, it was led by the charismatic philosophy professor Abimael Guzmán. A Maoist who had visited China during the Cultural Revolution, Guzmán made that version of Maoism his template for crushing the Peruvian state and installing a “People’s Republic of New Democracy.” The Shining Path’s terrorism spread outward from the mountains of south-central Peru, and the group had expanded attacks in Lima, seeking the war’s tipping point.

I was the embassy political officer reporting on the armed conflict. And, concerned about its impact on the drug trade and stability, the Washington interagency wanted more. Peru was one of the two top producers of coca leaf for the cocaine trade, and



Stephen G. McFarland was ambassador to Guatemala from 2008 to 2011. A career Foreign Service officer (1976-2014), he served 12 overseas tours focused on democracy and development in conflict and post-conflict countries, including Peru, El Salvador, Iraq (in a Marine regiment), Venezuela, and Afghanistan. He received an interagency reporting award for his work in Peru. Previous FSJ articles include “A Roadmap for New Hires” (July-August 2016) and “Right of Boom: A Bomb and a Book” (September 2021) about resilience in conflict zones. The author can be reached at mcfarlandsg@gmail.com.



Path's Recruitment event on International Workers' Day, May 1, 1988, in Lima.

the Shining Path had started to protect traffickers and coca farmers against the government. Terrorism, including attacks against U.S. facilities, put a brake on foreign investments and fueled worries about Peru's democracy.

I traveled in the Shining Path heartland, solo and without appointments, in and out. Some contacts shared not only their experiences, but also clandestine documents and captured guerrilla notebooks. A bullet hole had perforated one of these notebooks. I never learned the backstory, but it symbolized the stakes of political violence. What drove people to join it? With more initiative than caution, I went to a recruitment event to find out.



I entered the rundown building in downtown Lima, only a mile from the U.S. embassy, and walked down a dark and narrow corridor. The occasion was the Shining Path's recruitment and propaganda event for International Workers' Day on May 1, 1988, and more than 200 people had already arrived. I wore gray jeans and a weathered windbreaker that did not scream "foreigner." The Shining Path considered the United States an enemy, so I tried not to look suspicious, no easy feat as one of the whiter and taller persons in the crowd. I spoke native Spanish, and I carried only a regular passport; if challenged, I was a tourist. Nobody stared at me. The only exit was where I had entered, and I kept an eye on it for three hours.

As the May Day event kicked off, red flags bearing the yellow hammer and sickle papered the wall, marking this as the Shining Path's turf. The people around me were mostly men, but about a quarter of the crowd were women. They ranged from teenagers to people in their 40s, with most in their 20s and 30s. Most were mestizo—i.e., they had a mixture of Indigenous and white ancestors—but about a third appeared more Indigenous. How could a radical and cruel Maoist insurgency inspire such interest despite

a counterinsurgency campaign marked by executions, disappearances, and torture? Something didn't add up.

The Shining Path had organized the international workers' day event through its Popular Artists' Movement and advertised it through its still-legal newspaper. Both front groups provided political and information support and reportedly supported attacks. The organizers' hook for the audience was a simple, impassioned explanation why Peruvians outside the elite had no hope of improvement. In the face of Peru's unforgiving hyperinflation and its political system's indifference, the Shining Path told people their lives could have meaning by fighting for a higher cause and standing on the winning side of history, even at the risk of capture, torture, and death. They read poems, performed dramatic skits about revolutionary violence, and praised party leader Guzmán, referred to as "President Gonzalo."

A puppet show portrayed a Shining Path cell's execution of a mayor—including a depiction of the authorities' subsequent



The author, in 1988, speaking at a meeting hosted by a local foundation with Quechua-speaking farmers outside the town of Quinua in Ayacucho department. Quinua experienced considerable violence during the conflict, and the farmers opposed Shining Path.

capture and torture of the perpetrators. Then someone read a poem by one of the more than 300 “martyrs” who had died in the Shining Path’s 1986 prison uprising: “Poetry is not just a flower, pretty and beautiful, but also a machinegun that gives birth like a star.” Another poem emphasized the role of women: “I saw you, Carmela, light the dynamite’s fuse ...”

The last presentation was the re-enactment of a Chinese Communist Party play about the Chinese Revolution. A group of peasants, suffering exploitation and starvation, join the Communist Party and embrace the armed struggle; they overthrow and execute their cruel landlord. The transformed peasants then raise their rifles and the Party’s red banner toward the sky. The folks around me cheered.

Next it was the audience’s turn. A Shining Path member shouted an order, and attendees lined up by rank and file—it was the first time I’d done so since my military training. We were instructed to sing the “Internationale,” the 19th-century Marxist and socialist anthem. The organizers ran out of copies of the lyrics, so I could only repeat the chorus and lip sync as I tried to blend in.

When the slogans stopped, we broke ranks, and I chose that moment to leave while I was ahead.

Then came the climax. As the singing ended, a young Shining Path woman belted out slogans, repeated by other members and even some of the attendees around me: “Long live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism-Gonzalo thought!”; “Down with the dictatorship!”; “Long live President Gonzalo!”; “Long live the people’s revolution!”—and multiple times, “Long live the armed struggle!” Clearly some attendees had found something they could believe in. Their lives now had a purpose.

When the slogans stopped, we broke ranks, and I chose that moment to leave while I was ahead. I slipped into the dark corridor and walked out unnoticed. After hours of Shining Path rhetoric, the adrenaline rush of being outside was invigorating.

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Thus, my encounter with the would-be Shining Path members was concluded, or maybe not.

Some of those recruits may well have subsequently surveilled us or attacked our contacts or the embassy. When I returned to Peru in 1992, perhaps some of the newer captured guerrilla notebooks I read had belonged to them.



A critical metric for violent extremists is their ability to grow and replace members who are killed or captured. Al-Qaida in Iraq, and later the Islamic State, ultimately failed to do this in Iraq, but the Taliban succeeded in Afghanistan. The Shining Path sought quality in its recruits; the alleged members I had met in the mountains showed motivation, obedience, and what Shining Path ideologues called “class consciousness”—including a willingness to die for the cause, what their leaders termed “crossing the river of blood.”

In the Ayacucho countryside the Shining Path had grown through the



COURTESY OF STEPHEN MCFARLAND

This Shining Path poster from 1985 highlights the “armed struggle” and illustrates the “cult of personality” surrounding Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán.

university’s contacts with students and villagers. As the war’s intensity increased, Shining Path violence against peasants reduced its appeal, but military human rights violations helped the guerrillas to recruit. Outside Ayacucho, a peasant told me that while no one in his community supported the Shining Path, the soldiers had still killed his brother; what he was most worried about, however, was the soldiers’ theft of his sheep, his family’s livelihood.

The Shining Path’s ideology based on class warfare found fertile ground in a Peru whose stark inequalities tracked major racial, ethnic, class, and regional divisions, and resentment. Many at the May Day event were likely from families that had migrated from the mountains to the capital’s shantytowns. They appeared to be mostly from the lower class, with some from the lower-middle class, but not from the very poor. Many looked like, and probably were, workers in dead-end jobs in the informal economy, or state university students, or low-paid government employees who

struggled under hyperinflation. Clearly the Shining Path’s urban recruiting base was much broader than the government or the U.S. embassy imagined.

Peru’s politicians dismissed the Shining Path as lacking popular support, and it is true that it would have lost in an election. But that missed the point: Shining Path’s leader was building an elite, hierarchical, and ideologically pure Maoist party to use organized violence and, in particular, terrorism to seize power. As in Russia in 1917—and later elsewhere, from the left and the right—a resolute, ruthless extremist minority could conquer a larger but disorganized majority. The Shining Path



STEPHEN MCFARLAND

Shining Path propaganda on the walls of a school outside Huancayo in the central Andes in February 1988, as the Shining Path stepped up its presence there.

had begun the war in 1980 with about 200 members and, even at its apogee, had at most 10,000 to 20,000 members, compared to a Peruvian military and police force that exceeded 100,000 and a much larger civilian government apparatus.

The Shining Path relied on violence, including the engagements it lost, to build support. Members justified terrorism and the selective assassination of real or perceived opponents, armed and unarmed. Their methods were crude, but as I reflected in 1993 while retrieving pieces of an engine block from the car bomb that had exploded outside my Embassy Lima office, crude methods can work.

The group's emphatic but flawed analysis of Peru's systemic inequality and injustice, if accepted by recruits, led to the "logical" next step of justifying revolutionary violence to conduct systemic change. In George Orwell's *1984*, the protagonist Winston Smith observed that the Party could order citizens to believe that "two plus two equals five." The Shining Path stoked the resentment among non-white Peruvians over racial, regional, and class-based exclusion to shape it into the class-based violence Mao had championed.

The Shining Path's Marxist competitors looked down on them as unschooled cousins from the country (reflecting more than a little racism, classism, and big-city snobbery on their part). But the pro-Soviet communists were behind the times, the Trotskyites were irrelevant, the traditional pro-China parties were uninspiring, and the new pro-Cuban Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement that sought to emulate Central American guerrilla groups was ineffective. The legal leftist parties challenged Sendero in the towns, often paying with their lives, but they were hopelessly divided at the national level.

Under the circumstances, Peruvian elites had assumed, wrongly, that the large enough use of indiscriminate military force would defeat Shining Path; instead, it had the opposite effect. As the United States had learned in Vietnam and in El Salvador, and would relearn the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan, a military can kill real or suspected guerrillas, and civilians, in such a way that motivates even more persons to join the guerrillas.

In 1989, facing failure, Peru's military changed its doctrine to treat civilians less as enemies, and more like potential allies, and expanded armed self-defense groups, or *rondas*, in the villages to fight Sendero. The police changed too. Police officers I met in 1988 had proposed a more intelligence-based effort. And in 1990 the Peruvian police formed a special counterterrorism group that used legal investigative techniques. Two years later, with alleged U.S. support (according to American journalist Charles Lane and former police officers in this unit), the counterterror-

ism group captured Sendero head Guzmán and his senior leaders without firing a shot.

The leadership's decapitation led to Shining Path's collapse. Almost no new Sendero leaders emerged, and recruitment was near zero.



The United States has also struggled, and sometimes failed, to comprehend extremists, terrorists, guerrillas, and insurgents. In Iraq and Afghanistan, our tactical intelligence often identified enemy capabilities and even intentions, but we lacked sufficient understanding of insurgent motivation, recruitment, and support. Success requires understanding why otherwise normal individuals join an effort that they know they may not survive and how people, per Orwell's observation, can believe that two plus two equals five.

One reason foreign (and local) observers misjudge foreign internal conflicts is that having lived in societies that have functioned relatively fairly and effectively, we fail to appreciate the resentment generated by societies that are systemically less fair and effective, more discriminatory, divided, and sometimes even predatory. "Clientitis"—excessive confidence in host country governments and elites' strategy and understanding of their country—was another huge obstacle for the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

We gloss over critical factors that are hard to measure, such as people's desire for justice, for understanding why they always remain on the bottom, for belonging to something bigger than themselves, and even why they might relish the companionship born of the shared risk of clandestine activities. We have excessive confidence that a globalized, democratic, private sector-led economic model will self-correct toward stability and social justice.

To overcome these challenges, foreign and local observers must get outside the middle- and upper-class enclaves, open their eyes, and employ vigilant empathy—at times, an armed empathy—to understand the causes and drivers of extremism. U.S. Foreign Service officers, our diplomats, are in a unique position to understand the capabilities and intentions of non-state actors, including extremist and violent groups. Doing this, outside the diplomatic bubble, requires taking calculated risks based on experience, analysis, tradecraft, and intuition. We also rely on the role of luck, even if we don't know how much.

Not every risk is worth taking; not every dance with the devil ends well. But the reward is unique insights that boost our ability to pursue our objectives in a dangerous world. ■



Turning Your Favorite FS Skills into Your Next Career

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/WENCH-MIT

If you're thinking about leaving the Foreign Service—whether by choice or otherwise—it might be time to figure out how to start your next career. These tips can help.

BY EILEEN SMITH

Thousands of federal employees are suddenly out of work. For most, it wasn't a choice. When I left, it was. After more than 20 years of federal service—and nine years before my minimum retirement age—I took a rare leap. I walked away from my cherished diplomatic career to start my own business as a public speaking coach.

Over the last seven years, my business grew to replace and then exceed my previous income. It also gave me flexibility to make time for my family, friends, and even myself. If you're worried you might abruptly find yourself out of work or if you are simply considering changing fields at some point, it's worth developing a plan for what comes next.

Identify Transferable Skills

Many feds have not only found themselves out of a job but have also found their field of work has dried up—and their contacts are in the same boat. If that is your situation, it might be time to find a new, tangential industry. For me, as I let my mind wander over my options, I remembered that when I was senior adviser to the deputy secretary of State, I regularly coached her ahead of important speeches, and she had said I could do it professionally.

That was one tiny moment in the span of my career. For the most part, I traveled the world in pursuit of U.S. policy goals, duked it out in strategy scuffles at the White House, addressed members of Congress, and managed billions of dollars in foreign assistance. Yet this one comment propelled me in a new direction.

How do you find your new path? Start by listing all the skills you used in each job during your government career. Dig deep. Some skills will transfer well, and some won't. Using artificial intelligence (AI), you can pop your list into the computer and see which skills are most in demand in growing industries. Before you decide, remember which of those skills you enjoyed using most. Your sweet spot is in the Venn diagram of what you're good at, what you like to do, and what will earn you money.

Do Your Research

Once I identified becoming a public speaking coach as my new business idea, I went on a coffee crusade. I reached out for introductions to people who had their own businesses and asked about their journeys. How did they start? How did they find clients? Was my idea viable? How would I even begin?

The people who spoke to me were incredibly generous with their time and advice. I won't forget the woman who, at the end of our conversation, told me there was plenty of room in this industry. I didn't imagine such a welcoming response from someone who could see me as a potential competitor. The owner of a large public speaking coaching firm was equally generous. I took this as a lesson in the blessings of paying it forward.

Before taking the leap, I wanted to actually try coaching a client. I had coached the deputy secretary of State. I had read



Eileen Smith's career at State and USAID spanned more than 20 years. Now she's bringing her lessons learned on the international stage to her business as a public speaking coach. Find her free job search offering at www.spokesmith.com.

Useful Resources to Get You Started

Below is a short list of sites that may help as you start your new career journey. (Note that AFSA does not endorse these sites.)

Identify Your Strengths: O*NET OnLine

<https://www.onetonline.org>

This free tool from the U.S. Department of Labor can help to identify your most marketable skills.

Find Related Jobs: mySkills myFuture

<https://www.myskillsmyfuture.org>

Their tool prompts you to enter a past or current job to view a list of career options that require similar skills.

Learn the Legal Ropes: U.S. Small Business Administration

<https://www.sba.gov/>

The official, step-by-step guide to business setup can be found on the SBA website—a free government resource that walks you through the most critical foundational steps, including:

How to incorporate: It has detailed, easy-to-understand guides comparing Sole Proprietorships, LLCs, and Corporations so you can decide what's right for you.

