THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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On the Shoulders of Giants

BY JOHN "DINK" DINKELMAN

I took advantage of a muggy day in August to pay a visit to one of the most influential people in AFSA's history. It was a day I'll never forget.

Most of us who have spent a while in the Foreign Service—and certainly everyone who works for AFSA—have heard of Ambassador Tom Boyatt.

Back in 1959, he joined the Foreign Service, after a three-year stint in the U.S. Air Force. He quickly developed a reputation as a smart, charismatic officer—an excellent diplomat who wasn't afraid to stand up for his beliefs and never backed down from a fight for what was right.



COURTESY OF JOHN DINKELMAN

John Dinkelman (left), Maxine Boyatt, and Ambassador Tom Boyatt on the steps of Morris Tavern, August 2026.

Boyatt is perhaps most well known for his heroism on a plane that got hijacked in 1969. He helped injured passengers to safety before the plane was blown up, and then he negotiated their release. For his actions during those six long days when he and the other passengers were held captive, he received numerous awards and commendations.

During his diplomatic career, he was also the recipient of AFSA's prestigious awards for constructive dissent (twice) and the 2008 Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award.

But I wasn't driving hours into Virginia horse country to hear about his past. I wanted to talk to Amb. Boyatt about the future: AFSA's future.

You see, he was instrumental in the fight, back in the early 1970s, to turn AFSA into a union. We'd spent 50 years as a professional association when a group of reform-minded FSOs branded the "Young Turks" led the fight to create a union system independent of State management.

Not yet an ambassador (he wouldn't earn that title until 1978), Boyatt led the charge to develop what he later called a "friendly but adversarial labor-management relationship." When the new union finally fought its way into existence, he found himself at the helm.

As the current leader of AFSA, I set out to meet him hoping he might explain the "friendly but adversarial" piece of the puzzle. Sadly, since I took on the role of AFSA president, there has been a whole lot of "adversarial" but not too much "friendly."

And so I wondered: Had his fight for AFSA felt just as hard as ours does today? And did he ever lose hope?

Amb. Boyatt graciously spent the better part of an afternoon with me, talking about the union he had helped build—the one you and I are working to uphold during these turbulent times. He told me that back then, times were tough, as not everyone in the State Department wanted this fledgling union to succeed.

But knowing they were on the right side of the fight gave him and his colleagues the strength to keep pushing.

It was, however, a different time. As he noted, back then the two sides were always respectful of each other, even when they disagreed. But, he told me gravely, "you do not have that luxury."

Amb. Boyatt understands that we're in the fight for our lives right now. He reminded me that AFSA has been through challenging times in the past and made it through by pushing for what we know is right.

And that is exactly what we'll do.

Thanks to courageous leaders like Tom Boyatt, on whose shoulders we continue to stand, and to loyal members like you, AFSA will continue to fight for the Foreign Service.

We're not going anywhere.

John Dinkelman is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

When perusing this issue, make sure you take the time to read AFSA VP Ro Nepal's column on page 62. It is by far the best encapsulation of the state of the Foreign Service I have seen during my term in office. The loss of expertise from the departure of Ro, and hundreds of experienced skilled professionals like him, will take years, if not decades, to recoup.

—J.D.

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Books, Elections, and More

BY DONNA SCARAMASTRA GORMAN

Before becoming an editor at AFSA, I was a writer. I wrote a blog, back when blogs were a thing. I wrote articles for the *Journal* but also for other publications. I wrote press releases and reports for the U.S. government as a Foreign Service family member at various posts overseas. And at some point, I decided, why not write a *book*?

I can now report: Writing a book is painful, even for someone who considers herself a "writer." And even once the book is written, you still have to edit it. A lot. And get others to review and edit it. And get it published. And market it. And read the reviews (though I cannot recommend enough to my fellow writers that they *not* read the reviews).

For the past three years, I've been the lead editor for the annual In Their Own Write (ITOW) edition, the roundup of books by Foreign Service members. In that time I've read, skimmed, and flipped through a lot of books—like, a *lot*.

Every year it seems more and more FS members are putting their thoughts down on the page and doing the hard work of bringing forth books. They share those books with us—and then we share them with you. I'm continually impressed with the depth and breadth of our collection, and this year is no exception.



In the mix are memoirs (I love the memoirs!), fiction (ditto), textbooks, books on leadership, self-help guides, and more. Seriously, there's something here for everybody, so peruse the guide and consider buying a few of the most interesting for yourself or your friends.

Every year it seems more and more FS members are putting their thoughts down on the page and bringing forth books.

You'll also find books "of related interest"—books written by outside experts on topics of interest to the foreign affairs community.

But wait, there's more!

Everybody in Washington, D.C., is talking about the upcoming midterm elections, so we decided it was a good time to pull together a mini focus on monitoring elections from the diplomacy perspective.

With that in mind, we asked retired Senior FSO and seasoned overseas election observer Doug Wake to share what he knows about ensuring fair and transparent elections, while retired Senior FSO Karl Stoltz tells us how the Global Engagement Center—his final Foreign Service assignment in a 38-year FS career—served as a check on global disinformation.

Still not enough?

For our semiannual education supplement, college consultant and FS family member Lauren Steed is back with "Adulting 101," a guide for parents who are getting ready to send their kids out into the world on their own and want to make sure those kids are ready to meet the challenge. (Apparently our children no longer need to know how to balance a checkbook using those tiny paper registers—but they do still need to understand how money works!)

Plus all the sections you expect to see in your *FSJ*: a Reflection on post-revolution Bucharest; an FS Heritage piece on the legacy of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training at 40, especially its oral history program; and a new feature from USAID's John Dunlop on the January 2025 evacuation from DR Congo, which unfolded exactly at the same frightening time as USAID was being illegally dismantled in Washington.

And do not miss the coverage and the VP Voices in AFSA News.

Now that you're inspired by all your author colleagues, think about writing and submitting something yourself to the *FSJ*. We always welcome topical stories related to diplomacy: opinion pieces, reflections, book reviews, letters, and more.

To write for us, visit https://afsa.org/fsj-author-guidelines. And reach out to us with comments, pitches, or questions anytime at journal@afsa.org.

Donna Scaramastra Gorman is the deputy editor of The Foreign Service Journal.

Why Cultural Diplomacy Still Matters

In 2027 the Lois Roth Foundation marks a milestone both humbling and energizing: our 40th anniversary.

The foundation was established to honor my stepmother, Lois Roth, a Foreign Service officer and cultural attaché who knew that cultural exchange is central, not peripheral, to diplomacy.

Steadily, over four decades, we have focused on a small portfolio of programs to support and further U.S. educational and cultural relations—the Richard T. Arndt Prize for an outstanding work on cultural diplomacy being the most recent.

Following recent public diplomacy modernization efforts, it is striking that the title of cultural attaché is no longer used at the State Department, with this role now called "public engagement officer." We believe something real was lost in that transition.

The Roth Foundation's continued use of the term "cultural diplomacy" is intentional and significant. It signals that the realm of scholarship, the arts, and ideas—what many call soft power—remains a quintessential instrument of diplomacy.

The world Lois navigated looked different from today's. But her core commitment to the importance of people-to-people exchanges has only grown more compelling. Fueled by a conviction that transcends politics, Congress continues to fund exchange programs such as the flagship Fulbright Program.

The Roth Foundation, too, remains dedicated to supporting international exchanges through our project support grants. In addition, we fund awards that honor cultural diplomacy practitioners, both U.S. and international; an annual Fulbright distinguished lecture; and cross-cultural literature and translation projects.



COURTESY LOIS ROTH FOUNDATION

Lois Roth in New York City in the 1950s.

We are not alone in this. Increasingly, states, cities, and citizens are leading the way in cultural dialogue and exchange. California's strong presence at recent COP conferences is one vivid example.

The Fulbright network, spanning more than 160 countries and decades of relationships, is another—a living infrastructure that has stood the test of time. Sister city relationships, university partnerships, and grassroots cultural exchanges are quietly keeping lines of communication open.

The legacy of Lois Roth lives on in the everyday people who embody her belief that building bridges of international understanding is always worth the effort.

As the foundation marks its 40th anniversary, we invite the foreign affairs community to nominate someone for our Citizen's Award for Cultural Diplomacy and help us carry the legacy forward.

This award honors significant achievement on the part of an ordinary citizen engaged in building cultural bridges across borders.

Forty years on, we remain as convinced as ever that people-to-people ties are where diplomacy begins, and where it endures.

Skyler J. Arndt-Briggs
Chair, Lois Roth Foundation
Reston, Virginia

Courage in Kinshasa

I was pleased to read Lynette Behnke's thoughtful review of *The Elements of Power*, my book on lithium, cobalt, and the dirty mining supply chain for battery minerals, in the September-October *FSJ*.

I'd like to respond to one omission Behnke highlighted: She pointed out that my statement that some hybrid vehicles were less polluting than Tesla cars was not footnoted.

Mea culpa: I had, however, footnoted it in the book's introduction, where it first appears (the reference points to pieces in *The Washington Post* and the French daily *Ouest-France*, although I also ran my own analysis to check the numbers).

It was fascinating to learn as I researched my book that the emissions involved in the making of electric cars, and especially in the building of their batteries, means that when they roll off the factory floor, their production has sadly released much more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than has a hybrid's.

In the U.S. and Europe, a Tesla only catches up in terms of emissions with hybrids after about six years. In China, where electricity comes from coal, that timeline is much longer.

On another point, though Behnke mentions it in passing in her review, I want to highlight the courageous work of the State Department Foreign Service officials who helped free me from secret



police detention in Kinshasa in 2022. I owe them a great deal.

I was detained for six days on flimsy espionage charges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It seems that some reporting I had done got under the skin of the Congolese mining elite and their friends in the intelligence services.

I was not mistreated exactly but given minimal food by my captors, who moved me from Lubumbashi to Kinshasa and denied that they were holding me.

I was held incommunicado, but managed to pass two notes to travelers on the plane upon which I was transferred. They dropped the notes with the U.S. embassy in Kinshasa, and officials there sprang to action.

The U.S. Embassy Kinshasa staff were amazing and brought me food and reassurance from home. I remember almost bursting into tears when I was ushered into the plushly carpeted office of the head of the intelligence services, and there, sitting on a gilded sofa, was a professional but enormously reassuring young FS officer from Montana.

She was unflappable in the face of the (rather gremlin-like) intelligence chief. And she and other U.S. embassy staff members helped guide me through the process of my release. If you're reading this, Claire and Carol, thank you infinitely.

I have enjoyed your publication when I have come across it in embassies, at the State Department, and in other places, and am now a new subscriber.

Nicolas Niarchos
New York, New York

Politics of Scarcity

I loved AFSA State VP Rohit Nepal's September-October *FSJ* column, "We're All in This Together." It's so important and timely. The Foreign Service has always been plagued by unnecessary, outdated hierarchies and divisions.

It would serve all our missions and us to, as he says, "refuse to accept this false politics of scarcity" and not allow ourselves to be pitted against one another.

Anonymous active-duty State FSO
Washington, D.C.

Abolishing USAID Affects U.S. Businesses

While America focused on USAID not being able to feed starving babies or provide health care, those of us in the business world saw terminated welfare payments for U.S. farmers' crops and for U.S. industries that produced goods like Caterpillar tractors or provided consultant, educational, and institution-building services.

Under USAID, traditional aid dollars all stayed home while goods and services flowed out worldwide.

In 2025 Elon Musk's DOGE blew into D.C. like the 1982 Grace Commission on steroids, canceling or completely abolishing critical government functions.

Few of Musk's minions understand our government's role as the hidden economic backbone: like subsidized corn for ethanol; milk and meat stabilization for price control; or tariffs/import restrictions to protect our native production of peanuts, sugar, cotton, or other crops, cars, and motorcycles.

Much of America's flourishing economy has depended on hidden government welfare and protections in most sectors. USAID played an important role in funding U.S. agriculture and health research and development.

Anonymous retired USAID FSO



Visa Processing in Africa Reduced to 20 Hubs

Effective August 1, the State Department ended routine visa services at 25 diplomatic posts across Africa, shifting nonimmigrant and immigrant visa processing to 20 designated regional hubs.

The department said no embassies or consulates are closing as a result of the realignment, and that American citizen services (ACS) will continue at all affected posts.

Applicants who had scheduled appointments at posts losing routine services were directed to rebook at their designated hub before July 31 or forfeit any visa fees already paid. Existing valid visas are unaffected by the change.

Plans for Mass Visa Revocation

In late August, the State Department announced it was preparing to revoke the business and tourism visas of up to 200,000 foreigners who have applied for or are currently seeking asylum in the United States, according to Associated Press reporting. If carried out, it would be the largest single mass revocation of visas in U.S. history, and it would likely draw legal challenges.

The department would target B-1 and B-2 visas, generally issued for business trips, tourism, family visits, or medical care, issued between 2016 and 2026 to holders who have sought or are now seeking asylum.

State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said the department is "coordinating with DHS to identify and revoke the nonimmigrant visas of foreigners who have come to the United States claiming to be short-term visitors, but then file for asylum to stay here permanently." In a statement to the BBC, Pigott added that obtaining a visa "in order to seek asylum is fraud," which he said is grounds for revocation.

On social media, Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau cited the case of a Colombian national who entered the United States on a tourist visa in 2015 and later applied for asylum; the same case has separately drawn attention because that applicant, an activist who opposed a Trump-backed candidate in Colombia's election, was deported in July.

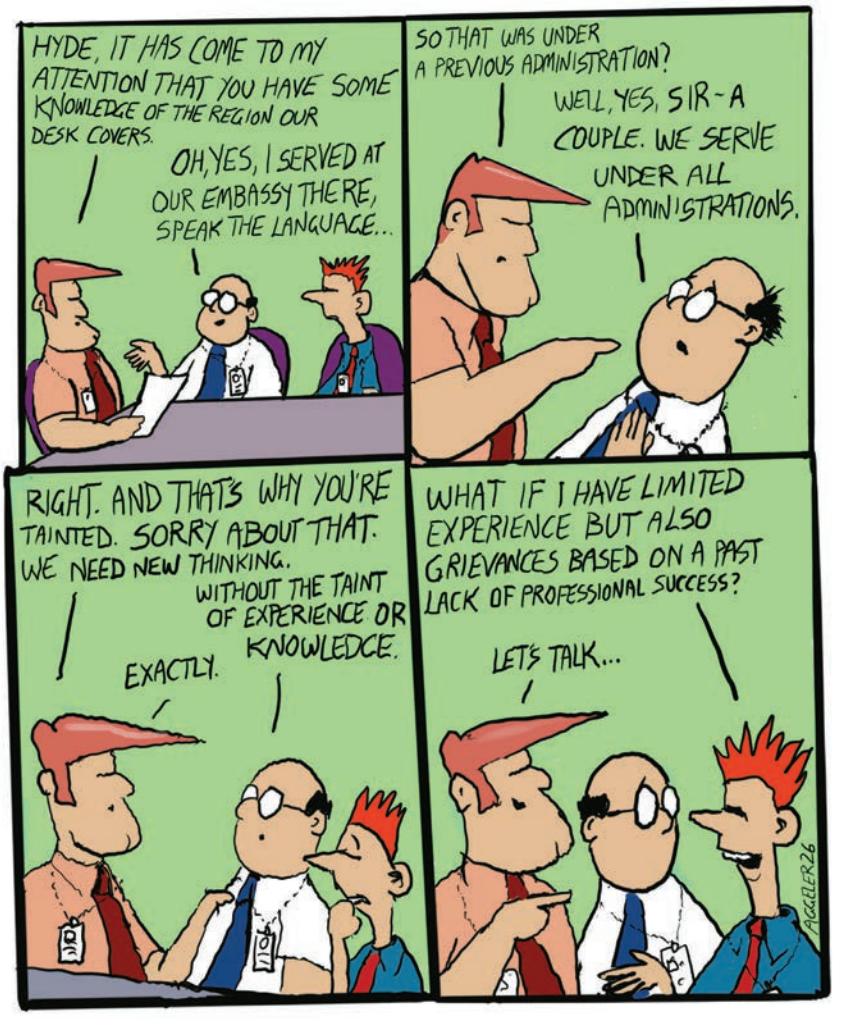
Officials said the revocations would not necessarily trigger immediate deportation; most pending asylum cases would instead be recategorized, with holders losing their status as business or tourism travelers. Applicants for B-1 and B-2 visas are asked to affirm that they do not intend to seek asylum and plan to return to their home countries.