Local and state registrations: It provides a road map for what you need to do, including directing you to your specific state's Secretary of State website, where you can register your business name (e.g., as an LLC).

Set up Your EIN: Internal Revenue Service

<https://www.irs.gov/>

An Employer Identification Number (EIN) is like a Social Security number for your business, and you'll need it to open a business bank account and file your business taxes. This is the only official website where you can get your EIN. The online application is free, fast, and provides your new EIN immediately upon completion. Do not pay a third-party service for this.

Design a Logo: Canva

<https://www.canva.com/>

This all-in-one visual design platform makes it easy to create a professional brand from scratch. Use their Logo Maker tool to generate a logo in minutes. Their brand kit helps set your brand's colors, fonts, and logos in one place to ensure all your materials—from proposals to social media posts—look consistent and professional.

Build an Online Presence: Squarespace

<https://www.squarespace.com/>

Your website is your digital storefront. Squarespace can help build a beautiful, professional consultant website (with no coding required). Your new site will include your domain name, hosting, and even client scheduling tools so your clients can book and pay directly on your site.

Launch Your Business: IndeCollective

<https://www.indecollective.co/>

This site offers a structured program and community for launching your consulting practice. Their comprehensive platform was built specifically to help professionals become successful independent consultants, coaches, and fractional leaders. It provides detailed “playbooks” (on pricing, marketing, sales), expert coaching, AI-powered tools, and a high-trust peer community to help you skip the trial-and-error phase and build a profitable practice.

Grow Your PR Skills: Five Minutes to Famous

<https://fiveminutestofamous.com/>

Getting featured in media outlets builds credibility and third-party validation. This course and community teaches entrepreneurs and consultants how to become their own publicist by landing guest posts and features in publications to grow their authority. You'll find a process for creating pitches, finding media contacts, and leveraging media wins to establish yourself as an expert.

Get Smart on Money: Wave

<https://www.waveapps.com/>

Designed for freelancers and small business owners, this financial software tool offers simple accounting and invoicing to help manage your money. Its free plan includes unlimited invoicing, expense, and income tracking.

Connect with Female Entrepreneurs: Dreamers & Doers

<https://www.dreamersdoers.com/>

This private, curated collective for female founders and leaders moves beyond networking and focuses on amplifying the work of its members. Membership provides access to a powerful peer network and what they call their “PR Hype Machine™,” which helps you gain visibility, thought leadership opportunities, and press engagement.

Find a Mentor: SCORE

<https://www.score.org/>

SCORE is a nonprofit organization (supported by the SBA) that provides a nationwide network of free, volunteer business mentors. You could be matched with a retired executive or an experienced business owner who provides confidential advice on everything from your pricing strategy to your business plan.

—Eileen Smith

so many books about public speaking, executive presence, and body language that they all began to repeat one another. But what would it feel like as a career?

A friend introduced me to the leader of a large think tank. I offered several free sessions and left them walking on air. My participants were asking for more. The think tank gave me invaluable testimonials to use when I started my business—and became my first paying client.

Launch

There's so much to do to get started. There's the nitty-gritty of incorporating, setting up your bank account, taxpayer ID, and local and state registrations. There are wonderful resources now to help with your branding, logo, and website (see sidebar).

You also might want to invest in some training. I know—this doesn't feel like the time to spend money. I waited a couple of years into my new venture before joining a business development program and realized I should have done it at the beginning.

It covered the arc of starting and building a business, including

marketing and sales training. These skills were so removed from what made me successful in government that I didn't even know I didn't have them. I also took public relations training so I could replace my expensive PR company with my own sweat equity.

When it comes to clients, go big early. Landing the large think tank as a client gave me credibility. Ask your network for introductions in your new field. Even the smallest job with a known entity can make a difference. My client list now includes some of the biggest names in banking, commerce, publishing, and sports. Don't start too small.

This isn't easy. Expect your new business to be a slow build. Give yourself breaks. You won't do your best work if you do a full court press like you did in your diplomatic career. Build in time to take care of yourself so you can show up at your best to your new clients.

You've already built stronger partnerships, saved lives, created strategic alliances, and wrangled the interagency. Starting your own business is different, and it can be lonely. It's also the beginning of a wonderful new adventure. ■



A First-Tour Foray into Eastern Türkiye

BY NOAH E. ROSE



NOAH ROSE

I arrived in Ankara in early 2024 for my first tour brimming with excitement and uncertainty. Joining the U.S. Foreign Service had been a childhood dream, and after a year at the Foreign Service Institute, I had left all my friends and family for this assignment.

One month in, restless to see more of Türkiye, I booked a last-minute flight to Van—in eastern Türkiye, only an hour’s drive from the Iranian border. I reached my gate at Ankara Esenboga Airport early and observed that nearly every other passenger was dressed in unfamiliar conservative, religious attire.

In Van, I asked the front desk to call a taxi. Minutes later, Osman, who would become both driver and guide, pulled up. After he made a call

from the taxi, I asked, “*Arapca mi konusuyorsun* [Are you speaking Arabic]?”



Noah E. Rose is a political officer serving in Ankara and is looking forward to his next assignment as a consular officer in Montreal.

Van Citadel, or the Fortress of Van, is a massive stone fortification built atop a steep bluff in far eastern Türkiye by the kingdom of Urartu during the 9th to 7th centuries B.C.



NOAH ROSE

My hiking buddy, Yasar, led the way up the steep, icy path.

“*Yok, Kürtce* [No, Kurdish],” he answered. I later learned that Van was 80 percent Kurdish; the Kurds were a group of people who spoke a language I had never heard before.

As we explored the city, a pattern emerged: almost every local I met, having encountered few foreigners other than Iranians, opened with “*Iranli misin* [Are you Iranian]?” I learned to laugh and reply, “*Tam tersi—Amerikalıyım* [Just the opposite—I’m American].”

That answer earned me two companions for a hike up to the ruins of a castle, built around 800 B.C. by the Urartu Kingdom. While I was paying the entry fee, another visitor, Yasar, introduced himself and decided to join me.

In the warm, unguarded hospitality I would come to recognize as characteristically Turkish, he explained that he had endured a 15-hour bus ride from Istanbul as part of his job inspecting hospitals. We traded stories as we climbed.

Rounding a bend, I spotted a man standing perilously close to the cliff edge, gripping what looked like a long pole. Half concerned, half intrigued, I pointed him out to Yasar. Bounding ahead, Yasar learned the stranger—Mehmet—was wielding a large net to catch pigeons roosting in the rock face.



NOAH ROSE

By way of proof Mehmet extended a hand clutching a still-flapping bird. (I would later learn that millennia-old pigeon-keeping traditions still thrive in eastern Türkiye.) Mehmet volunteered to join our little hiking party, net and pigeon in tow.

After descending, the three of us exchanged numbers and parted ways.

I texted Osman for a pickup and waited in the parking lot. Within 30 seconds a young man who had been loitering behind some cars approached. Fresh from State Department security training, I braced for a mugging.

Instead, he politely asked if I would photograph him and his friends. They had set up a makeshift picnic—fruit, soda, and what I soon discovered was homemade whiskey and *raki*, Türkiye’s version of Greek *ouzo*.



We met Mehmet, a pigeon catcher, who posed with Yasar and volunteered to accompany us, net and pigeon in tow.



As I waited for my ride in the parking lot, a young man politely asked me to photograph him and his friends. By the time Osman arrived, I had joined their lively picnic and invited Osman to do the same.

When I asked one picnicker whether he liked America, he grinned and replied, “Only when I’m drunk.” Fortunately for me, he was. By the time Osman arrived, I had joined their festivities and invited him to do the same.

Flying back to Ankara, I reflected on this first foray outside the capital. A little local language and a lot of local hospitality had transformed what I expected to be a simple weekend outing into an adventure that got me hooked on exploring cultures I hadn’t dreamed of.

I decided to seek those conditions whenever possible for the rest of my tour—and, I hope, for the rest of my career. ■

NOAH ROSE

! SUPPORT AFSA

Time is critical. AFSA is under threat—your support today determines our ability to fight back tomorrow. An executive order in March 2025 stripped AFSA of union status at some of our agencies. We are fighting back. Here’s how you can help!

MEMBERSHIP. Stay with AFSA by paying your member dues directly to AFSA. Payroll deductions have been shut off for State employees, and annuity deductions have been shut off for all retirees. Visit <https://afsa.org/stay-with-afsa>.

DONATE. Please support our legal cases on your behalf by donating to **AFSA’s Legal Defense Fund**. And please support our efforts to bring awareness to the critical work of the Foreign Service by donating to **AFSA’s Fund for American Diplomacy**. Visit <https://afsa.org/donate>.

BE AN AFSA AMBASSADOR. Share our message with colleagues who may not have renewed their AFSA membership yet and with friends and neighbors who might be willing to donate to our work.

Questions? Email member@afsa.org.

2025 AFSA Awards Celebrate Diplomatic Excellence

On October 1, 2025, members of the Foreign Service community gathered at Georgetown University's Lohrfink Auditorium to celebrate the achievements of their colleagues at the annual AFSA Awards Ceremony. The event, hosted by AFSA, the School of Foreign Service and Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, honored excellence, leadership, and integrity across the ranks of the U.S. Foreign Service.

AFSA President John "Dink" Dinkelman opened the ceremony alongside Ambassador Barbara Bodine, director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, and Dean Joel Hellman of the School of Foreign Service. In his remarks, President Dinkelman reflected on the turbulence facing the Foreign Service this year and the



2025 AFSA Award recipients with AFSA President John "Dink" Dinkelman (center) gathered outside the Lohrfink Auditorium at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

enduring resilience of its members. "Since January," he said, "the Foreign Service has faced both a thinning of its ranks and the heavy hand of politicization. Both forces strike at the core of who we are: a merit-based, nonpartisan workforce devoted to the Constitution."

The evening's top honor, the **Award for Lifetime**

Contributions to American Diplomacy, was presented by President Dinkelman to **Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield**, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a 40-year veteran of the Foreign Service. Her long career in diplomacy earned praise for her leadership, mentorship, and dedication to creating a Foreign

Service that reflects the diversity of America. Dinkelman commended her "Gumbo Diplomacy," her unique ability to bring people together through warmth, empathy, and food.

The **Foreign Service Champions Award**, presented by President Dinkelman, recognized

Continued on page 68

AT THE BREAKING POINT

AFSA Conducts Global Survey on the State of the U.S. Foreign Service

America's diplomatic capacity is being decimated from within. Since January 2025, as many as one in four members of the U.S. Foreign Service have resigned, retired, seen their agencies dismantled, or been removed from their posts. This unprecedented loss of personnel and institutional capacity puts U.S. global leadership and the safety of U.S. citizens at serious risk.

To assess the impact of these dramatic shifts, AFSA surveyed its active-duty Foreign Service members. More than 2,100 responded, from entry-level officers to senior leaders, from Washington-based staff to those at posts worldwide.

"At the Breaking Point: The State of the U.S. Foreign Service in 2025" is based on the findings of this survey, which was conducted electronically between August and September 2025—before the government shutdown began on October 1.

The results are sobering:

- 86 percent said changes in Washington have undermined their ability to carry out U.S. foreign policy.
- 98 percent reported poor morale.
- Nearly one-third reported changing their career plans since January 2025.

Continued on page 71



Breaking State?

January is usually a time to think about new beginnings, but I'm not quite there yet. Last year was brutal for the State Department, certainly the darkest in my 23 years as a Foreign Service officer. The challenges we faced have me looking backward, thinking about the state of the department and the Foreign Service. After all, we need to understand where we are before we can chart a way forward.

It's been hard to wrap my mind around the damage and cruelty of the past year. I think of the more than 100 USAID staff, both American and Jordanian, whom I had to look in the face and explain the unexplainable decisions being made in Washington. I remember the entry-level officers asking whether they would be fired because they weren't tenured.

Back in Washington, a panicked mentee asked me if references to DEIA in their previous employee evaluation reviews would doom their chances. It pained me to hear them worrying about whether they'd be punished for doing what they had been told to do. All this while seeing so many of my mentors being shown the door.

Some of you may be thinking: "It can't be that bad; transitions are always tough." Don't take my word for it. AFSA's 2025 "State of the Foreign Service" sur-

vey, which was released in December (see full story on page 61), includes input from more than 2,100 active-duty State Department personnel, illuminating the grim reality.

A staggering 98 percent of respondents reported poor morale in the department. We've never seen numbers like this in any of our previous member surveys. Almost one-third of respondents said they have changed their career plans since January 2025.

Measurements of morale and employee satisfaction can reflect a variety of factors, including some outside leadership's control. But it is safe to say these results tell us something is seriously wrong.

Why has morale cratered in the past year? For starters, we're a mission-oriented Service. We thrive on getting things done. We're frustrated because we feel like the changes of the past year have stopped us from delivering results for the American people.

Of our members, 86 percent said policy changes implemented since January 2025 have hindered their ability to implement U.S. foreign policy, while only 1 percent reported any improvement.

The survey shows that the destruction of USAID (which gutted our development and humanitarian

assistance capabilities), rapidly declining budgets, and the marginalization of public diplomacy tools, among other things, have all contributed to the sense that we are losing ground at a time of growing global challenges.

The rapid politicization of the Foreign Service is also dragging down morale and preventing diplomatic advancements that help our fellow citizens. Of the growing number of our ranks who are reconsidering whether to remain in the Service, 65 percent cited politicization as their reason for leaving, while 45 percent feared being personally targeted.

For the first time in my career, colleagues worry that their personal political views, political contributions, or social media profiles might preclude them from getting their next assignment. Instead of focusing on doing good work, colleagues are worried they'll face prejudice for the work they did in a previous administration, such as working on refugee issues or participating in department-sponsored DEIA activities.

Even more troubling is the widespread feeling that Foreign Service members need to join organizations with the "right" political orientation to get ahead.

Not long after we collected survey answers, the longest government

shutdown in history kicked off. Many of us have been through shutdowns before, and we remember the department sending politically neutral messages about them, as the Hatch Act requires.

This year, those previously neutral communications took on a vicious and partisan tone, blaming one party and further reinforcing the fear that our nonpartisan foundation is crumbling.

In another break from the past, we saw threats to withhold back pay for furloughed employees, in direct opposition to the law requiring it. Fortunately, Congress provided a glimmer of hope in an otherwise dark year by explicitly mandating back pay and acting against reductions in force: a reminder that we have allies and need to keep telling our stories to rally their support.

I found another glimmer of hope in a recent encounter with some of the newest members of the Foreign Service. As they recounted the long and winding journey to getting their invitations to the orientation class, their excitement, nervous energy, and optimism about what lies ahead reminded me of how I felt when I first joined.

I know it won't be easy, but we owe it to them, and to ourselves, to do our part to make 2026 a brighter year. ■



The Road to 2026

I will not miss 2025.