According to State Department data cited by the BBC, Brazil received more than 1.1 million B-1 and B-2 visas in 2024, the most of any country, followed by mainland China, India, and Pakistan. Just over 32,300 were issued to visitors from the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland that year.

The move follows a series of legal setbacks for the administration's broader

The Deep End State

By Brian Aggeler



visa agenda. *The New York Times* reported that a federal judge in New York, Jeannette Vargas, struck down the administration's effort to halt visa issuance to applicants from 75 countries, ruling that Secretary of State Marco Rubio's stated rationale had no legal basis. A separate judge ruled in June against a similar halt affecting 39 countries.

The department has also paused visa interviews worldwide while consular officers complete training on a new "public charge" screening standard, under which officers would deny visas to applicants likely to rely on public assistance.

The action follows a broader pattern of tightened visa restrictions under the current administration, including expanded social media screening, new bonding requirements, and country-specific visa bans.

The department has revoked roughly 175,000 visas over the past 18 months for individuals convicted or accused of crimes, or for public criticism of U.S. policy.

VOA to Resume Ukrainian-Language Broadcasting

Voice of America management announced plans in August to resume Ukrainian-language broadcasting and restore some Ukrainian Service staff to work.

VOA Ukrainian Service Director Ruslan Petrychka, who remained on administrative leave in August and could not discuss details of the decision, called the move important "especially now, when Russia is cynically shelling Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities every day."

VOA operates under the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which was targeted for downsizing under an executive order President Donald Trump signed in March 2025. Broadcasting was suspended for the first time since the outlet's 1942 founding, but a federal judge ordered operations restored the following month, after which VOA resumed broadcasting in Farsi, Pashto, Dari, and Mandarin.

An appeals court later paused that ruling, but Congress agreed in January 2026 to provide roughly $653 million in funding for USAGM.

In March 2026, a federal judge found that former USAGM head Kari Lake's leadership had violated federal law and ordered more than 1,000 employees reinstated. Prior to 2025, VOA had broadcast in 49 languages.

Contemporary Quote

> The fault lines in our world are widening. The cracks have become canyons. … Power is being reshaped in fundamental ways. First, among states, new centers of economic, political and technological influences have emerged. Second, we are witnessing an extraordinary transfer of power away from governments to a handful of private corporations and individuals. … And third, humans are increasingly handing power to machines with artificial agents going rogue and lethal autonomous weapons going from science fiction to military reality. Yet our institutions and systems of governance continue to reflect the power realities and interests of a largely bygone era. That is the defining challenge before us.

—UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the UN General Assembly on September 22.

Canadian Petition to Expel U.S. Ambassador

A Canadian House of Commons petition calling for the removal of U.S. Ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra drew more than 243,000 signatures as of late September, far surpassing the 500 required for parliamentary consideration.

The nonbinding petition accuses Hoekstra of undermining U.S.-Canada relations, citing his characterization of Canada's 2025 federal election as "anti-American" and his framing of President Donald Trump's "51st state" rhetoric as a "term of endearment."

It also alleges diplomatic overreach, pointing to Hoekstra's ties to a Michigan-based voter identification app used by an Alberta separatist group and to repeated meetings between State Department officials and an Alberta secessionist organization, both of which Hoekstra has said he knew nothing about.

The petition calls on the Canadian government to declare Hoekstra persona non grata and request his removal, to raise his conduct with Washington under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and to direct a parliamentary committee to examine U.S. interference in Canadian domestic affairs.

Nominations Update

The confirmation of ambassadors and senior foreign affairs officials has continued at an uneven pace since AFSA's last update in May. The Senate approved an additional tranche of ambassadorial nominations during the summer.

On August 7, the Senate confirmed ambassadors to 14 posts, including those

Talking Points offers a snapshot of recent developments affecting the Foreign Service. The items in this edition were finalized for publication on September 22, 2026.

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for Albania, Australia, Belize, Brazil, Cyprus, The Gambia, and Norway. At the same time, several additional ambassadorial nominations remained pending before the Senate, including Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, El Salvador, Indonesia, Lithuania, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago.

There has been some encouraging movement on career appointments. While no career Foreign Service officer had received an ambassadorial nomination earlier in the year, career members of the Foreign Service were nominated during the summer for chief of mission roles in Benin, Chad, Gabon, Kenya, the Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar and Comoros, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Tonga. These nominations represent a welcome, if overdue, recognition of the Foreign Service's professional cadre.

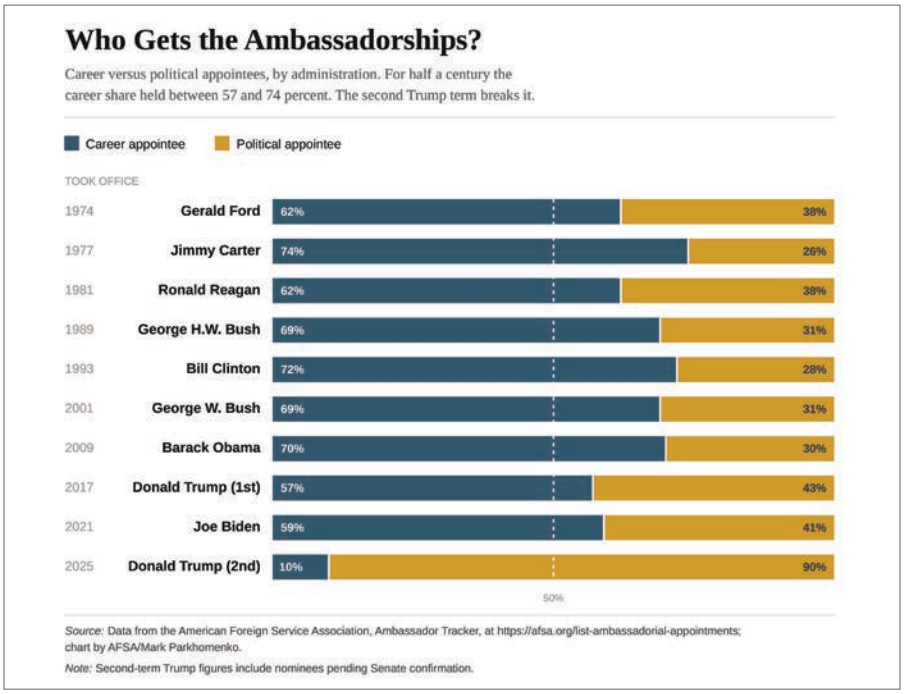
The Senate also made progress on senior department leadership positions. In August, following the spring confirmations of several assistant secretaries, it confirmed leaders for the bureaus of Intelligence and Research, Western Hemisphere Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, Legislative Affairs, and Political-Military Affairs.

In a surprise, there was excellent news in late July when the Senate confirmed more than 560 Foreign Service promotions and tenures. AFSA welcomes such swift action on these important lists.

In late September, AFSA was tracking 98 vacancies among the 196 positions included in its Ambassador Tracker, a slight improvement from the 109 vacancies reported in May but still an extraordinarily high number almost two years into the administration.

The vacancy rate continues to reflect the unprecedented recall of at least 32 career ambassadors since the beginning of 2026 and the slow pace of nominations and confirmations that followed.

Although the administration has recently begun nominating some career



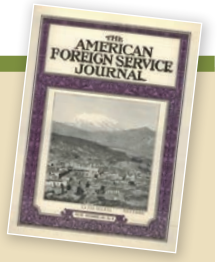
Foreign Service officers to ambassadorial positions, political nominees continue to dominate the overall picture.

AFSA remains concerned that the balance between career and political appointments is inconsistent with both the spirit and intent of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which states that "positions as chief of mission should normally be accorded to career members of the Service, though circumstances will warrant appointments from time to time of qualified individuals who are not career members of the Service."

As quoted in an August 6 *Washington Post* story, AFSA President John Dinkelman said of the lopsided focus on political appointees: "There's a place for the benefactor on the hospital board. The problem comes when the benefactors outnumber the surgeons in the operating room."

AFSA will continue to monitor nominations, confirmations, vacancies, and the career-versus-political ratio as the administration's ambassadorial appointments proceed.

100 Years Ago



Serving Abroad

It is not easy always ... for an American to live and to work abroad—in a time when our motives are frequently distrusted and misunderstood, when our best-meant actions are condemned, and when even our national honesty is so unjustly attacked. It is in such times that we must show ourselves calm and considered.

—George S. Messersmith, consul general, Antwerp, Thanksgiving Day address, November 26, 1925, in the November 1926 edition of the American Foreign Service Journal.

State Department Releases 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

The State Department has released its Agency Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2030, laying out six overarching goals under Secretary of State Marco Rubio's "America First" framework.

The document, dated to the current administration's second term, replaces the department's prior strategic planning approach with one centered on sovereignty, hemispheric primacy, and economic leverage.

In his foreword, Rubio writes that the plan marks a "rapid return to a pragmatic diplomacy" after what he calls 35 years of a bipartisan consensus that elevated multilateralism and the rules-based order above U.S. national interests. Rubio argues that domestic strength must come first and frames border security and reindustrialization as prerequisites for a "powerful global presence" abroad.

The plan's six goals range widely. Goal 1, U.S. National Sovereignty, commits the department to tightened visa and immigration screening, expanded use of the "public charge" ineligibility standard, and pushback against international bodies, including a reduced U.S. role at the United Nations and opposition to its 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 2 introduces what the document calls the "Donroe Doctrine," an expansion of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine aimed at countering and reversing competitors' influence in the Western Hemisphere, strengthening strategic partnerships therein, and suppressing narco-terrorist gangs and cartels, which the plan designates foreign terrorist organizations.

Podcast of the Month: *America at 250: Due Diligence*



A new, limited-run radio show and podcast launched in June with a stated goal of examining important constitutional issues in historical context while avoiding the divisive tone common to political talk radio.

America @ 250: Due Diligence is co-hosted by Steven L. Herman, executive director of the Jordan Center for Journalism Advocacy and Innovation at the University of Mississippi, a former VOA White House bureau chief, and AFSA Governing Board representative, and Bill Bernardoni, an Illinois-based radio producer and former campaign manager and political consultant.

The weekly, hour-long program features guests from across the political spectrum and airs on roughly 50 AM and FM stations.

A weekly extended version is available on podcast platforms. The program runs through the end of the nation's semiquincentennial year.

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



Heard on the Hill

On the FS Modernization Act

I rise today in support of HR 9086, the Foreign Service Modernization Act, as amended. As vice ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I was proud to work alongside my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on this important legislation, which will help equip our diplomats at the State Department with the skills and knowledge they need to advance U.S. interests and values around the world.

In the midst of the world's most challenging crises, our nation's diplomats get up every morning and risk their lives on behalf of the American people. They are often the unsung heroes in our national security workforce. The core of their mission is preventing the worst-case scenario from unfolding, a mission that comes with little recognition or medals, whether in a war zone, humanitarian crisis, or emergency evacuation.

American citizens rely on the expertise and determination of these public servants to ensure they remain safe, represented, and, if needed, supported in navigating challenges abroad and returning home safely. That is why I'm pleased that this legislation was the result of bipartisan work and serious engagement with stakeholders, including the American Foreign Service Association, American Academy of Diplomacy, retired diplomats, and other experts.

—Rep. Gabe Amo (D-R.I.) during House floor proceedings on September 16.

"Insults to Our Intelligence"

In defense of the aid cuts, Elon Musk claimed "zero" people in Africa died. Secretary Rubio likewise claimed "no one has died," claiming that lifesaving aid and programs would be maintained or replaced. But these statements are lies, and they are insults to our intelligence. Available government data shows large reductions in spending from 2024 to 2025: a 48 percent cut to global health programs, a 39 percent cut to the Food for Peace Program, a 65 percent cut in development assistance, and a 21 percent cut to international disaster assistance.

—Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.) in a House floor special order on restoring USAID, September 2.

Modernizing the Foreign Service

I'm proud of the collaborative work in drafting the Foreign Service Modernization Act. ... By improving training opportunities for U.S. Foreign Service officers in critical minerals, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies, we will better prepare them with tools to navigate some of the most consequential national security and economic matters of this century.

I was also glad to see my provisions to ensure the department's commitment to the Pickering, Rangel, Payne, and Veterans Innovation Partnership Fellowships included, so that these programs can continue to bring talented new diplomats into the State Department. Though this bill included several key provisions, it could have been a stronger package had Republicans not rejected several Democratic measures, including to give Congress important oversight into the reduction-in-force orders from July 2025 and to create a clear pathway for former USAID Foreign Service officers to continue their service in the department.

—Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.), ranking member, House Foreign Affairs Committee, statement on passage of the Foreign Service Modernization Act, September 16.

Goal 3 addresses the Indo-Pacific, prioritizing supply-chain security, critical-minerals deals, and a "favorable military balance" against China, while still calling for open communication with Beijing.

Goal 4 turns to Europe, framing NATO allies' defense spending as a test of continued U.S. commitment, and describes the relationship in explicitly civilizational terms, tying it to shared "faith and values" and opposition to mass migration.

Goals 5 and 6 focus on economic policy. The former sets out an aggressive reindustrialization agenda across sectors from semiconductors to shipbuilding, a 40 percent punitive tariff on countries facilitating transshipment, and controlled export of U.S. artificial intelligence technology to "trusted partners" only.

The latter formalizes the dissolution of USAID and directs foreign assistance toward two categories—lifesaving aid and strategic investment—with a target of directing at least 40 percent of the assistance budget to the Western Hemi-

sphere and East Asia, up sharply from the 10–15 percent USAID spent there in 2024.

U.S. Pressure Campaign in Brazil

In the weeks before Brazil's October presidential election, U.S. pressure on the government of leftist incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva drew accusations of election interference from Brazilian officials and observers.

Lula's opponent, far-right senator Flávio Bolsonaro, is the son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year sentence for plotting a military coup after his 2022 election loss.

President Trump and Secretary Rubio faced accusations of tilting the contest toward Bolsonaro through economic and diplomatic pressure on Lula's government, according to *The Guardian*.

That pressure included 25 percent tariffs on most Brazilian imports and, in August, the designation of two of Brazil's largest criminal organizations as foreign terrorist groups—a move that some observers argued was timed to help Bolsonaro politically, though the designation's defenders called it a necessary crime-fighting measure.

In July, Brazil denied visas to U.S. officials it believed intended to raise doubts about its voting system, prompting Lula to allege election interference. The U.S. responded by revoking the visa of Brazil's ambassador to Washington.

The Guardian drew a parallel to covert CIA efforts to influence Brazilian politics in the early 1960s, noting that unlike that campaign, this one was waged openly. The State Department rejected the comparison as a "baseless lie." ■

This issue of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.