Sadly, many of our political “leaders” today will look back and consider it a “success.” In my view, they caused physical pain and emotional distress for dedicated public servants, destroyed U.S. institutions, devastated American livelihoods and families, bankrupted U.S. small businesses and farms, and caused severe, irreparable harm globally, including the deaths of thousands of children.

As 2026 begins, I am looking forward to how we can stop the harm and reverse the damage caused by the wanton abuse of power and inhumanity of our “leaders.” The movement that began last year protesting our dismissal and the destruction of our beloved agency grew as the attacks and damage inflicted by this administration on federal institutions, public servants, and our country expanded.

Those seeds, planted in early lawsuits and demonstrations against the unconstitutional power grab, have brought a large cross section of Americans into the fight. The “No Kings!” movement mobilized more than 7 million people to protest the government’s actions. Other protest actions defending the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights continue to grow and attract supporters across the political

I’m not a natural organizer, but I am a committed participant and advocate.

spectrum, from coast to coast, the upper Midwest to the heart of the South, and around the globe.

A month after the No Kings! October protest—one of the largest single-day protests in U.S. history—disparate groups came together in opposition to the government’s actions in off-year elections, sweeping elections across the U.S. in a resounding manner, proving that your vote counts and your voice matters.

The work ahead will not be easy. It will take sustained effort to rebuild a government that serves more than the billionaire class, one that protects all people, regardless of heritage, origin, citizenship status, religion, gender identity, income, or geography, and that advances a humane, just foreign policy rooted in U.S. values of equality, peace, and shared prosperity.

As individuals, we need to make our voices heard by donating our time as well as demonstrating and exercising our individual power of the purse. As civil rights icon the late John Lewis (D-Ga.) said: “Make good trouble.” We must engage and advocate within our local and

national community organizations, churches, temples, mosques, and labor unions.

We must exercise the power of the purse with greater precision. Some time ago, I stopped going to Starbucks. I avoid Uber and Walmart, and I refuse to support other non-labor friendly companies. It’s hard to be a labor leader and support major anti-union businesses. Sure, it’s a small individual gesture, but if more people actively look at how and where they spend their money, those companies supporting the current regime might change. Economic boycotts and protests work: Just ask Disney, Sinclair Broadcasting, or Budweiser.

Admittedly, I struggle daily with what I can and will commit to. I’m not a natural organizer, but I am a committed participant and advocate—in public, with the media, openly in my local community groups, and behind closed doors with leaders. I am not yet leading my local party chapter or heading up the next No Kings! protest in my community, but I am turning out and raising my voice.

Last, I fully understand the limitations of the power of the purse. Many can’t

CALENDAR

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

January 19
Martin Luther King Jr. Day
AFSA Offices Closed

January 21
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

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

simply avoid shopping because of geography, availability, or need. I live in a small mountain community, but I am fortunate to have choices: between Starbucks and the locally owned coffee shops, between the Raley’s and small natural grocery store, and between our locally owned small brew pub and the giant corporate Hyatt sports bar. There can be choice.

I am heartened that, for now, the push for change from that cross section of Americans seems to be increasing. Complacency now would minimize these recent gains and prolong any return to a country based on the ideals laid out in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the speech JFK gave launching USAID in November 1961.

I hope I will not miss 2026. ■



A Growing Alumni Network

Our directory of retired members and alumni is in the mail. It's a great tool, letting our members easily get in touch with colleagues—both retirees and those who were RIFed before retirement age. Arranged alphabetically by state, it will show you who among your colleagues and friends may be near you, helping us all stay in touch with our profession and our community.

It also lists alumni/retiree organizations across the country. Equally helpful is the front resource section that helps members figure out whom to call with questions on retirement and/or benefits after departure from the Foreign Service.

Our work for both our retirees and alumni remains a core activity. For example, we continue to work for parity with our military colleagues as we seek exclusion for a portion of the FS annuity from Virginia taxes.

We also seek more equitable treatment of our RIFed colleagues who fell shy of the age requirements to receive a pension.

We continuously monitor legislative work on the Hill to track initiatives that may affect you in retirement.

The AFSA staff and Governing Board want to thank all the retirees who have stepped up to help with the many challenges 2025 has brought. Through

We continuously monitor legislative work on the Hill to track initiatives that may affect you in retirement.

your fundraising efforts, op-eds, outreach to Congress, and volunteer work, you've helped raise awareness about the Foreign Service's role in protecting U.S. citizens and developing our national interests. We thank you for helping AFSA mitigate the steps taken to diminish the work of the Foreign Service.

One final request: As you can imagine, many of our colleagues who have been RIFed and/or forced into

early retirement are seeking new professional opportunities. AFSA plans to hold several employment-related webinars highlighting opportunities that fit with FSO skill sets and experience in the near future.

If you know of any suitable opportunities, email AFSA Counselor for Alumni and Retirees Brian Himmelsteib at Himmelsteib@afsa.org, and he will get the word out. ■

AFSA Essay Contest Goes Live

AFSA invites high school students outside the Foreign Service community across the United States and abroad to participate in the 2025-2026 National High School Essay Contest. A successful annual AFSA outreach program for 25 years, the contest offers an introduction to the world of diplomacy to students who might not otherwise hear about the Foreign Service.

This year's topic challenges students to consider the future of U.S. soft power and diplomacy in a world where critical institutions such as USAID, Voice of America, and major exchange programs have been drastically reduced or eliminated.

In 1,000-1,500 words, students must argue whether the United States can maintain global leadership without these tools while focusing on the role and capac-



2024 AFSA Essay Contest winner Ian Rosenzweig with former Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard R. Verma.

ity of the U.S. Foreign Service in achieving diplomatic goals under such constraints.

The winner will receive \$2,500, an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., with their parents, and an educational voyage with Semester at Sea. The winner's school will receive 10 copies of *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, 3rd ed.*

Submissions are open to all U.S. high school students, including those abroad, and are due in April 2026. Children of Foreign Service members and AFSA employees are not eligible.

For eligibility details, study resources, and submission guidelines, visit afsa.org/essay-contest.

Please help spread the word by sharing with your alma mater and with high schools in your local community. ■

AFSA Treasurer's Report

AFSA's finances enter 2026 battered but not broken. RIFs, buyouts, and early retirements reduced AFSA's dues-paying membership by 25 percent in 2025.

A March 2025 Executive Order, among other actions, led to a cessation of payroll and annuity deductions for dues payments, depriving AFSA of that revenue.

AFSA then worked for months to get members to visit the AFSA website to switch to direct payment—while the State Department appeared to have electronically blocked employees from doing so on their work computers.

As a result, AFSA lost \$1.5 million in projected 2025 dues revenue—a 25 percent drop. We anticipate that the loss of dues revenue in 2026 will be about the same—25

percent because of the loss of effortless paying via salary or annuity deduction and Foreign Service downsizing.

This 25 percent drop in annual dues revenue has necessitated a substantial belt-tightening in AFSA's operations. We reduced *The Foreign Service Journal's* frequency of publication from 10 issues in 2024 to seven in 2025 and six in 2026 (although each issue now has more pages).

With staff salaries and benefits constituting AFSA's biggest expense, we cut staffing from 41 positions at the start of 2025 to 34 at the year's end. Every AFSA section slashed discretionary spending.

Despite those cuts, as we drafted the 2026 AFSA operating budget, it became clear that projected dues

revenue would not be sufficient to maintain the core staffing required to defend the Foreign Service in the critical areas identified in the strategic plan outlined by John Dinkelman in this month's President's Views column on page 6.

To close that funding gap, the AFSA Governing Board in November approved a 2026 budget counting on two additional sources of revenue:

First, we plan to draw down AFSA's \$3.1 million emergency reserve by 20 percent in 2026. Since similar drawdowns may be needed in 2027, 2028, and possibly beyond, taking larger annual drawdowns would leave the reserve dangerously low at the end of this decade.

Second, this year we will seek to raise \$725,000 in donations and grants from individuals and foundations

concerned about preserving a nonpartisan career Foreign Service.

That is an ambitious target, but we hope for success similar to that of 2019, when generous donors helped AFSA defray the attorney fees of members called to testify during House of Representatives' impeachment hearings.

While we believe that our 2026 financial plan will allow AFSA to fight on to protect our members individually and the Foreign Service as a profession, a shortfall in fundraising or unanticipated events such as additional RIFs or the need to file new lawsuits could require further budget cuts as the year progresses.

Another key to avoiding deeper cuts is your continued membership despite the added effort of direct dues payment. ■

—John K. Naland

AFSA Dues Increase for 2026

In accordance with Article IV of the AFSA Bylaws, the Governing Board can increase annual dues by no more than the cumulative increase in the national Consumer Price Index, published by the Department of Labor, since the effective date of the previous dues increase.

For 2026, the board has voted to increase all membership dues by 3 percent. In concrete terms, this amounts to an increase of \$2.15 up to \$16.41 per year, depending on the individual membership category. For those paying quarterly, the increase is between 53 cents and \$4.10 per quarter, again depending on membership category.

Those paying annually will be billed the new rate on their regularly scheduled renewal date. AFSA last increased its membership dues rate in January 2025. ■



AFSA Governing Board Meeting, October 15, 2025

The board awarded the 2025 Matilda W. Sinclair Language awards to 10 recipients.

The board discussed constructive dissent and exemplary performance vetting process changes that will go into effect with the 2026 awards.

The board agreed to appropriate an additional \$6,500 from the Legal Defense Fund for legal services rendered for AFSA.

The board agreed on changes to the AFSA website and the Legal Defense Fund standard operating procedures (SOP). ■

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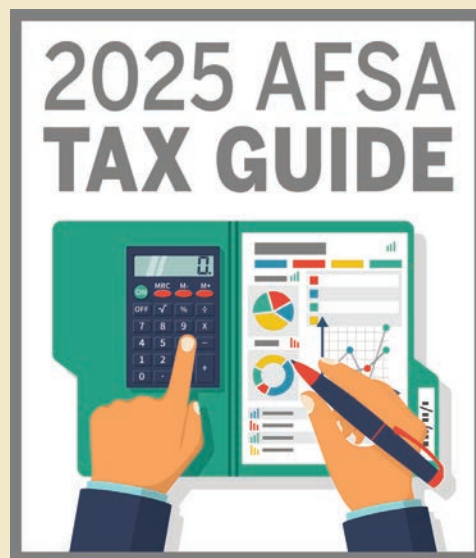
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AFSA NEWS

AFSA Federal and State Tax Guides Now Online



AFSA is pleased to announce that the 2025 Federal Tax Guide has moved online, joining the State Tax Guide in a digital format that allows for easier navigation, timely updates, and direct links to key IRS resources. The new format makes it simpler for members around the world to access the most current guidance on tax issues affecting the Foreign Service community.

The federal guide, prepared by Christine Elsea Mandojana, CPA, CFP, and her team from CEM Global Tax Planning, LLC, with contributions from AFSA's Senior Labor Management Adviser James Yorke, provides a thorough overview of federal tax provisions relevant to U.S. government employees serving domestically and overseas.

It covers a variety of issues, including filing deadlines and extensions; new tax deductions; taxation of capital gains; investment and real estate income taxation; the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion; and the reporting requirements for foreign assets.

The guide also reviews changes to Form 1040 and related schedules, highlights adjustments to Thrift Savings Plan and IRA/Roth contribution limits, and provides a new "Who Must File" section.

In addition to the federal guide, members also have access to a detailed state-by-state tax guide and a state pension and annuity tax guide, ensuring access to the latest tax information for all 50 states and all U.S. territories.

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**ENROLLED
AGENT**

The most significant addition to our federal guide is the inclusion of many provisions from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), a sweeping reform measure signed into law on July 4, 2025. The OBBBA introduces a range of temporary and permanent changes that will affect 2025 tax returns and beyond.

These resources aim to help members navigate U.S. tax laws and life abroad, while reminding readers that professional tax advice should be sought for individual circumstances.

The most significant addition to our federal guide is the inclusion of many provisions from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), a sweeping reform measure signed into law on July 4, 2025. The OBBBA introduces a range of temporary and permanent changes that will affect 2025 tax returns and beyond.

Among its temporary measures, the law provides deductions through 2028 for voluntary tips received by service workers; the overtime premium portion of earned income; qualified car loan interest on new vehicles assembled in the United States; and a temporary enhanced personal exemption for seniors, offering up to \$6,000 per qualifying individual. The legislation also expands the cap on state and local itemized tax deductions to \$40,000 through 2029.

In addition to these temporary deductions,

the OBBBA makes several permanent adjustments to the tax code that will affect many taxpayers. It eliminates the personal exemption, makes permanent the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act tax brackets, phases out energy credits, increases the maximum child tax credit, expands the definition of qualifying expenses for 529 education accounts, and establishes new reporting requirements for digital assets.

Looking ahead to 2026, additional OBBBA provisions will take effect, including the introduction of new “Trump Accounts,” designed to help minors begin retirement savings; an increased withdrawal maximum from 529 education plan funds for K-12; and the introduction of a new floor for charitable giving deductions. Together, these provisions represent some of the most substantial tax changes in recent years, with implications for both domestic and overseas filers.

Members can now read the complete 2025 AFSA Federal and State Tax Guides online at <https://afsa.org/afsa-tax-guide> ■



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AFSA Awards
Continued from page 61

Virginia State Senator Tara Durant (R-Fredericksburg) and **Delegate Paul E. Krizek (D-Alexandria)** for their bipartisan work in the Virginia General Assembly supporting Foreign Service families. Durant's education-focused legislation ensures continuity for children returning from overseas assignments, while Krizek's long-standing advocacy has strengthened tuition access for FS family members and financial parity for FS retirees.

AFSA's performance awards celebrated outstanding contributions at post and within the association. The **Nelson B. Delavan Award**, presented by Mark Delavan Harrop, honored **Mina Raas-Dana** of Embassy Tokyo for her exceptional service as an office management specialist (OMS) and her role in strengthening U.S.-Japan cooperation through leadership of high-level visits and morale initiatives. The **M. Juanita Guess Award** for an outstanding community liaison office coordinator, presented by Jon Clements, went to **Jiana Leonard** of Embassy Dhaka, whose steady leadership during internet blackouts, political unrest, and evacuation kept her community informed, connected, and resilient.

President Dinkelman presented **Vivian S. Walker** with the **Award for Achievement and Contributions to the Association** in recog-



From left: Nora S. Brito, Delegate Paul E. Krizek, Vivian S. Walker, AFSA President John Dinkelman, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Jiana Leonard, and Mina Raas-Dana.

nition of her six years of leadership on the Editorial Board of *The Foreign Service Journal*. As board chair from 2023 to 2025, Walker, a retired Senior Foreign Service officer and now co-president of the Public Diplomacy Council of America, helped strengthen AFSA's capacity to document and defend the profession of diplomacy.

A special **Group AFSA Exemplary Performance Award** was presented by AFSA Treasurer John K. Naland, to **Jahari Fraser, Nikki Gamer, Christine Miele, Erin Oliver, Sharon Papp, Nadja Ruzica, Raeka Safai, and Kim Sullivan**, AFSA's "Crisis Response Team" worked tirelessly throughout 2025, responding to a surge of crises facing the Foreign Service community and defending AFSA's mission through communication, advocacy, member outreach, and legal action.

The **Avis Bohlen Award** for a Foreign Service family member was presented by Ambassador Avis Bohlen to **Jane Krill Thompson**, whose



Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield receives the 2025 Lifetime Contribution to American Diplomacy Award. From left: AFSA President John Dinkelman, Dean of the Walsh School of Foreign Service Joel Hellman, Thomas-Greenfield, and Ambassador Barbara Bodine.

volunteer work in Nepal created opportunities for children with special needs and migrant backgrounds. Her initiatives, including the creation of a school library through a J. Kirby Simon Trust grant, continue to strengthen ties between U.S. Embassy Kathmandu and the local community.

The **Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy**, presented by Shiraz Mahyera, recognized **Nora S. Brito**, whose leadership in Kyiv between 2023 and 2024 advanced

governance reforms and anti-corruption measures critical to Ukraine's democratic resilience. Her work establishing Ukraine's first Victim Witness Coordination Center and supporting anti-corruption prosecutions has left a lasting imprint on the rule of law in Ukraine.

The **Christian A. Herter Award**, presented by President Dinkelman, went to **Carrie Muntean**, who, after 25 years in the Foreign Service, led a working group to reform leadership culture and improve accountability

across the department. Her white paper, circulated prior to her retirement, outlined concrete reforms to strengthen management practices and ensure employee support.

The **William R. Rivkin Award**, presented by Ambassador Charles H. Rivkin, honored 10 USAID and State Department officers—**Eric Burkett, Andrea Capellán, Jessica Carlson, Andrea Cristancho, Abtin Forghani, Sam Kraegel, R. Clark Pearson, Joshua Schramm, Meghan Waters**, and **Heather Wirick**—for their courageous Dissent Channel cable opposing the dismantling of USAID and the termination of foreign assistance programs. Their joint action, grounded in professionalism and fact, underscored the role of constructive dissent in defending U.S. policy integrity and global leadership.

In addition, AFSA presented a **Posthumous**



Attendees gathered in Lohrfink Auditorium to celebrate the 2025 award winners.

Dissent Award to 12 U.S. diplomats whose actions during the Holocaust embodied humanitarian courage: **Ambassadors Laurence Steinhardt and Leland Harrison; Ministers Herschel Johnson and Myron Taylor; Rives Childs; Raymond Geist; Roswell McClelland; George Messersmith; Paul Squire; Myles Standish; Pinkney Tuck; and George Waller.**

Working under immense risk, often without support from Washington, these diplomats individually defied restrictive policies to issue visas, transmit evidence of Nazi atrocities, and save Jewish lives. Pres. Dinkelman highlighted their example as “a reminder that the Foreign Service’s truest measure lies not only in policy but in conscience.”

The ceremony closed with a reception in Georgetown’s Fischer Colloquium, where colleagues, students, and guests celebrated the 2025 award recipients, each representing, in Dinkelman’s words, “the best of who we are as diplomats, public servants, and citizens.”

Profiles of this year’s winners, begin on page 20. ■

NEWS BRIEF

Government Shutdown Harms Diplomacy

In response to the 43-day federal government shutdown, AFSA issued a series of statements defending the integrity and well-being of the Foreign Service workforce and warning of the mounting diplomatic, economic, and human costs of the crisis.

Between September 25 and October 31, AFSA released multiple press statements condemning threats of mass federal employee dismissals, urging an end to the shutdown, calling out misleading claims about Foreign Service recruitment, and documenting the real-world impact of the

work stoppage on America’s ability to conduct diplomacy.

As part of this effort, AFSA gathered firsthand accounts from more than 125 active-duty Foreign Service members around the world. Their experiences, which AFSA has shared widely on social media and elsewhere, reveal the far-reaching consequences of stalled diplomacy, reduced security, and eroding morale.

Read excerpts from the collection on page 47. Find all AFSA press statements at <https://afsa.org/press>. ■

Service and Sacrifice : Memorial Project Expands Online

AFSA recently completed a yearlong project that significantly expanded the AFSA website's biographical summaries of the 321 fallen colleagues inscribed on the AFSA Memorial Plaques in the Department of State's C Street lobby.

When the original AFSA plaque was unveiled in 1933, Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson told the assembled crowd that its purpose was to show the American people and future Foreign Service members the "spirit of devotion and sacrifice" of those U.S. diplomats and consuls who died in circumstances

distinctive to overseas service.

For the next 67 years, that testament to service and sacrifice was visible only to those who visited the plaques.

In 2000 the plaque inscriptions were posted on AFSA's recently created website, allowing internet users worldwide to view the names, dates, locations, and causes of death.

Fifteen years later, AFSA searched its files and added biographic information on each of the honorees, along with photos of a few.

For the recently completed expansion, volunteer

researcher FSO Lindsay Henderson researched each of the 321 plaque names in online databases including newspapers.com (for contemporary obituaries and news reports) and ancestry.com (for dates of birth and other biographical information).

AFSA Awards and Plaques Committee Chair John Naland added information from sources including *The Foreign Service Journal* digital archive, *State Magazine*, and the Department of State Biographic Register (unclassified versions through 1974).

The new research expanded most of the biographical summaries from a few sentences to a few paragraphs, adding information on place of birth, education, government service, details of final assignment, and location of burial, along with photos of 86 of the fallen.

The result presents a fuller picture of each person, their service to our nation, and their sacrifice. The website expansion was implemented by AFSA Online Communications Manager Jeff Lau.

Read about the honorees at <https://afsa.org/virtual-afsa-memorial-plaque>. ■

AFSA Welcomes Newest FS Orientation Class

On October 21, 2025, AFSA hosted a welcome reception for the September 2025 Foreign Service orientation class at its headquarters in Washington, D.C. The event brought together 72 members of the incoming class of 100 to connect with AFSA Governing Board members, staff, and alumni hosts.

Set up in an open-house format with food and refreshments, the gathering offered new officers and specialists an informal opportunity to connect with AFSA leadership and learn more about the association's work in support of the Foreign Service.

AFSA President John Dinkelman opened the program, which included brief remarks from former Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security Greg Starr, AFSA State Vice President Ro Nepal, AFSA State Representative Connor Ferry-Smith, and AFSA General Counsel Sharon Papp, who shared their perspectives on AFSA's advocacy, legal services, and member benefits.

While AFSA was not included in the official orientation schedule this year—for the first time in many decades—the event provided a valuable opportunity to welcome the new class and highlight AFSA's mission of

protecting and strengthening the Foreign Service. Many of the attendees chose to join AFSA as members.

Those who were unable to attend are encouraged

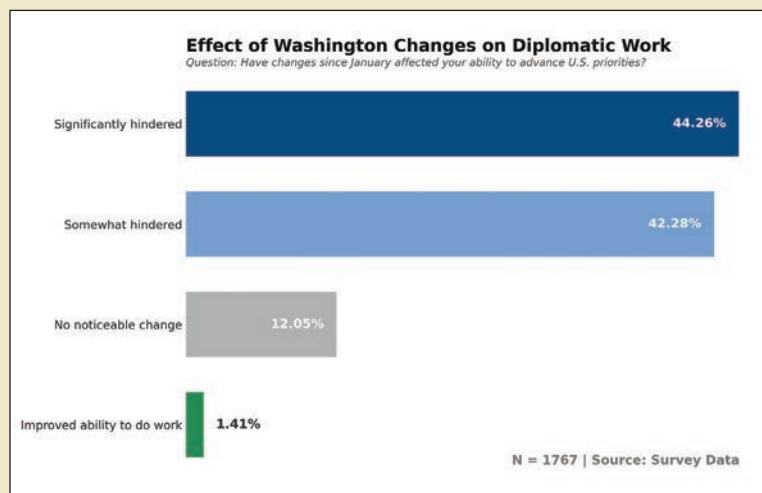
to reach out to AFSA at member@afsa.org to learn more about membership and upcoming events. To sign up online, go to <https://afsa.org/active-membership>. ■



Former Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security Greg Starr delivers remarks to the incoming class of Foreign Service members alongside Ro Nepal (left) and John Dinkelman (center).

AFSAMARK PARKHOMENKO

Global Survey, continued from page 61



The entire report was released publicly on December 3, 2025.

AFSA's survey findings make clear that the U.S. Foreign Service is in crisis. To restore its effectiveness and protect independence, AFSA urges Congress to:

- **Protect the Nonpartisan Career Foreign Service:** Reaffirm that career diplomats serve under presidents of either party and they must be able to offer their expertise shielded from political retaliation including reassignment or dismissal for political reasons.
- **Reassert Congressional Oversight:** Ensure transparency and accountability in executive actions affecting the Foreign Service and foreign policy institutions; exercise oversight of organizational and policy processes.
- **Strengthen and Modernize the Foreign Service:** Partner with AFSA on reforms that enhance training, leadership, and adaptability while safeguarding professionalism and integrity to meet 21st-century challenges.

These steps are essential to restore trust, morale, and the institutional foundations of U.S. diplomacy.

Eroding Capacity

AFSA's 2025 survey reveals a Foreign Service workforce struggling to fulfill its mission amid unprecedented political and budgetary pressures. Across the board, career diplomats report that the conditions necessary for effective U.S. diplomacy are rapidly eroding.

An overwhelming 86 percent of respondents said that recent changes have negatively affected their ability to implement the

foreign policy of the United States. Only 1 percent reported any improvement. Additionally, nearly 75 percent said their overall ability to do their jobs has been affected "a great deal" or "a lot," with another 20 percent describing a "moderate" impact. Taken together, more than 90 percent of U.S. diplomats say their work has been disrupted—both by political interference and deep cuts to budgets and staffing.

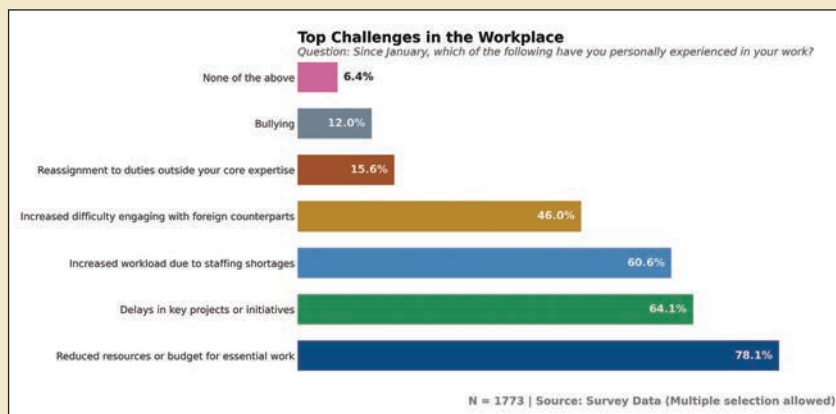
The effects are being felt in every corner of U.S. diplomacy: 78 percent of respondents reported operating under reduced budgets; 64 percent said key projects and initiatives are being delayed or suspended; 61 percent are managing significantly heavier workloads due to staffing losses; and 46 percent report new obstacles in negotiating with foreign counterparts. These challenges stem from diminished credibility, shifting directives, and resource shortfalls.

Respondents identified several core areas of U.S. foreign policy in which capacity has been especially weakened: development and humanitarian assistance (59 percent); public diplomacy (56 percent); national foreign policy priorities (52 percent); and economic and trade promotion (37 percent). These are the pillars of U.S. global engagement, each weakened by the constraints now facing the diplomatic workforce.

A Workforce in Freefall

Among our survey respondents, an alarming 98 percent reported somewhat or significantly reduced morale in the workplace since January. Additionally, one-third reported that they have considered leaving the Service early since January.

Among those who are considering leaving the Service, 75 percent cited declining workplace morale; 59 percent cited the loss of workplace protections or benefits; 56 percent noted reduced resources to do their jobs; and 54 percent cited negative political influence at work.



Brain Drain

Diplomacy was once a lifelong calling. For generations, Foreign Service members dedicated their entire careers to advancing U.S. interests abroad. In AFSA's 2025 survey, 81 percent of respondents said they entered the Service intending to serve 20 years or more. Today, that commitment is wavering. Only about half of those say their plans haven't changed, and nearly one-third said they have changed their minds since January 2025. By contrast, in AFSA's 2022 survey, only one in four respondents said they might leave before completing a full career.

The difference in just three years speaks to a growing sense that the Foreign Service has become untenable for many of its members. The numbers do not capture those whose careers were cut short involuntarily, through reductions in force, politically motivated dismissals, or agency closures beyond their control.

Policy Priorities

Survey respondents identified a series of urgent priorities aimed at restoring the integrity, independence, and effectiveness of the U.S. Foreign Service.

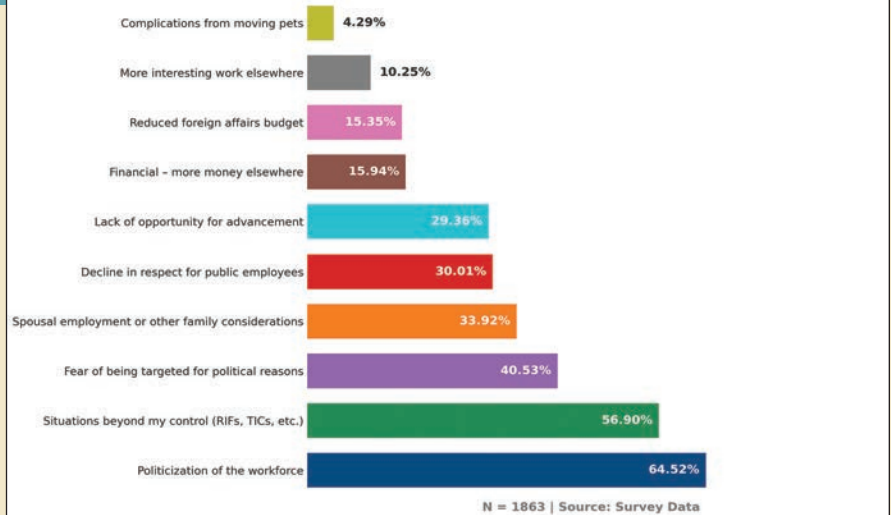
At the top of the list is protecting the Foreign Service career path itself. Respondents voiced alarm over the replacement of career positions with political appointees, widespread budget reductions across the foreign affairs agencies, and the erosion of the merit-based systems that govern assignments and promotions. They also called for greater protection of the Foreign Service performance review process, the integrity of the assignments system, and fair retirement and benefits policies.

In open-ended responses, more than 380 members elaborated on their concerns. The most common appeals were to reverse ongoing reductions in force, prevent additional lay-offs, reform the employee review processes and assignments systems to ensure fairness and transparency, and reinstate collective bargaining rights—an essential mechanism for safeguarding the workforce's voice within government.