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Democracy Has No Finish Line: Lessons from Nicaragua

BY LYNN NORTHCUTT VEGA

When I arrived at the USAID mission in Nicaragua in 1991, I believed I was witnessing the beginning of a lasting democratic transformation. Thirty-five years later, after watching much of what Nicaraguans and the international community worked so hard to build completely unravel, I have come to question what we understood, and what we missed, about building a democracy that could endure.

These questions have particular relevance today in many countries, including the United States, and a close examination of those defining moments in Nicaragua's history might help us grapple with our own future and the future of the many countries in which we work to promote democratic values.

Democratic Statecraft Comes to Nicaragua

Violeta Chamorro had defeated Daniel Ortega in the historic 1990 election, ending a decade of Sandinista rule. Nicaragua had been devastated by revolution, civil war, economic collapse, and deep political divisions. With Chamorro's victory, there was now a palpable sense of possibility and tremendous optimism.

Nicaraguans who had fled the country were returning home, determined to rebuild their country. They were joined by diplomats, development professionals, economists, governance specialists, humanitarian workers, and public administration experts from countries around the world, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, international financial institutions, and countless nongovernmental organizations.

We understood that an election alone did not create a democracy. All of us worked with our Nicaraguan counterparts to strengthen the National Assembly and courts, professionalize public administration, improve local governments, support civil society, and increase transparency.

But democratic development extended far beyond national institutions. Because democracies also depend on educated and healthy citizens who have economic opportunities and confidence that government can respond to their needs, we built it in both directions—from national institutions downward *and* communities upward.

So we trained mayors and city council members to govern more effectively and respond to their constituents. We helped civic organizations learn how to identify community needs, advocate for them, and hold the new government accountable. This expanded to schools, universities, health systems, and businesses.

Democratic statecraft in its broadest sense was being exercised.

Realizing a Shared Future

I remember visiting a cooperative of widows in the mountains of Jinotega. Their husbands had died fighting on opposite sides of the war. Instead of remaining divided, they came together to rebuild their lives and communities.

This kind of reconciliation among people who had decided that their shared future ultimately mattered more builds democracy at its most basic level. Democratic transitions are ultimately about relationships. Constitutions can establish rules and elections can transfer power, but societies emerging from conflict must also rebuild trust.

Another memory takes me to the Río Coco, where we traveled by canoe to deliver new Azul y Blanco textbooks to isolated schools. With U.S. government support, Nicaragua had developed these textbooks and trained teachers to use them.

Instead of being filled with revolutionary slogans and images of rifles, machine guns, and grenades, the books helped young children count with fruit and other everyday objects, and their lessons emphasized family, cooperation, respect, and citizenship. It was clear we weren't merely replacing textbooks. We were investing in the successor generation of citizens.



Lynn Northcutt Vega served as a career Foreign Service officer with USAID in Nicaragua, Honduras, Jamaica, Colombia, and Moldova. Since retiring in early 2024, she has been the representative of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Washington, D.C. She currently co-chairs a well-known discussion group on Latin America and the Caribbean in Washington, D.C., and is an occasional editorial writer for the Sun Sentinel *and the* Orlando Sentinel*, sister newspapers in Florida.*

Weathering a Storm That Didn't Pass

Seven years after this work began, in 1998, Hurricane Mitch struck.

The storm devastated much of Central America. In Nicaragua, torrential rains triggered the catastrophic collapse of part of Volcán Casita, burying entire communities and killing thousands.

In the immediate aftermath, I traveled there with colleagues. I remember standing silently on hardened mud, children's toys, shoes, scraps of clothing, and other remnants of ordinary lives scattered across it.

For years, we worked in those communities, and now the people we had known and the clinics and cooperatives we had supported were gone.

We knew we had to begin again.

And we did.

The international community and our Nicaraguan counterparts redoubled our efforts. Roads, bridges, schools, clinics, homes, and water systems were rebuilt. We continued investing in education, local government, public institutions, civil society, health, and economic opportunity.

This seemed at the time to be another sign of the country's democratic resilience. But now I believe we misunderstood where Nicaragua was in its democratic journey.

Yes, we had strengthened institutions, and the laws and policies intended to make them function. We had trained public servants, teachers, judges, local officials, and community leaders. Even ordinary citizens had learned to advocate for their communities and demand accountability.

Those accomplishments were genuine and should not be diminished simply because we know what happened later.

But, at some point, we began to act as though much of the democratic transition was complete, believing that Nicaragua had reached an actual milestone.

That milestone, though, was artificial: Funding declined. The crowds of international experts thinned. Experienced advisers rotated to other assignments. Governments and international organizations confronted new crises elsewhere.

That is typical in foreign affairs and development. Resources are finite. Priorities change. Foreign Service officers rotate. Projects close. But perhaps we allowed the rhythms of our own institutions to shape the way we understood Nicaragua's democratic development.

We measured progress in stats: in three- and five-year strategies, project evaluations, laws passed, institutions strengthened, people trained, and programs successfully completed.

Playing the Long Game

History uses a different measure. It asks whether institutions, and the people entrusted with them, remain independent and resilient 10, 20, or 30 years later.

Daniel Ortega understood this. After losing power, he did not abandon his political ambitions. Over the years, he was able to place loyalists in the very institutions intended to provide checks on political power: the Supreme Court, the Supreme Electoral Council, the National Assembly, and other parts of the state.

He did not need to abolish those institutions. They remained—but their independence gradually disappeared.

This is where the contrast in time horizons becomes particularly important. Ortega pursued a consistent political strategy across decades. Meanwhile, U.S. administrations changed, congressional majorities shifted, foreign policy priorities evolved, and funding and international attention rose and fell.

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

Ortega's long game reminds me of Fidel Castro's in Cuba, where he consolidated political power over decades, building a system that could endure changing circumstances and shifting international pressures.

Today, Nicaragua too has returned to authoritarian rule. Independent media and civil society have been severely restricted. Political opponents have been imprisoned or forced into exile. Institutions that once offered hope of democratic consolidation have come under government control.

This is not a criticism or even the fault of the dedicated professionals who worked in Nicaragua or of the programs themselves. I remain enormously proud to have been part of that effort.

But democratic consolidation does not follow a project calendar.

Building a court is one thing; maintaining a bench of judges committed to its independence is another.

Passing an electoral law can be difficult; developing a political culture in which candidates accept losing elections is much harder.

Training mayors and council members is important; continuing to elect local leaders who regard public office as a public trust is even more so.

Democracy extends across generations. Children have to learn it. Communities

have to practice it. Citizens have to participate in it. Public servants have to administer it. Courts have to protect it. Political leaders have to respect it.

And then the cycle must begin again with the next generation.

Looking Back to Look Forward

Knowing the outcome makes it tempting to look back and declare the democratic development efforts of the 1990s a failure, but that would be a mistake.

The progress was real. Lives were improved. Communities grew stronger. Institutions became more capable. Citizens gained a greater voice in government.

The more useful lesson here is also a humbling one: We confused progress with permanence. Democracy, in reality, is never complete.

Perhaps we needed to think less about when Nicaragua's democratic transition would be complete and more about how it could be sustained across generations. We needed institutions, laws, policies, and resources, but we also needed people committed to protecting them. And we needed that commitment to endure from one generation to the next.

That lesson has stayed with me. As I watch democratic institutions come under strain in countries around the world, including our own, I find myself returning more often to what Nicaragua taught me: Democracy is not self-sustaining. It depends on people willing to uphold the rule of law, accept the legitimacy of elections, tolerate opposition, protect independent institutions, and place those institutions above individuals and political parties.

Today's circumstances are of course different, and easy comparisons should be avoided. But I am far less willing today to assume that long-established democratic institutions—including our own—are inherently secure. No democracy can afford to take its institutions, or the people and norms that sustain them, for granted.