Survey participants were particularly troubled by recent procedural changes that appear to politicize or weaken professional standards. Among the most alarming was the introduction of a new "fidelity" or loyalty category for employee evaluations, which 77 percent cited as a major or moderate concern, and the sweeping changes to the Foreign Affairs Manual, which were noted by 86 percent. Other controversial developments include the use of directed assignments, the

Factors Driving Employees to Leave

Question: What factors would cause you to leave the service before mandatory retirement?



cancellation of detail assignments, and the elimination of the annuity exception, which provided an earned annuity to those forced out of the Service before full retirement age.

Respondents were equally clear about what must be preserved to sustain the Foreign Service's professional corps. Nearly all—an overwhelming 98 percent—rated nonpartisanship as "important" or "very important." Other key priorities included maintaining opportunities for advancement into senior leadership roles, preserving collective bargaining rights, ensuring a fair and transparent grievance process, and protecting the Service's rotational assignment system and training pipeline for new officers.

Together, these findings reflect a workforce deeply alarmed by the erosion of the systems that have long upheld their professionalism. The message from U.S. diplomats is clear: Safeguarding the integrity of the career Foreign Service is essential to safeguarding the nation's capacity to lead.

Conclusion

AFSA's 2025 workforce survey reveals a stark truth: America's professional diplomatic corps, long one of the country's greatest strategic assets, is under extraordinary strain. The numbers tell a story of deep loss. Behind the numbers are dedicated public servants who have spent their careers advancing U.S. interests abroad and safeguarding the country's safety and stability.

The findings of this survey demonstrate that the U.S. Foreign Service—the professional, nonpartisan corps that carries out U.S. foreign policy—is in crisis. AFSA urges Congress to protect the nonpartisan career Foreign Service, reassert congressional oversight of U.S. foreign policy and the Foreign Service, and work to strengthen the Foreign Service as an institution.

To read the full report, go to <https://afsa.org/at-the-breaking-point>. ■

—Lisa Heller, AFSA's Director of Professional Policy Issues

AFSA Honors 2025 Sinclair Language Award Recipients

Proficiency in foreign languages remains a vital skill for members of the U.S. Foreign Service, essential not only for professional development but also for personal security and effectiveness at post.

Each year since 1982, AFSA has recognized outstanding accomplishments in the study and use of difficult languages through the Matilda W. Sinclair Awards program.

AFSA established this program with a generous bequest from former Foreign Service Officer Matilda W. Sinclair, who sought “to promote and reward superior achievement by career officers of the Foreign Service ... while studying one of the Category III or IV languages under the auspices of the Foreign Service Institute.”

Any career or career-conditional member of the Foreign Service from the Department of State, USAID, Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Agency for Global Media, or Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is eligible for the award.

Recipients are selected by a committee comprising the dean (or designee) of the FSI School of Language Studies

and the AFSA Awards and Plaques Committee. Each winner receives \$1,500 and a certificate of recognition.

This year’s recipients demonstrated remarkable commitment to mastering complex languages through immersive study and engagement with cultural and linguistic communities.

We are pleased to announce the 2025 Sinclair Award recipients:

- **Barbara Mozdierz:** Russian
- **Brandon Lee:** Arabic
- **Craig Joiner:** Russian
- **Ehsan Aleaziz:** Turkish
- **Juan-Carlos Johns:** Chinese
- **Kelsey Yanvary Spaulding:** Dari
- **Shane Alexander:** Georgian
- **Sonia Tarantolo:** Turkish
- **Tim Edge:** Turkish
- **Tragdon A. Sexton:** Chinese

For more information on the Sinclair Awards, contact awards@afsa.org or visit afsa.org/matilda-w-sinclair-language-awards. ■

AFSA Launches Lunchtime Listening Sessions

AFSA held the first two events in its new Lunchtime Listening Sessions series in late 2025, creating space for candid, in-person dialogue with members at AFSA headquarters.

The inaugural session, held on October 16, 2025, brought together 25 mid-level officers for an open discussion on the challenges facing the Foreign Service and how AFSA can best advocate for its members during a difficult year.

On November 20, AFSA hosted a second session for State specialists working in Washington, again welcoming 25 participants for a frank exchange of perspectives on workplace issues, career expectations, and priorities for AFSA’s labor management and advocacy efforts.

The listening sessions are designed to foster ongoing conversation between members and AFSA leadership in a small-group setting.

AFSA plans to continue the series in 2026, with upcoming sessions for Senior Foreign Service members, first- and second-tour (FAST) officers, and members from other foreign affairs agencies. ■

AFSA Hosts MSPB-Focused Webinars

In November 2025, AFSA organized a series of webinars to help members better understand and navigate the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) process.

On November 6, former MSPB Vice Chair Raymond Limon led a hybrid session on the MSPB discovery process, providing an overview of how discovery works and offering practical tips for preparing a strong case.

On November 10, AFSA’s USAID community was invited to join “Navigating the Filing of an MSPB Appeal,” an informal online session walking participants through each step of filing an appeal, with AFSA staff available to answer member questions.

Finally, on November 18, AFSA held its first Rise Up Legal Clinic, during which pro se litigants met one-on-one with members of AFSA’s Office of the General Counsel and other volunteer and retired Foreign Service legal professionals for individualized guidance on their MSPB appeals.

Recordings and related materials from these sessions are available to members at <https://afsa.org/resources>. ■

A Fond Farewell to an AFSA Unsung Hero

After 30 years of dedicated service to the American Foreign Service Association, Senior Labor Management Adviser James Yorke retired in November 2025. A quiet but powerful force behind the scenes, James directly assisted thousands of AFSA members over the years, helping them navigate the often-complex rules and regulations that govern Foreign Service life.

James was also instrumental in securing in-state tuition rates for the children of Foreign Service members domiciled—but not physically present—in their home states, saving the families of our members thousands of dollars. His long-standing partnership with Charleston Global Financial Services made it possible for AFSA to resolve countless payroll and debt collection disputes.

AFSA President John Dinkelman remembers first meeting James while serving on the orientation staff more than 20 years ago. “He was coordinating on AFSA’s behalf, and that was my first glimpse of his steady professionalism,” he says.

Years later, as Dinkelman moved into the Office of Logistics Management (A/LM), he came to appreciate Yorke’s work even more. “I worked with James from the other side of the table as he advocated for membership when my office was

less than helpful to clients. I found his continued professionalism, attention to detail, and consistent reliability to be hallmarks of his service.”

Current AFSA Treasurer John Naland, who served as AFSA State vice president from 1999 to 2001 and later served twice as AFSA president, lauds James as “an unsung, behind-the-scenes hero who, armed with deep knowledge of the rules, regulations, and laws pertaining to travel, transportation, allowances, and assignments, has directly assisted thousands of AFSA members one-on-one and hundreds of times has convinced the State Department to extend benefits

James Yorke has been a tireless advocate for Foreign Service specialists, leading negotiations to improve career paths for office management specialists and working extensively on issues affecting information management specialists and Diplomatic Security agents.

to employees who State initially said did not qualify.”

“James is an essential member of the AFSA Labor Management team,” adds AFSA General Counsel Sharon Papp, who worked with Yorke for three decades. “We could not keep up with

all the demands placed on the team without his consistent and tireless efforts, his encyclopedic knowledge of the rules and regulations, and his willingness to help his colleagues out.”

James Yorke has been a tireless advocate for Foreign Service specialists, leading negotiations to improve career paths for office management specialists and working extensively on issues affecting information management specialists and Diplomatic Security agents. He has also represented members of



James Yorke

helped compile AFSA’s annual Federal Tax Guide (see page 66) and has authored numerous *FSJ* columns explaining the nuances of allowances and benefits. He was also a recipient of the 2020 AFSA Special Achievement Award.

Born in the United Kingdom, James joined AFSA in 1992 following a 30-year career in the British Navy. After accompanying his wife, now-retired Foreign Service Officer Jean Louis, to Bogotá, he returned to AFSA in 1998 and has served the association ever since. Since 2010 he has worked remotely from his home in North Carolina.

AFSA bids a warm farewell and heartfelt thanks to James Yorke for his decades of extraordinary service to the FS community. ■

The Appalachians, Adirondacks—or the Adriatic?

International Summer Camps Take an American Tradition Overseas

Here's how to find the perfect American-style summer camp for your kids—outside the United States.

BY MELISSA MATHEWS

MELISSA MATHEWS

Looking out at the Adriatic Sea.

Each summer across the United States, kids head off to sleepaway camp. For many families, it's a rite of passage—and one that many Foreign Service families pursue at great time and expense, flying kids across continents and oceans with



Melissa Mathews is a corporate communications professional and a former journalist. Her family has been in the Foreign

Service for more than 18 years, serving in Guatemala, Saudi Arabia (twice), Jordan, Austria, and Jamaica.

overstuffed duffle bags, seams bulging with swimsuits, sleeping bags, and hiking boots.

But what if there were a better way?

Over the past couple of decades, a number of American-style summer camps have sprung up overseas, serving both local families and expat ones. One of the best known is Camp California, on the shores of the Adriatic in Croatia. Originally envisaged as an English-immersion experience for Croatian kids, it now serves as a destination for children from more than 40 countries.

"I had always gone to summer camp. It was the highlight of my summer," said LeighEllen Murray, a Foreign Service parent, who also worked at summer

camps as a young adult. "For me, it's really important that kids have age-appropriate and safe ways to experience life away from their parents."

Camp California is based on the grounds of a Euro-camping style resort. Campers sleep in bunks in off-grid huts, steps from the deep blue water. They eat in the resort dining hall along with vacationers, but otherwise enjoy their own sports and recreation facilities, including a pier, boats, and arts and crafts pavilion.

For each week of a two-week session, campers select from a menu of activity options to build their schedule—everything from sailing and paddleboarding, to tennis and soccer, to drama.

Considerations for Parents

"My first consideration as a parent is how safe and well run the camp is, and if I feel good about it," Murray said. "I look for programs that will be a good fit for them, whether it's well organized and how the camp communicates."

The International Camp Fellowship lists dozens of summer residential camps overseas. Here are some considerations for families seeking a traditional summer camp experience while posted abroad.

Location. One of the advantages of an international summer camp is to keep kids within driving distance of parents in case of emergency. For that reason, many Foreign Service parents will choose a camp in the country or region where they live. Additionally, campers



MELISSA MATHEWS

Huts by the beach for campers at Camp California in Croatia.

looking to build foreign language skills may choose a camp in a country where they can get an immersive experience.

Cost. Summer camp fees run the gamut, depending on locality and

programs offered. As a rule, you should budget for at least \$1,000 a week. Camp California, for example, costs about \$2,300 for a two-week session for summer 2026. Specialized activities may cost more.

Give your child a summer of
growth, connection, and discovery.

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A four-week coed boarding and day experience where students with learning differences thrive.



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Safety. Following the Texas summer camp disaster over July 4 weekend last summer, safety is top of mind for any parent. While accreditation or association memberships can be a good indicator of robust safety practices, there is no substitute for asking questions, meeting camp leaders, and inspecting facilities, if you can. In addition, prep your camper to be their own advocate, ensure their swimming skills are strong, and even establish a “safe word”—something Murray’s family did but fortunately never had to use.

“Go with your gut when choosing a summer camp,” Murray says. “You know your kid, and what might be right for one might not be the best fit for yours.”

As a rule, you should budget for at least \$1,000 a week.

Teens and Young Adults

While many summer camp experiences are tailored for older elementary and middle school kids, others have programs geared to older teens. Camp California, for example, offers Teen Adventure and Teen Sailing programs; in the latter, kids spend the first week learning to sail and then spend the second living on a boat.

Older kids can also find summer jobs as camp counselors or activities staff. Minimum age and qualifications vary, but CCUSA is one place high school and

college students can start their search for international summer work adventures, including at camps. As in the U.S., lifeguarding and other skill certifications are in demand.

Creating Friendships That Last

For internationally mobile third-culture kids, summer camp can provide stable friendships they can return to year after year. They can also serve as a meet-up point for friends from a previous post, helping kids to maintain relationships across the miles.

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CAMP SOLES

FOREIGN SERVICE FAMILIES



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HOME AWAY FROM HOME FOR FOREIGN SERVICE CHILDREN



Help Your Kids Build Lifelong Friendships

Encourage Independence

Laundry and linen packages to save you from transporting bulky items



Camp Soles is the summer camp of choice for many FS kids. These campers (ages 7-16) form lifelong friendships, benefit from both American and international counselors as role models, and participate in a variety of outdoor and indoor confidence-building activities. We provide special training for counselors to better understand third culture kids. Camp Soles will become the familiar place your children look forward to visiting each year. A large proportion of campers are FS kids.

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+412-213-5321

fun@campsoles.org



A camper ziplining in Croatia, 2025.

Our daughter attended Camp California for a couple of summers while our family was posted to Vienna. It was about a six-hour drive to Pakostane, Croatia, but we also took advantage of a shuttle service offered from Ljubljana, Slovenia, which cut our drive to about four hours each way.

send handwritten letters, which were scanned and forwarded to parents by email.

Camp photographers posted hundreds of photos daily, so while she felt far away from us, we never felt too far from her. When she got sick in the middle of the night, the “Camp Mom,”

Both summers, our daughter had a blast, and I always felt confident that she was having a good experience. Phones and other electronic devices were left at check-in, but campers had the opportunity to

a nurse, took her to the wellness hut and provided us frequent updates on how she was feeling.

Both summers, she met up with a friend from a previous post, helping to maintain an important relationship. Camp gave them something to text about throughout the year, especially when it was time to choose activities or think about what to pack.

When that friend’s family—Murray’s family—was eventually posted to Vienna, the girls were able to pick up their friendship like no time had passed at all. For our two daughters, a shared summer camp experience helped a relationship flourish over three Foreign Service tours, and counting. ■



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■ **Bonita “Boni” Lynne Bender-Klosson**, 77, a retired Foreign Service specialist and FS spouse, died on October 2, 2025, in Rockville, Md.

Ms. Bender-Klosson was born in Aiea, Hawaii, in 1948, the daughter of Harold F. Bender, a U.S. Navy chief commissary steward, and Elsie Rose Bender. She spent her earliest years in Honolulu and Samoa before the family settled in Redwood City, Calif.

Ms. Bender-Klosson graduated from Woodside High School in 1966 and obtained an associate of arts degree from Cañada College in 1973.

The combination of a summer in Switzerland with a Swiss family and encouragement from her mother led to Ms. Bender-Klosson’s decision to join the Foreign Service as an office management specialist (OMS) in 1973. Her first two assignments were to New Delhi (1973-1975) and Athens (1975-1977), where she worked for the economic affairs counselors.

A dog lover, Ms. Bender-Klosson got her beloved Shanti while in India. After a brief leave from the Foreign Service, she rejoined in the fall of 1978 and was posted to Embassy Moscow’s science and technology section, which she always said was her favorite tour.

Assigned then to Embassy Bonn (1980-1982), she worked both for the embassy’s legal adviser and the political section’s Berlin unit. During a visit by Secretary of State George Shultz, she was recruited to serve on “the Line” (S/S-S) from 1982 to 1986 and staffed countless trips by the Secretary.

When she staffed the Secretary for his grueling United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) schedule, Ms. Bender-Klosson and the line officer coaxed a smile from a beleaguered Secretary by surprising him with a mock briefing

memorandum for an end-of-day bilateral with “King Kong.”

Secretary Shultz’s Executive Assistant Charlie Hill chose Ms. Bender-Klosson to serve as his personal assistant from 1986 to 1988. She was proud of the recognition she received from Secretary Shultz for her work and her “terpsichorean” abilities when he took time out with the staff for dancing.

After serving in the office of the Department of State’s Counselor (1989), Ms. Bender-Klosson married Michael Klosson in June 1990, and they were assigned as a tandem couple to Stockholm (1990-1993), where she worked for the regional security officer. This was followed by The Hague (1993-1996), where she worked for the administrative counselor.

Ms. Bender-Klosson became step-mother to Michael’s daughter, Emily, and the couple adopted another daughter, Karen, through an odyssey to Bolivia in 1994. Erin, a West Highland terrier, and Scratch, a golden retriever, rounded out their family.

Ms. Bender-Klosson worked for the director of the Executive Office in the Bureau of African Affairs (1996-1998) before retiring to care for her daughters, while also transcribing oral histories for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

She accompanied her husband to Hong Kong (1999-2002) and Cyprus (2002-2005), where she involved herself in their daughters’ schools, chaired the local American women’s associations, and made significant contributions to the missions’ representation initiatives.

After returning to Rockville, Md., in 2005, Ms. Bender-Klosson chaired the Rockville High School after-prom party Decoration Committee and organized the Flower Valley House and Garden tour.

A devoted mother and grandmother, she also enjoyed travel, visiting more

than 50 countries. She welcomed new pets, usually rescues, into the family. She was known for her artistic flair, memorable dinner displays, and elaborate themed children’s parties.

She was a skilled artist, talented interior designer, and enjoyed tennis, skiing, music, and dancing. Above all, with her radiant smile, she conveyed a special warmth toward all, making everyone, in the words of a friend, “feel like they’ve known her since second grade.”

Ms. Bender-Klosson is survived by her husband, Michael Klosson; their children, Emily C. Robbins (and spouse Nate Robbins) and Karen L.B. Klosson; grandson Wyatt L.C. Robbins; and her brother, Harold F. Bender (and spouse Lynda Bender).

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations in her memory to Lucky Dog Animal Rescue of Arlington, Va., or the Alzheimer’s Association.

■ **Donald Boissonnault**, 83, a retired Foreign Service communications specialist, died on September 13, 2025, in Holyoke, Mass.

Mr. Boissonnault served in the U.S. Army from 1963 to 1965, before joining the Foreign Service in 1967.

During a 27-year career, Mr. Boissonnault served in Tehran, West Berlin, Tel Aviv, Brasília, Moscow, Nairobi, Bonn, Damascus, and Islamabad. He retired in 1994.

■ **Theodore Bennett Carter**, 87, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on October 6, 2025, at his home in Reston, Va., after a courageous battle with cancer.

Born in New Bedford, Mass., in 1938, Mr. Carter attended high school in Newport, R.I., where watching ships move through the harbor sparked a lifelong interest in ships of war and all things nautical. He earned degrees from

the University of Rhode Island, Boston University School of Law, and Southern Methodist University.

Mr. Carter joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1965. During a distinguished career with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), primarily as a regional legal adviser, he served overseas in Vietnam, South Korea, Egypt, Pakistan, and Barbados.

Colleagues remember his steady professionalism, intellectual curiosity, and ability to build friendships across cultures. After retiring from government service in 1993, he continued to travel widely as a consultant and adviser, work he found as rewarding as his diplomatic years.

Mr. Carter was as industrious in retirement as during his career. A gifted photographer, he recorded tens of thousands of images from his travels and shared them through slideshows that turned evenings at home into journeys around the world.

He also pursued painting—producing watercolors of mountains, ships, and city skylines—and devoted himself to model shipbuilding, constructing an extensive collection of handmade model warships and passenger liners, reconstructed from both photographs and original ship plans.

A substantial portion of his work is on display at the U.S. Naval War College Museum in Newport, R.I., where his models have been recognized for their craftsmanship and historical fidelity.

As a lifelong fan of the Boston Red Sox and Boston Celtics, Mr. Carter admired Ted Williams and followed his hometown teams from every corner of the world. An avid reader throughout his life—especially of history, World War II, and international affairs—he had a tireless thirst for knowledge.

In accordance with his wishes, his ashes were scattered in the waters off Newport, where Narragansett Bay opens to the Atlantic Ocean.

Mr. Carter is survived by his wife, Virginia Carter, of Reston, Va.; his children, Ted, Randy, and Laurie; and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

■ **William “Bill” Dameron**, 83, a retired Foreign Service officer and former U.S. ambassador to Mali, passed away on August 4, 2025, following an aggressive onset of lung cancer.

Mr. Dameron was born in Dallas, Texas, and raised in Boone and Warrenton, N.C., and Atlanta, Ga. His father, Bill Jr., was an early pilot for Braniff, and his mother, Jerry, was one of their first stewardesses.

He attended the Georgia Institute of Technology, graduating with a degree in industrial management in 1964. He participated in Caterpillar Tractor Company’s Management Preparatory Program and later obtained his MBA from Georgia State University.

In 1969 Mr. Dameron joined the U.S. Foreign Service, traveling to his first post, Tripoli, with his then-wife, Eileen Mahaffey Dameron; their daughter, Phoebe; and two cats.

It was the beginning of a career that would take him to Nigeria, Hungary, and Norway, before culminating in an ambassadorship to Mali in 1992.

Ambassador Dameron’s focus was largely on the field of economics, and he held multiple positions in the State Department’s European and African bureaus, including as office director in the Bureau of African Affairs (AF) and as an acting assistant secretary in AF under Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs FSO Hank Cohen.

Amb. Dameron and his current wife, Diana Montgomery Dameron, also a Foreign Service officer, retired in 1995 to Portland, Ore., to be closer to friends and family. There, they made a wide circle of friends and fell in love with the city’s

ethos, cultural opportunities, food scene, and proximity to some of nature’s most beautiful settings.

Amb. Dameron was devoted to performing and supporting classical music. He played the sousaphone in his high school marching band, and as an adult, he learned to play oboe, English horn, and later bassoon. He played in community orchestras and was able to enjoy performing even more after retirement.

In Portland, he was a member of the Oregon Sinfonietta for 26 years. He was on the board of Chamber Music Northwest, serving a term as board president. He also volunteered for Oregon Sinfonietta as personnel coordinator and wrote the program notes.

Avid opera fans, the Damerons traveled widely to attend performances in historic opera houses. Amb. Dameron also rekindled his childhood love of minerals, and together he and his wife contributed mineral displays annually at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show. Amb. Dameron served on both national and regional boards of the Friends of Mineralogy.

Despite his waning health, Amb. Dameron was able to enjoy many celebrations, musical performances, and visits from friends and family in the months preceding his death and consistently expressed how lucky he felt.

Amb. Dameron is survived by his wife, Diana; sister Linda (and her husband, Leonard) Himes; daughter Phoebe (and her husband, Jason Ham); and granddaughter Hannah Dameron.

■ **Araceli H. Enano**, 62, a retired Foreign Service specialist, passed away peacefully at home in Houston, Texas, on August 26, 2025, after living courageously with sarcoma.

Ms. Enano was born on May 2, 1963, in Tokyo to Yasui H. Enano and Mariano

A. Enano. Her father was a U.S. Army veteran and a survivor of the Bataan Death March. She spent her early years in Japan and the Philippines before the family settled in the United States.

She earned her bachelor of science degree in business information systems in 2002 and her master of science in computer information systems in 2004, both from the University of Phoenix.

In 2005 Ms. Enano joined the Foreign Service as an office management specialist (OMS). She served at U.S. embassies and missions in Belize, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Spain, France, Switzerland, Georgia, and Belgium.

Her professionalism, composure, integrity, and organizational excellence earned the trust and admiration of colleagues worldwide.

Ms. Enano received awards from U.S. missions in Belize, Bangladesh, Taiwan, and Georgia for her dedication, initiative, and teamwork.

She was also commended by the U.S. Army Special Forces, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, and the Drug Enforcement Administration for her contributions to interagency and security operations.

In Belize, she empowered women at Hattieville Prison to start small businesses and regain independence.

She concluded her career with the U.S. Foreign Service in 2023, completing 20 years of service, including earlier work at the American Institute in Taiwan.

Ms. Enano lived her life with curiosity and energy. In Taiwan, she modeled in fashion shows and competed in dragon boat racing for four years. She performed hula and Filipino folk dances with various troupes, played on embassy softball teams in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Belize, and enjoyed playing golf. As

a certified divemaster, she taught diving in Okinawa and Hawaii.

For many years, Ms. Enano trained in karate and taught classes in Belize alongside her husband, Luis. In Spain, she taught English and American Christmas traditions; and in Taiwan, she taught English to Chinese military officers. She served as a Japanese translator for martial arts instructors in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Central America.

Family and friends remember Ms. Enano for her dedication, adventurous spirit, warmth, and the grace with which she represented the United States abroad.

She loved and cherished her family, always keeping connected even while living overseas, and was known for her generosity. Her life, courage, and commitment to helping others continue to inspire all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Ms. Enano is survived by her husband, Luis Gonzalez of Hawaii; stepsons Louie Gonzalez (and his daughter, Emily) of California and Justin Davis (and his wife, Laleh) of Missouri; her siblings, Felipe of Texas and Benita of California; and many nephews, nieces, cousins, and friends.

■ **Raymond González**, 100, a retired Foreign Service officer and former U.S. ambassador to Ecuador, died on April 15, 2025, in San Marcos, Calif., surrounded by family members.

Mr. González was born on December 25, 1924, in Pasadena, Calif. He served in the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for a bullet wound sustained in Germany in 1944, one month before his 20th birthday.

Returning from convalescence to noncombat duty, he was briefly assigned to the American Legation in Bern, where his work alongside U.S. diplomats sparked an interest in diplomacy.

After the war, Mr. González attended La Sorbonne Université in Paris for a semester following a liberal arts curriculum. He earned a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Southern California in 1949 and a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1950.

He entered government service as a reference assistant at the Library of Congress. Transferring to the State Department in 1950, he entered the U.S. Foreign Service the following year.

Mr. González served in diplomatic and consular assignments in Guayaquil, Naples, Rome, Luxembourg, Brussels, San José, Lima, Panama, and Washington, D.C. While assigned to Luxembourg and Brussels (1958-1961), he served in the U.S. Mission to the European Communities (now the European Union).

Later, in Washington, D.C. (1963-1965), he was political adviser to the U.S. Representative on the Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) and attended the National War College (1965-1966).

From 1974 to 1978, Mr. González served as deputy chief of mission in Panama during the negotiation of the Panama Canal Treaties.

In 1978 President Jimmy Carter appointed him U.S. ambassador to Ecuador, where he oversaw the peaceful transfer of power from the military to a democratically elected civilian government.

Returning to the United States in 1982, Ambassador González served one year as a diplomat in residence and visiting adjunct professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, Calif.

He then joined the Office of the Inspector General at State (1984-1988). As a senior inspector, he headed teams evaluating the performance of our diplomatic

missions around the world. Amb. González retired in 1988 but remained in Washington as a consultant to the department.

In 1992 he returned to his permanent residence in California. There he served as foreman of the San Diego County Civil Grand Jury (1995-1996) and subsequently served on a committee appointed by the County Board of Supervisors that monitors the implementation of Grand Jury recommendations.

For six years he served on the Hispanic Advisory Council at California State University, San Marcos. Amb. González was active in the San Diego Laubach Literacy Council, an affiliate of ProLiteracy Worldwide. He served as a volunteer tutor and director at a literacy center in San Marcos and on the board of directors of the council. For a number of years, he was chair of the Foreign Service Retirees Association of Southern California.

Amb. González was predeceased by his wife of 68 years, Ernestine, in 2017.

He is survived by his sister Mary; sons Carl, Paul (Larry), Greg (Cheryl), Rick (Lili), Chris, and Phil (Rhonda); a daughter, Caroline “Pepi”; and nine grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and niece Laura and nephew John.

■ **Alden Hatheway Irons**, 85, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on September 10, 2025, at his home in Ashburn, Va., from complications due to Parkinson’s disease.

Born on November 3, 1939, to Richard K. Irons, who taught history at Groton School in Groton, Mass., for 40 years, and his English wife, Audrey (née Radcliffe), he grew up on the school’s campus in an international family with a deep interest in foreign affairs.

Mr. Irons attended St. Paul’s School in Concord, N.H., during the mid-1950s, and spent a post-graduate year at St. Paul’s School in London in 1957 and

1958. He entered Harvard as a sophomore history major.

Mr. Irons married Wellesley alumna Judith Ann Lisle in 1962, after his first year at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.

A month later, responding to the State Department’s call, the couple landed in Mali for his first assignment, as the general services officer and then political officer. The couple’s first child, Catherine, was born there in 1963.

In subsequent postings to Norway, Finland, Haiti, and Morocco, Mr. Irons held political, economic, human rights, and international labor reporting roles, as well as consular positions. Early in his career, between overseas assignments, he focused on post-colonial African political and economic affairs, a lifelong interest.

In 1964 Mr. Irons was posted to Oslo as a consular officer. There, their second child, Stephen, arrived in 1967, about three weeks before they returned to the United States for their first Foggy Bottom assignment.

The couple settled in Annandale, Va., with Mr. Irons working first in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, digging into the political, economic, and governance issues of Africa’s still-emerging post-colonial period, and then in the Executive Secretariat. Richard, their third child, was born in Washington, D.C., in 1970.

In 1972 Mr. Irons was deep into his second year of Finnish language training in preparation for four years in Helsinki as the embassy’s labor and political officer. The assignment included planning for the Helsinki Conference of 1975, which led to new post-World War II cooperation among European countries, reducing tensions and increasing East-West exchanges.

In 1977 Jimmy Carter’s ascendancy to the presidency focused the State Department’s attention on human rights issues as

never before. Mr. Irons landed on the front lines in Port-au-Prince, where he headed the political section, delivering U.S. protests about the brutality of Haitian President Jean-Claude Duvalier’s government.

By the time he left Haiti, the country had few political prisoners. The Duvalier regime ended in the Haitian popular uprising of 1986.

In 1978 the family returned to Washington, and Mr. Irons spent two years on the Inter-African Affairs desk followed by two years in human resources.

In his last overseas assignment, Mr. Irons was the labor officer for Morocco and his wife, Judy, became the consulate nurse.

In 1986, settling in Arlington, Va., Mr. Irons undertook a three-month assignment in the State Department Inspection Corps. After that, and for the rest of his career, he focused on international labor issues in the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. In 1988 Mr. Irons converted to the Civil Service.