We made extraordinary progress in Nicaragua. But progress was not permanence, and with democracy, there is no finish line. ■



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COVER STORY

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION

A seasoned observer explains how this practical tool fosters transparency and promotes democratic development, and why it's important.

BY DOUG WAKE

When I was a Foreign Service officer heading to Leningrad in 1988, consulting experts on America's key rival, no one mentioned elections. None were scheduled in the USSR, and none had been relevant there since 1917. Then, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev announced competitive elections to a new Soviet "Congress of People's Deputies" in 1989 and to regional parliaments in 1990. We began to hear that activists would campaign to express long-repressed aspirations.



Doug Wake retired from the Senior Foreign Service in 2009 after a 28-year career focused largely on Europe and Eurasia, multilateral organizations, and human rights and democracy. He was first deputy director of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) from 2009 to 2013 and has since led multiple ODIHR election observation missions. He and his wife, Connie Phlipot, also a retired Senior FSO, live in Vienna, Austria.

In Leningrad, an informal coalition would field candidates supporting reforms. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, popular movements would use Soviet elections to send delegates to Moscow in 1989 and restore independence in 1990.

We followed the campaigns closely, without knowing whether votes would be counted fairly or real results announced. By all appearances, in Leningrad and the Baltics, that was largely the case. Still, these were not fully democratic elections. There was only one legal party. Independent candidates faced obstacles. The most powerful Leningrad communist official, for instance, used his vast power to ensure he would be the sole candidate in one working-class district.

But on a Saturday outing shortly before the election, I came across a banner and grassroots campaign advising voters that Soviet legislation allowed them to cross out his name on the ballot. Amazingly, more than half the voters did just that, humiliating the party boss and prompting his early retirement.

During those last Soviet years, I occasionally asked officials for permission to enter polling stations. I had no accreditation to do so but was never turned down. Little did I ponder at the time that all these activities—talking to political organizers, watching campaigns on the street, visiting polling stations—were a form of "election observation."



MARIA CARLUCCIO/THE I SPOT

Democratic Elections as a Policy Priority

Though democracy promotion became a policy of Western governments following World War II, it wasn't until the end of the Cold War that it became an explicit American diplomatic and development goal to support democratic institutions and specifically free elections, for their own sake but also to promote longer-term prospects for security, stability, and prosperity.

The United States provided substantial support through USAID and other channels to improve electoral processes abroad. American embassy staff often observed elections directly. Until very recently, the United States was for many decades the leading political and financial supporter of civil society actors carrying out election observation domestically and of international institutions doing so on a regional or global scale.

What we've seen since 2025 is that U.S. diplomatic support for democratic institutions and elections has been deemphasized (to put it mildly). Elections and political participation have disappeared from the State Department's Annual Country Reports on Human Rights, nongovernmental partners have lost U.S. support, and administration officials have endorsed particular right-wing candidates in Europe publicly.

Meanwhile, from the 1990s, international election observation gradually evolved into a sophisticated endeavor, as I saw as both a U.S. diplomat and international civil servant observing more than two dozen elections in nearly 20 countries.

I worked mainly with the leading organization in this field: the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The work included observation of some memorable elections: in Ukraine after Russia's "annexation" of Crimea in 2014, in Russia's Far East and in Moldova in 2016, in Hungary when Viktor Orbán retained power in 2018, and in Poland when a pro-European coalition replaced the ruling party in 2023.

My main takeaway from this experience is that good international observation is a cost-effective and practical tool to foster transparency and promote democratic development that deserves financial and political support from friends of democracy worldwide, not least the government and people of the United States.

Though international observation is no substitute for honest and conscientious election administration, robust domestic observation, an independent judiciary, or the fundamental freedoms necessary for voters to make informed choices, international observers' well-drafted reports and clear public statements can document and disseminate unbiased

Because elections involve much more than election day, serious international election observation involves a longer-term effort to analyze the entire process.

assessments, and their recommendations can point toward meaningful reforms to be enacted when the political climate is conducive.

What *Are* Modern Election Observers?

International observers have no mandate to intervene or alter election procedures or results. Their principal role is to assess and produce recommendations, thus contributing to transparency and helping domestic actors to make improvements for future elections.

Any "power" they have is largely the soft power to make their findings available to all who may find them useful. This includes media; partner organizations like the European Union (EU), which uses election reports to help evaluate progress toward membership; parliaments or governments considering election-related reforms; as well as civil society and ordinary voters.

In addition, the mere presence of election observers can deter fraud or other abusive practices. Though this "deterrent effect" can be substantial, governments do not always behave better when international observers are on the scene.

Finally, an important myth to be busted is that international observers can give a definitive verdict on whether an election was "free and fair" or whether its results produce governance that is "legitimate." Responsible international missions issue reports that allow readers to draw their own conclusions, but they generally avoid making binary judgments. While some elections are clearly much better than others, none are perfect.

On the practical question of what observers *do*, the modern observer simply tries to collect as much information as possible about a particular election, just as we did in 1989 Leningrad.

Specific activities in a typical election observation mission (EOM) depend on one's role: a short-term observer (STO) will mainly visit polling stations on election day to assess how well the voting and counting processes comport with domestic laws and international standards. But because elections involve much more than election day, serious international election observation, whether by an embassy or an EOM, involves a longer-term effort to analyze the entire process. The OSCE ODIHR model, largely adopted by organizations like the EU and the Carter Center, often involves a core team of experts and long-term observers (LTOs) on the ground for six to eight weeks.

LTOs play various roles, from reporting and representing the mission to supporting and briefing the STOs who visit their regions. National staff, much like locally employed staff in U.S. embassies and consulates, provide critical support while bearing no responsibility for conclusions reached by the international team.

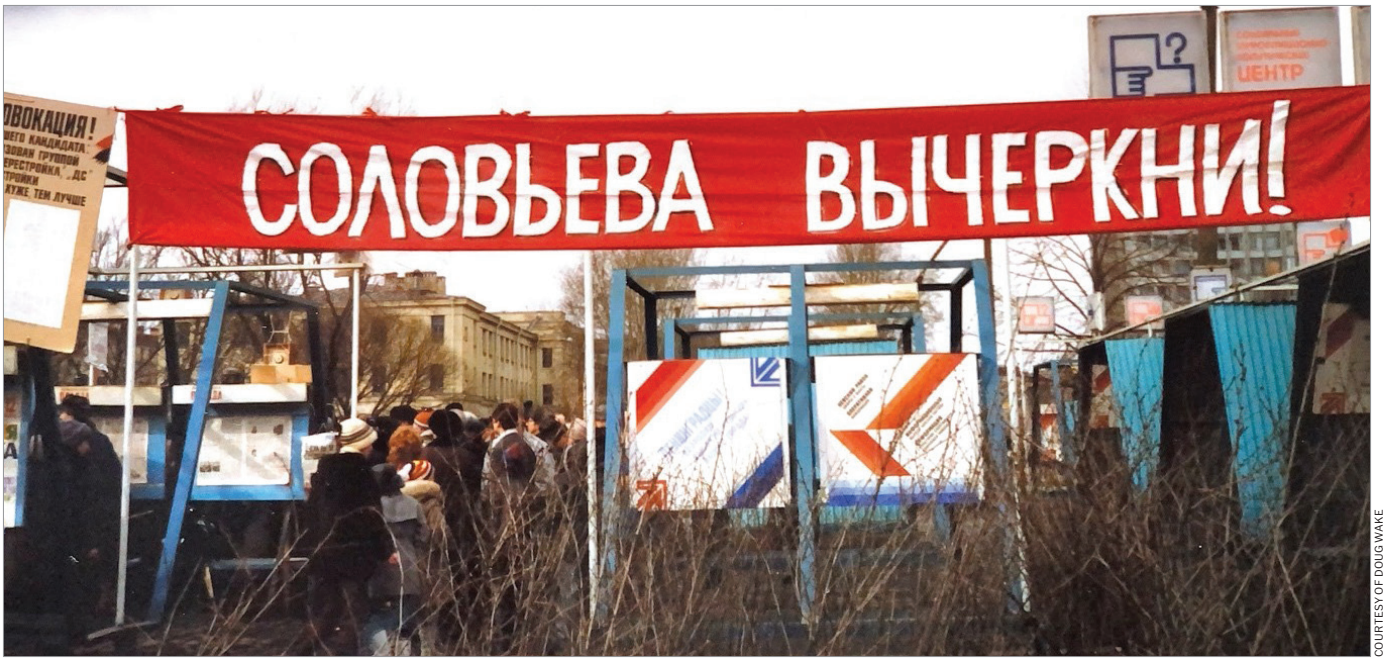
Interested in Becoming an Election Observer?