Though he formally retired in 2002, he continued to work part-time. Friends described his role then as “the State Department’s institutional memory on labor diplomacy.” His career spanned 46 years—from John F. Kennedy’s presidency to Barack Obama’s.

Mr. Irons is survived by Judith Ann Irons, his wife of 63 years, and their three children: Catherine Olson of Bourne, Mass.; Stephen Irons (and spouse Mei Tan) recently of Berkeley, Calif.; and Richard Irons (and spouse Lisa D’Ambrosio-Irons) of Falls Church, Va.; and nine grandchildren. His two younger brothers, Clifford of Newbury, Mass., and David of New York City, also live on.

In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes a gift in memory of Alden Irons to the Parkinson’s Foundation at <https://parkinson.org>.

■ **Patricia Kansas**, 85, a retired member of the Foreign Service and FS spouse, died on August 24, 2025, in Kittery, Maine.

Ms. Kansas was born on October 29, 1939, in Cranston, R.I., the daughter of the late James F. and Mary E. (née Smith) Lannon. She grew up in Cranston alongside her brothers Thomas J. and Edward E. Lannon.

She met her future husband, Thomas Kansas, while still a teenager through her friendship with his sister. The two married young, at 19 and 21. Their marriage of more than six decades was marked by partnership, adventure, and mutual devotion.

Mr. Kansas joined the State Department in 1975 as a technical security officer, and the couple began their Foreign Service life together with an assignment to Athens, where they spent four years.

After a brief period in the United States, the couple returned overseas in 1983, when Mr. Kansas rejoined the Foreign Service as a building and maintenance officer. Subsequent postings took them to Niger and Türkiye.

Following her husband's retirement, Ms. Kansas joined the State Department herself, and they continued their Foreign Service career overseas.

Ms. Kansas worked as an office management specialist (OMS) for three tours, and then as a general services officer until her retirement in 2005. She served at posts in Venezuela, Uruguay, Guyana, Libya, Grenada, the Dominican Republic, and Germany, where she helped move the embassy from Bonn to Berlin.

Ms. Kansas shared a deep and enduring bond with her husband. Together, they built a life filled with love, laughter, and a sense of adventure. Her devotion to her family was unwavering, and at the center of her world were son Scott Kansas; daughter-in-law Andrea Kansas; grand-

children Taylor Kansas, Madison Bookhart, and Jordan Bookhart-Holderfield (and husband Will); and great-grandchild Wesley Bookhart-Holderfield.

Friends and family members recall Ms. Kansas' innate ability to make others feel valued, whether it was through a listening ear, a kind word, or her infectious sense of humor. Her home was always filled with warmth, they remember, and her spirit will forever live on in the countless memories she created by sharing the interesting experiences she had during her many years in the Foreign Service and by the way she embraced life with open arms.

Her passion for volunteering and teaching brought her great joy, and she used her innate talents to brighten the lives of everyone she came into contact with.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the American Lung Association, a cause that was near and dear to Ms. Kansas' heart.

■ **Stephen Hitchcock Rogers**, 95, a retired Foreign Service officer and former U.S. ambassador to Swaziland (now Eswatini), died on July 27, 2025.

Born in Flushing, N.Y., on June 21, 1930, Mr. Rogers grew up on Long Island and in Lexington, Mass. He knew even before he graduated from Port Washington (N.Y.) High School that he wanted a career in the U.S. Foreign Service.

After a Naval ROTC scholarship enabled a bachelor's degree in public and international affairs at Princeton, he served for three years as navigator on a destroyer during the Korean War.

While subsequently pursuing a master's degree in economics at Columbia, he met his future wife, Kent, at a French Club tea on campus. He proposed to her once he knew he had a job lined up with the State Department, and they married and moved to Washington, D.C.

Later, in 1962, he also received a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University.

In 1956 the couple's shared life of service and adventure began. The Foreign Service took the family to India, France, England, Mexico, and South Africa, with stints in Washington, D.C., interspersed. Mr. Rogers' final assignment was Swaziland, where he served as U.S. ambassador from 1990 until retiring in 1993.

During his 37-year diplomatic career, Ambassador Rogers represented and advised on the policies of nine different presidential administrations. He also taught economics at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

In retirement, Amb. Rogers and his wife returned to their home in Annandale, Va., that they had bought early in their marriage. Though settled, they hardly stayed put: Their love of adventure and learning took them on travels around the world for another quarter-century.

They also kept up their tradition of diving into the community through active engagement with the church they had joined in 1957, the neighborhood civic association, and through volunteer work in schools. Amb. Rogers also served as a poll worker and captain in numerous elections, helped lead his Princeton alumni class, and advocated for positive political change.

Learning about people and places, history and nature kept Mr. Rogers growing throughout his long life. He would find out as much as he could about the countries they lived in, memorize poetry on the Metro, and report on "All Things Considered" at the dinner table.

He read long biographies up until his last years and was happy to quote Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride" or Frost's "Mending Fences" well into his 90s.

He was also fascinated with birds, from the hoopoes of India and hadedas of Southern Africa to the cardinals and Carolina wrens of their suburban Virginia backyard (where he even enjoyed the struggle to keep the birdseed away from the squirrels).

Music was another thread throughout Mr. Rogers' life: He played clarinet in the high school band, sang with the glee club in college and with choirs, choruses, and barbershop quartets in the ensuing decades, and even played a crapshooter in a community production of "Guys and Dolls" in Mexico City.

Amb. Rogers was predeceased by his wife, Kent, in 2017; brother, John (and spouse Barbara); and sister, Carolyn (and spouse George).

He is survived by his children, Kryston (and spouse Tim) Fischer, Halsey (and spouse Aromie Noe), Julia (and spouse Smiley Nelson), and John (and spouse Gigi Garcia-Rogers); seven grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

■ **Mona Burchell Rowland**, 93, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on May 12, 2025, in Silver Spring, Md.

Born in Indiana, Pa., Ms. Rowland was the daughter of Ralph Shearer Rowland and Star Wilson Rowland. She grew up in Indiana, Pa., Washington, D.C., and Annandale, Va., and graduated from Fairfax High School in 1949 and Lynchburg College in 1953.

After a year on the staff of an educational journal in Washington, D.C., she joined her parents in Bangkok, where she began her Foreign Service career with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA).

Ms. Rowland served in Thailand, Italy, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Laos, and Pakistan, in addition to assignments in Washington, D.C.

In Laos, she played an important role in evacuating Americans before the Communist takeover in 1975 and was among the last to leave that year. It took another year to get her car out: Apparently, a Laotian general coveted the yellow Camaro, and when it finally arrived in the United States, it had been stripped and had bulletproof panels added.

Ms. Rowland's last overseas assignment was as an executive officer in Pakistan. Her last assignment before retirement was in the USIA budget office in Washington, D.C.

After retiring in 1983, she lived and birdwatched with her beloved cats in Reston, Va. Her home reflected her talent for collecting beautiful and interesting things, including toys and folk art from all over the world.

She contributed to her parents' passion for genealogy by serving as the typist for their book, *Kellenbergers and Shearers*. She moved to Riderwood in Silver Spring, Md., in her final years.

Ms. Rowland was predeceased by brother Ralph Wilson Rowland and sister Mary Joyce Burks.

Friends and family members remember her smart wit and big smiles. Memories can be shared at <https://bit.ly/Rowland-obit>.

■ **William Seth Shepard**, 90, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on August 21, 2025.

Born on June 7, 1935, in Boston, Mass., and raised in Franklin, N.H., Mr. Shepard graduated from the Tilton School in 1953; Wesleyan University, where he was president of Sigma Chi and graduated cum laude, in 1957; and Harvard Law School in 1961.

A Fulbright Scholar, he taught in France before attending law school. Afterward, he served as a commissioned

officer in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, where he taught international law.

In 1964 Mr. Shepard entered the U.S. Foreign Service. His first overseas assignment was to Saigon, where he served as aide to Ambassadors Henry Cabot Lodge and Ellsworth Bunker (1966-1967). He returned to Washington, D.C., in 1967 to serve as a staff officer in the Executive Secretariat.

Sent to Budapest in 1970, he served as consul and political officer, helping negotiate the first U.S.-Hungarian Consular Convention in more than 30 years in 1972. In 1973 he returned to Saigon, serving as an arms control negotiator with the International Control Commission.

Back in Washington, Mr. Shepard served as Hungarian and Baltic affairs desk officer until 1975, and then as desk officer for Singapore and Malaysian affairs until 1977.

In 1978 he went to Athens as deputy political counselor, and in 1983 he was assigned to Bordeaux as consul general at the American Consulate General until 1985.

Following his diplomatic career, Mr. Shepard worked as director of congressional affairs at the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, where he facilitated the ratification of the landmark INF Treaty in 1988.

As a congressional fellow and national security adviser to Senator Robert Dole, he advised on foreign policy and wrote arms control proposals.

In 1990, at the request of the Republican Party, Mr. Shepard became Republican candidate for Governor of Maryland. A moderate by temperament and style, he surprised many with his strong showing across party lines and left a strong mark on state politics.

In his next career, as an author, he published 14 books, including a diplomatic mystery series, autobiographical tales, and his highly regarded *Shepard's Guide to Mastering French Wine*. He was an in-demand public speaker worldwide.

He also served as wine editor for *French Wine Explorers*. His knowledge of wine, particularly Bordeaux, resulted in a first-class wine cellar and membership in several international wine societies.

Mr. Shepard was recognized as a distinguished alumnus of Tilton School at his 60th reunion, receiving the George L. Plimpton Award for a lifetime of service and leadership. He was named an Honorary Hungarian Freedom Fighter by the Hungarian Society of America, the only non-Hungarian to be so named.

He was a member of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, Governor Bradford Compact Society, Society Descendant Colonial Governors, Society Descendant Colonial Wars, Montesquieu Academy France, City Tavern Club, Flagon and Trencher, and Tred Avon Players.

Remembered as a man of integrity, intellect, and humor, Mr. Shepard was also a devoted family man. Married in June 1960, he and his wife, Lois, enjoyed a lifelong partnership of travel, politics, adventures, and rooting for the Red Sox. Together, they raised three children.

Family members and friends recall how he carried himself with grace and style amid life's challenges, and his saying: "We often lived abroad but were always at home."

Mr. Shepard was preceded in death by his brother, Walter Roskos Shepard, and sister-in-law, Barbara Shepard, and by his son, Warren Burke Shepard (1966-1980).

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Lois; their daughters, Stephanie Shepard Lipson and Cynthia Robin Shepard; four

grandchildren, Victoria Ashley Dickson (Christian), Christina Morgan Lipson, Emma Grace Lipson, and Erik Lipson Jr.; a great-grandson, Zander Christian Dickson; his brother, Dr. James Shepard (Sally); seven nieces and nephew, and their children; and a extended family in many parts of the country.

The family thanks the entire team at Talbot Hospice for their extraordinary personal and professional care over Mr. Shepard's last several months.

■ **John "Jock" W. Shirley**, 94, a retired Foreign Service officer and former U.S. ambassador to Tanzania, died peacefully on October 7, 2025.

Mr. Shirley was born in 1931 in Hailsham, England, to an American father and English mother. From the age of 6, he was sent to boarding schools in France, Croatia, and Hungary.

He and his father spent the war years in Hungary, trapped after the Hungarian declaration of war against the U.S. in 1942. Despite being "enemy aliens," they were treated with consideration.

With the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, they went into hiding, surviving the siege of Budapest and the early months of Soviet occupation. These experiences gave him a lifelong antipathy to extremism of the left and the right.

Relocating to the U.S. after the war, Mr. Shirley graduated from the Augusta Military Academy and Georgetown University School of Foreign Service.

Following service in the U.S. Air Force (1952-1956), stationed in Germany, he joined the Foreign Service in 1957 with the U.S. Information Agency (USIA).

Mr. Shirley was assistant cultural officer in Zagreb (1958-1959) and in Belgrade (1959-1960). He then served as public affairs officer in Trieste (1960-1963), press attaché in Rome (1963-



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.

1965), and press attaché in New Delhi (1965-1968).

He returned to Washington, D.C., where he was policy officer in USIA's Near Eastern and South Asian affairs division (1968-1969).

After Polish language training at the Foreign Service Institute, he was posted to Warsaw (1970-1972). Back at USIA, he was deputy director and then director for East European and Soviet affairs and director for European affairs (1972-1977).

Following a stint in Rome (1977-1980), Mr. Shirley returned to Washington to serve as USIA's associate director for programs (1980-1981), acting director (1981), counselor (1981-1983), and deputy director ad interim (1983).

He spoke six foreign languages at a professional level. In 1984 he was named U.S. ambassador to Tanzania, until his retirement in 1986.

Ambassador Shirley and his wife, Kathy, also a former ambassador, settled in Stonington, Conn., where he pursued his lifelong passions for riding, sailing, and rowing.

In retirement, Amb. Shirley founded and then shepherded a scholarship program, still flourishing 34 years later, at Sarospatak, the school he attended in Hungary. In 2016 he moved to the Waverly Heights retirement community in Gladwyne, Pa.

Amb. Shirley is survived by his wife of 57 years, Katherine; his daughters, Pamela and Jeanie; seven grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren. ■

Here We Are, Again

The Breach: Iran-Contra and the Assault on American Democracy

Alan McPherson, *University of North Carolina Press*, 2025, \$27.95/paperback, e-book available, 384 pages.

REVIEWED BY HARRY W. KOPP

In *The Breach*, Alan McPherson, Freaney Professor of History at Temple University, has given us an account—short and wonderfully easy to read—of the Iran-Contra affair, the greatest scandal of Ronald Reagan's presidency.

McPherson tells in persuasive detail how Iran-Contra, though little remembered today, inflicted major damage on American democracy and the Constitution: the rule of law was “desecrated,” the separation of powers “violated,” judicial independence “infringed,” and truth “despoiled.”

Even so, punishments from the judicial system were few, and from the electorate even fewer. Parallels to current events are unmistakable.

A Three-Part Scheme

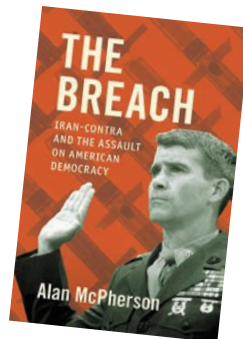
The Iran-Contra affair unfolded in the 1980s and remained a subject of investigation into the 1990s. Despite its two-part name, McPherson sees the scandal in three—Iran, the Contras, and the hyphen that linked them.

A quick recap, starting with Iran: President Ronald Reagan, who had defeated President Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election in part because of Carter's failure to rescue American hostages seized and held by Iran, was determined to recover American hostages held in Lebanon. By 1985 there were eight, held by terrorist organizations linked to Iran.

McPherson quotes Reagan's memoirs: “Almost every morning at my national security briefings, I began by asking the same question: ‘Any progress on getting the hostages out of Lebanon?’” At the same time, the president promised, quite publicly, to “never make concessions to terrorists.”