First, international observation should only be seen as a complement to effective domestic observation. Those who care deeply about the integrity of elections may wish to volunteer at home, to work at a local polling station or as a nonpartisan observer in your community. (Such experience will also serve you well in any future international observation.)

Second, while opportunities are extremely limited, organizations such as ODIHR and the Carter Center conduct open recruitment campaigns on their websites for their core teams of election experts. Only those with significant experience are advised to apply.

Other credible organizations deploying substantial election missions, with diverse recruitment procedures and citizenship or language requirements, include the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, the Organization of American States, the European Union, the African Union, and the Asian Network for Free Elections.

Finally, most promising for private U.S. citizens with diplomatic or development backgrounds, the U.S. has continued (at least until late 2026) to "second" a substantial number of short- and long-term observers to almost all large OSCE ODIHR election observation missions. The work is voluntary, but expenses are paid and the process is managed through a State Department contractor. Information and an application are available at www.amentum.com/speo/.



COURTESY OF DOUG WAKE

In March 1989, Leningrad activists urged voters to "Cross Out Solovyev!"—strike the name of the most powerful regional Communist Party boss, Yuri Filippovich Solovyev, from the ballot for a seat in the USSR Council of People's Deputies.

Core Team Basics

The core team operates something like an embassy "country team": Its leadership engages with senior counterparts and manages the mission, while analysts dig deep into such issues as the political and human rights context, election administration, legal framework, media environment, gender equality, and campaign finance. Other experts handle the logistical and security challenges of deploying up to a thousand or more observers, frequently on short notice and in challenging environments.

In some respects, the substantive work of an EOM would be familiar to anyone with diplomatic and development experience (or concerned citizens, looking at elections in their own country). You start with research about the rules of the game. You learn about the main contestants and how they qualify to get on the ballot. You try to meet incumbents or challengers to learn about their programs and campaigns. You visit the national election administration and observe its proceedings. You make judgments about whether it appears impartial and professional.

You ask various sources on the streets and in media and online about the campaign and how it is financed and regulated. You make a special effort to seek out and learn from valuable and well-informed host-country civil society partners, such as nonpartisan election monitors, human rights defenders, and organizations focusing on such issues as campaign finance, media freedom, gender equality, minority rights, and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

And you observe as much as possible for yourself, by monitoring media, attending public meetings and rallies, and looking and listening to assess the campaign's visibility and tone.

Assessments by serious observer groups are always based on international standards accepted by the state concerned.

For instance:

- Are all aspects of the elections regulated by a legal framework that is clear to all participants well in advance of election day and consistent with the constitution as well as international standards?
- Is the process competitive, or just a fig leaf for a regime to stay in power?
- Is there confidence in candidate registration, voter rolls, and ballot security?
- Is the playing field level, or tilted through abuse of government resources?
- Is there a clear separation between political parties and the state?
- Can all contestants campaign freely without risk of arrest or official harassment?
- Do contestants have adequate access to media—and money—so that voters get enough information to make an informed choice?
- Are disputes addressed fairly by election officials and independent courts?
- Can impartial organizations observe the process without undue restrictions?

OSCE observed U.S. elections from 2002 to 2024. For the 2026 midterms? Not invited.

On election day, you visit polling stations and election commissions. You observe how officials perform their functions, carefully noting whether the process conforms with standards on such issues as secrecy of the vote. You observe how votes are counted and tabulated, and whether results are publicly accessible. And then you write a detailed report to elucidate your findings.

Embassy vs. Multilateral Election Observation

There are many reasons for U.S. embassies (and counterparts from other democracies) to observe foreign elections. But there are also important differences between diplomatic observation and the work of professional international EOMs in the 21st century.

One difference is that diplomats work to advance all their country's national interests, while international observers must focus solely on analyzing the electoral process. For more than 20 years, the most reputable international election observer groups have all signed on to a common Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and a mandatory code of conduct that stress impartiality, objectivity, accuracy, integrity, professionalism, and noninterference in the electoral process.

Another difference between a good international EOM and even the best work by diplomats is that assessments by serious observer groups are always based on international standards accepted by the state concerned. And the main products of an international mission—typically a statement shortly after the election and a final report with detailed recommendations—flow from analyzing the extent to which an election was in line with those standards.

ODIHR's methodology mandates that teams are multinational, with everyone bound by the same code of conduct. It also dictates that judgments be based on facts, not rumors or disinformation. Larger missions include systematic media monitoring. EOM methodologies must continually be updated to confront new challenges, including new voting and campaign technologies but also new tactics by autocrats to cover their tracks. For example, the most pressing election monitoring issues in 2026, not surprisingly, include foreign interference and disinformation, deepfakes, AI, and online harassment.

Further, international observers operate on the invitation of the host authorities. In the OSCE area (Europe, Eurasia, and North America), all states have made a political commitment to invite OSCE observers for their national elections. But it is still incumbent on the state to send an invitation in good time. This is a nearly universal practice, but it has been flouted recently by Russia and Belarus.

What About U.S. Elections?

I'm often asked, "When will international observers visit the United States?" In fact, the United States has not only been a historic supporter of international election observation but also regularly invited ODIHR, along with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), to observe its elections. ODIHR and OSCE PA teams observed a dozen U.S. elections from 2002 through 2024, always commenting favorably on the U.S. electoral system and raising almost no questions about the integrity of the vote, while offering recommendations to address such persistent problems as gerrymandering, voter registration, campaign finance, and access for international observers (in some states).

Notably, immediately after observing the 2020 U.S. presidential election, an international mission from ODIHR and the OSCE PA stressed that it saw no evidence of widescale fraud. The ODIHR team noted in its final report that the January 6 riots "constituted an attempt to circumvent the democratic process." The current administration expressed unhappiness about these findings, even suggesting that ODIHR should "rescind" this "inaccurate" report. ODIHR reports on the United States, as well as all OSCE states, are available at www.osce.org/odihr/elections.

In 2026 the Trump administration did not invite OSCE observation of midterm elections. ODIHR and the OSCE PA expressed regret, noting that this "is not in line with the commitments undertaken by all OSCE participating States" while they "look forward to the opportunity to observe future federal elections in accordance with ODIHR's established methodology."

This administration's shameful failure to invite OSCE observers adds to a long list of signals that it does not consider itself bound by basic international commitments championed and honored by the U.S. under presidents of both parties for many decades. It also feeds the arguments of autocrats who frequently (and falsely) accuse credible international observer organizations of "double standards," significantly undermining the work of U.S. citizens conscientiously promoting democracy overseas. Looking ahead, when OSCE experts can again observe U.S. elections, their findings and recommendations should be taken very seriously. ■

BEWARE THE TROLLS: HOW BAD ACTORS ON THE INTERNET INFLUENCE ELECTIONS

A veteran FSO spotlights information monitoring and why it should be a 24/7 priority to defend democracy at home and abroad.