The president's men tried to realize these conflicting but fervently held desires with increasingly weird schemes that involved secretly selling weapons the CIA had procured to Iran, in exchange for cash and the promise of Iranian efforts to secure the release of the hostages. The project used private go-betweens—a business they called “the Enterprise”—to evade responsibility for clearly illegal arms transfers.

The Contra side of the scandal involved the administration's support for counterrevolutionaries (the Contras) against a leftist regime (the Sandinistas)



In late 1985 or early 1986, McPherson writes, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council staff, had what he called a “neat idea.” The Enterprise, of which North was the chief architect, had so overcharged the Iranians that even after its participants had skimmed substantial sums for themselves, there was money left over.

“Use it to support the Contras,” North reportedly said, providing the hyphen. These were funds that Congress never authorized or appropriated; they had been obtained illegally and used for purposes Congress had prohibited.

Who Knew ...?

Even after the whole story blew up, as such stories will, it was never clear how much the president or other senior officials knew. North's boss, National Security Adviser Admiral John Poindexter, testified that he

Even after the whole story blew up, as such stories will, it was never clear how much the president or other senior officials knew.

that had taken power in Nicaragua. President Reagan believed the Soviet Union intended to use the Sandinistas to undermine governments in Central America and Mexico; he saw the Contras as freedom fighters whose cause was vital to U.S. national security.

Congress, however, had prohibited U.S. support for the Contras by law, beginning in 1983. The administration's efforts to support the Contras regardless of those laws were the second part of the scandal.

did not ask the president for approval “so that I could ... provide some future deniability” if the story ever leaked out.

Other top officials, including the vice president, the president's chief of staff, and the secretaries of State and Defense, were not fully informed and were eager not to be enlightened.

According to the president's chief of staff, Poindexter himself—to be sure, an unreliable witness—said: “I had a feeling that something bad was going on ...

but I really didn't want to know." As novelist Don DeLillo wrote of another (fictional) covert operation, "Knowledge was a danger, ignorance a cherished asset."

Some of the facts came out in testimony before Congress, some in the report of a special commission. Then in December 1986 President Reagan appointed an independent counsel to investigate.

Five long years later, the independent counsel, a dogged former federal judge named Lawrence Walsh, had produced 14 indictments resulting in 11 convictions, including of North and Poindexter (whose convictions were later vacated on appeal), and no acquittals.

The scorecard is misleading; in reality, the investigation fizzled. Walsh could not use as evidence any of the immunized testimony of the Iran-Contra figures who

appeared before committees of Congress. As a result, defendants were charged not with the underlying crimes but with offenses, such as lying to Congress and obstruction of justice, that many members of the public could and did dismiss as no big deal.

On Christmas Eve 1992, lame-duck President George H.W. Bush pardoned six of the Iran-Contra figures then awaiting trial. As McPherson notes: "The only person who ended up in prison was Thomas Clines [a minor participant in the Enterprise], and that was for cheating on his taxes."

Who Cared ...?

McPherson's account begins in a detached and moderate tone, but by the concluding chapter, the author's fury is unrestrained: "The Republican Party,

especially, showed that Iran-Contra did not chasten it in the least. It continued its abhorrent disregard for the unwritten rules and conventions of a just and egalitarian society. ... It paid a paltry price come election time."

The Constitution, democracy, and the rule of law breached? In the end, too many people simply did not care. And so, 40 years later, here we are again.

Harry W. Kopp, a Foreign Service officer from 1967 to 1985, was deputy assistant secretary of State for international trade policy in the Carter and Reagan administrations. He is the author of The Voice of the Foreign Service: A History of the American Foreign Service Association at 100 (2nd edition, 2024) and co-author with John K. Naland of Career Diplomacy: Life and Work in the U.S. Foreign Service (4th edition, 2021).

An Unsettling View of the Global Landscape

Waste Land: A World in Permanent Crisis

Robert D. Kaplan, Random House, 2025, \$31.00/hardcover, e-book available, 224 pages.

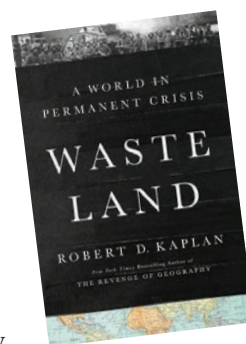
REVIEWED BY JOSEPH L. NOVAK

In his new book, *Waste Land*, Robert D. Kaplan goes full pessimist. Deeply concerned about Vladimir Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China, he is also worried about the impact of climate change and the spread of chaos in poorer regions of the globe. The main thing that is keeping him up at night, however, is the failure of the collective West to cohere in the face of escalating challenges.

Kaplan has long been one of America's premier geopolitical thinkers. *Waste Land* is his 23rd book in a list that includes *Balkan Ghosts* (1993), *The Revenge of Geography* (2012), and *The Good American* (2021). A writer of thought-provoking pieces in *The Atlantic* for many years, he is currently affiliated with the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

The Weimar Period

His latest work begins with a lengthy rumination on Weimar-era Germany. During that turbulent post-World War I timeframe, the German government was often ineffective and "everyone was hanging on for dear life, unaware of



where they were going." The chapter is titled "Weimar Goes Global," with Kaplan seeing the period as "a rough metaphor for our time."

Of course, the Weimar Republic abruptly ended with the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, followed by the swift movement toward

World War II. Kaplan seems to be saying that the present-day West could face a similar cataclysm if it does not show strength and resolve.

To Kaplan, the contemporary threats to stability are real enough. As touched on above, he sees Russia and China as dangerous players on the international scene. He laments that the Afghanistan and Iraq wars "substantially weakened the United States" and gave these

Kaplan underscores that he was not an optimist in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

“adversaries a head start in the renewed strategic competition.”

That said, Russia—“the sick man of Eurasia,” as he puts it—has been debilitated by its bloody invasion of Ukraine. As for China, it faces a shrinking population as well as declining economic growth. While Beijing has a seemingly firm institutionalized system in place to deal with leadership vacuums, Kaplan worries that post-Putin Moscow could unravel with unforeseen consequences.

Kaplan also writes sagaciously about the effects of climate change. He quotes science journalist Peter Brannen who harrowingly observed that “humanity’s ongoing chemistry experiment on our planet could push the climate ... into a state it hasn’t seen in tens of millions of years, a world for which *Homo sapiens* did not evolve.”

A chapter called “Crowds and Chaos” lists additional threats. Kaplan’s arguments in this section are not particularly well sketched out. He appears to be saying that expanding urbanization and the spreading use of digital communication platforms, for instance, could rile up populaces across the globe, leading to bouts of tumult.

Realism vs. Optimism

On several occasions, Kaplan underscores that he was not an optimist in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Unlike other commentators, he did not believe that the new age would inevitably be marked by harmony and mutually beneficial globalization. The

Hegelian-influenced Francis Fukuyama may have envisioned “The End of History,” but Kaplan—a foreign policy realist—was not buying it.

In this regard, Kaplan flags an article he wrote for *The Atlantic* in 1994 called “The Coming Anarchy.” The article, which was later made into a book, was controversial at the time for its gloomy tone. Rising to his own defense, he contends that many of the issues he dealt with, such as weak governance, poverty, and environmental scarcity, continue to plague numerous developing countries.

Throughout *Waste Land*, Kaplan displays an amazing level of erudition. He skillfully references Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun, Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, Walter Bagehot, Henry Adams, José Ortega y Gasset, Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, Elias Canetti, and many other writers and thinkers.

At times, his taste for citing eminent figures goes astray. For example, a prolonged disquisition on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his *Red Wheel* series of historical novels set amid his chapter on the Weimar period seems out of place.

The title of the book is itself a reference to the famous poem *The Waste Land* published by the renowned Anglo-American poet T.S. Eliot in 1922. Kaplan cites several of the poem’s lyrical highlights, including: “A crowd flowed under London Bridge, so many/I had not thought death had undone so many.”

Eliot’s theme of postwar breakdown and collapse is a perfect fit for Kaplan’s saturnine mood.

Anxious Foresight

Although Kaplan’s book goes off on tangents and is difficult to decipher at times, the overall point is a valuable one. Buffeted by a whirlwind of profound change, the international rules-based order is under significant stress. Those who do not recognize this, the author warns, are likely to be caught completely off guard by the onslaught of crises.

In response to this unpredictable state of affairs, Kaplan is advising the West to engage in some self-reflection. Its record in recent years in tackling the most pressing issues has not been an impressive one. If the West fails to realize that the current global landscape is Hobbesian in nature, it will face increasing marginalization.

An advocate of what he calls “anxious foresight,” Kaplan never claims that there is light at the end of the tunnel. But he does end *Waste Land* with the following apt guidance: “The direction of history is unknowable. There is no such thing as automatic linear progress. Thus, we have no choice but to fight on, as the outcome is not given to any of us in advance.” ■

Joseph L. Novak is a writer based in Washington, D.C. He is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in London and a retiree member of the American Foreign Service Association. A former lawyer, he was a Foreign Service officer for 30 years.



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Logrolling in Rural Thailand

BY DICK VIRDEN

Uttaradit is a *changwat* (province) in north central Thailand. One day late in 1968, some Thai companions and I found ourselves literally spinning our wheels there, stranded on a remote, hilly trail. This is the story of why we were there and how we got out of our fix.

Our trip was part of what in those days was called counterinsurgency, or the battle for hearts and minds. As the United States Information Service (USIS) representative based in the adjacent province of Phitsanulok, I was charged with organizing field information programs to villages in the five provinces of a north central region bordering Laos and Burma.

As a first assignment, it did not exactly fit the pattern for a fledgling diplomat. One of my Foreign Service classmates dubbed me “Lord Jim,” from Joseph Conrad’s book by that title; upcountry Thailand must have looked rather exotic from his European vantage point. But, in fact, I was no unique, lone-wolf adventurer. At that time, USIS had a dozen branch posts making similar expeditions to the country’s 50,000 or so villages.

On this day, we were heading for a group of villages due to be displaced by the Queen Sirikit Dam, which was being

built to provide flood control, irrigation, and power to the surrounding area on the Nan River.

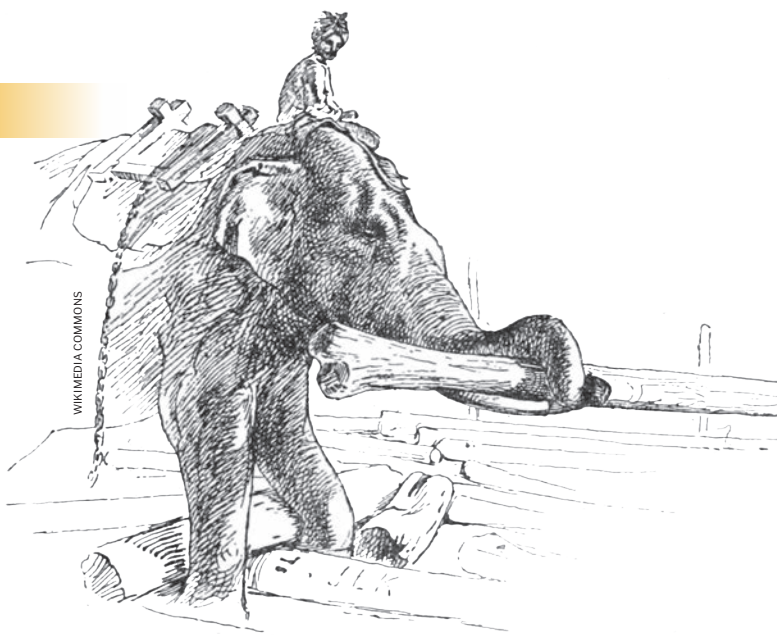
Our goal was noble: try to ensure that villagers knew what was afoot and convince them that they would benefit in the long run. There was good reason to suspect little had been done to inform or try to influence them, since reaching out to people in rural areas was alien to Thailand’s authoritarian tradition.

The overarching concern was that disaffected villagers might be tempted to join the ranks of communist insurgents threatening the government in Bangkok, an important U.S. ally in the war then raging nearby in Vietnam and Laos (and soon enough in Cambodia as well).

Despite our lofty purpose, our mobile information team (MIT) and the Jeep CJ-6s that carried us were stymied by a prosaic problem: A huge tree had fallen across the only trail available.

We were a group of about a dozen, counting my two Thai assistants and officials—as usual, an assortment of vets, teachers, health workers, and administrators—from the province and district. But with that log squarely in our path, we had no way to proceed, no direction home, as my fellow Minnesotan Bob Dylan wrote.

The answer was not blowing in the wind, but it was at hand in the surrounding teak forest. Someone remembered that elephants were the go-to means of logging



A drawing of an elephant lifting teak logs in Southeast Asia as appeared in *The Popular Science Monthly*.

thereabouts. Maybe we could track down a crew and persuade them to help us out?

And so we did. The details of our search and rescue are a bit murky—it’s been more than half a century!—but eventually we did find some elephants at work and convinced a handler to take on the offending log. As I recall, said elephant made short work of the challenge.

Path cleared, we were able to move on to a string of villages, some of which had rarely seen their government up close or considered that it was there for them.

For a couple of nights, our team provided information, services, and even entertainment (we showed films, stringing sheets between bamboo poles and using our portable generator since the villages lacked electricity).

The villagers seemed pleased enough, though it would be a stretch to claim—much less try to prove—that hearts were moved or minds changed.

Later I would submit my favorite petty cash voucher ever: “100 baht (\$5). Rental of elephant to remove log from trail.”

It was reimbursed too.

Also, the dam was completed and is still functioning today.

And, of course, Thailand never did “go communist.” But that’s another tale... ■



Dick Virden is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer. He served twice in Thailand (1967-1969 and 1980-1983); as country public affairs officer in Portugal, Romania, and Poland; and as deputy chief of mission in Brazil.

LOCAL LENS



In a village square on the outskirts of Datong, in China's Shanxi province, my family and I stumbled on a group of local women performing a traditional fan dance to celebrate Lunar New Year. Four men pounded on an enormous drum and two played cymbals while the dancers' "coach" blew a whistle and barked choreography orders.

There was no audience but us, the foreigners who showed up by happenstance. The afternoon was freezing, but the ladies beamed. ■

Julia Wohlers is a first-tour Foreign Service officer currently serving in Beijing with her husband and two sons. This photo was taken in February 2025 with a Samsung Galaxy S20+ and post-processed in Adobe Lightroom.



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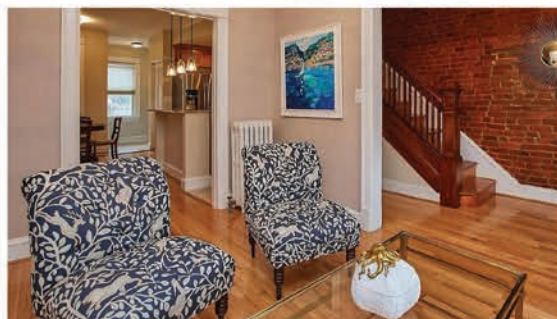
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