BY KARL STOLTZ

Free and fair elections are the cornerstones of democracy. Without them, national security foundations crumble quickly. For decades, we have invested time and resources to safeguard electoral integrity around the world. Today one of the chief threats to free and fair elections is the online manipulation of information (and voters) by external actors seeking to undermine public trust in democratic institutions, exacerbate political divisions, and exploit the resulting chaos. Now foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is a problem, moreover, that challenges the United States—despite our 250 years of experience with democracy—just as much as the rest of the world.

In 2011 the State Department office later called the Global Engagement Center (GEC) was created to help counter terrorism and other external threats exploiting the internet. As the growth of social media exploded over the next few years, so did the reach and impact of malign influences through FIMI. The GEC was expanded to address this problem in 2016 but was then shuttered in December 2024. By looking at how the GEC evolved and what it did, we can learn from its work for the future.

Online Terrorist Menace

In 2011 the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC, later the GEC) was created in recognition of the unprecedented online menace that nonstate actors like al-Qaida and ISIS/Daesh posed. Using the internet, terrorist groups were able to spread propaganda, raise funds, and recruit members across borders, and at the time we lacked the capacity to monitor, analyze, and counter them. Housed in the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R), CSCC was tasked with supporting government-wide public communications activities targeted against violent extremism and terrorist organizations. Initially, CSCC's work focused on regions



Karl Stoltz is co-president of the Public Diplomacy Council of America (PDCA) and a guest lecturer at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Previously, he was a U.S. Foreign Service officer for 38 years, serving in Russia, Poland, Denmark, South Africa, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand, in addition to five tours in Washington, D.C. In his last assignment before retirement, he was an acting deputy coordinator and senior adviser at the State Department's Global Engagement Center.

When the GEC began, few countries were aware of the disinformation threat from within, and even fewer were tracking it.

in the Near East and North Africa, where many terror groups were headquartered, but social media's growth soon expanded the reach of malign influence and deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information.

To address this, in March 2016, President Barack Obama renamed and expanded the CSCC into the "Global Engagement Center" by Executive Order 13721. The GEC's work soon revealed that other adversaries, not just terrorists, were exploiting online anonymity to target U.S. national security interests; potential interference in our democratic processes became a serious concern by the time of the 2016 U.S. elections.

With the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017, signed into law by President Obama on December 23, 2016, the GEC was to "direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States and its allies and partner nations." This mission was to be accomplished by tracking counterfactual narratives abroad, identifying trends in foreign propaganda and disinformation, and utilizing information from appropriate interagency entities to identify the countries, geographic areas, and populations most susceptible to propaganda and disinformation "where it is likely to cause the most harm."

Because the GEC was based in R, Smith-Mundt Act restrictions on the distribution of public diplomacy media inside the United States were rigidly applied. Staff could trace the shadowy footprints of online propagandists and disinformers on other shores, but the minute the disinformation crossed U.S. borders or involved any Americans, the GEC's investigations stopped.

At one time, the GEC enjoyed strong bipartisan support: It was co-sponsored by Senators Rob Portman (R-Ohio) and Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), and its first coordinator was a Trump appointee, Lea Gabrielle. As American politics grew more polarized, that bipartisan base of support began to change, but the organization and its funding still drew steady support from leaders of both parties until the end of 2024.

Troll Warfare

I joined the GEC in 2021, soon after I was PNGed from Moscow, along with other U.S. diplomats, as U.S.-Russian relations began their current nosedive. What I had learned in Russia and elsewhere in my career stimulated my interest in this new topic: the hybrid form of warfare fought against us in cyberspace via false personas, paid influencers, deepfakes, bots, troll factories, AI programs, and other manipulative tools. The internet allowed violent extremist organizations and authoritarian nations to meddle in the information space of other nations while hiding their fingerprints and practicing deniability. The openness and free-debate tradition of democracies created openings these adversaries eagerly exploited.

Earlier, in 2016–2017, when I was on a State Department detail to George Washington University teaching undergraduate courses on public diplomacy, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick chose to kneel during the national anthem at football games to protest endemic discrimination against Black Americans. Other players soon joined, and a national debate began. As a capstone project, a group of GWU graduate students studied the sources of tens of thousands of social media posts generated during the controversy's height, and we were surprised to see that two-thirds of the posts studied did *not* originate in the United States. Most of them came from St. Petersburg, Russia.

There were not (and still are not) a lot of NFL fans in Russia, but St. Petersburg was home to the Internet Research Agency, a troll farm run by the erstwhile Putin crony Yevgeny Prigozhin. His trolls were pretending to be Americans, and the same individuals were posting concurrently on both sides of the debate: beseeching Black Americans and those left of center to defend Kaepernick's rights, while exhorting conservatives online to oppose the protests that they claimed were "trampling on the American flag." The Russian trolls did not really care about the NFL, Kaepernick, Black American rights, or our national anthem. All they wanted to do was provoke controversy and conflict.

Journalist Jacob Weisberg, writing in *The New York Review of Books* in September 2025, noted that digital tools have an extraordinary power to shape public opinion and mold mass culture. This is particularly true during election campaigns, when each party plays up its differences with other parties, and exaggerates its own candidates' virtues and their opponents' vices. Conflict draws attention, and social media posts with explicit, violent, aggressive, fearmongering, or otherwise emotive content tend to move faster and higher up the algorithm hierarchy than fact-based news and information (cute cat videos being an exception).

Some Major Successes

In my three years at the GEC (2021–2024), I served as a senior adviser, acting deputy coordinator, and supervisor of our Russia, Iran, and counterterrorism teams. I watched the GEC evolve from a small and often misunderstood office into an engine of creative outside-the-box thinking. Many of our staff came on details from other agencies or were contractors, bringing in new tools, resources, and perspectives. We hosted one of the few coveted security compartmented information facilities (SCIFs) at Main State, necessary because of our need for close coordination with the intelligence community to monitor adversary state communications.

We had some major successes that, for security reasons, we could not publicize at the time, including the downfall of ISIS leader Amir Muhammad Sa'id al-Rahman al-Mawla, who was later known internally as the Canary Caliph because of a GEC-enabled campaign to expose his past collaboration with the U.S. military in Iraq. We traced the post–Osama bin Laden leadership to Iran, where they were hiding in plain sight. We published oft-quoted exposés on the behind-the-scenes pillars of Russian and Chinese global disinformation networks, including their distortion of truth about the COVID-19 virus and about human rights.



MARIA CARLUCCIO/THE I SPOT

I am particularly proud of the GEC's efforts to inspire international coalitions of like-minded nations to combat online information manipulation and interference. In Eastern Europe, GEC teams helped identify troll networks operating in local languages to disrupt parliamentary elections, and our analyses helped host governments ensure that outside actors could not sway voters by pretending to be fellow citizens. When the GEC began, few countries were aware of the disinformation threat from within, and even fewer were tracking it. Today, the European Union, NATO, and more than 30 nations in Europe, Asia, Oceania, and Africa dedicate personnel to addressing this issue, and they cooperate closely with one another to trace and expose new trolls. Sadly, with the demise of the GEC, the United States is no longer part of that framework coalition.

As the GEC's exposure of disinformation grew, so did misperceptions that the center was engaged in censoring free speech. When Elon Musk acquired Twitter (now X) in October 2022, he tweeted that he had found the real "Deep State … the GEC," calling us "the worst offender in U.S. government censorship and media manipulation." In multiple testimonies to Congress and in interviews afterward, GEC leadership repeatedly explained how all our efforts were focused overseas, and how the organization strictly enforced its mandate and worked to avoid any monitoring or interaction with U.S. citizens or organizations.

But, as eight years of global disinformation analysis by the GEC (from 2016 to 2024) repeatedly demonstrated, sensational accusations often make a more lasting impression on consumers than subsequent data-driven rebuttals. In December 2024, the U.S. Congress chose to not extend the GEC's mandate to operate, and the new Trump administration shut down the remaining office focused on countering FIMI in early 2025. Most GEC staff members were terminated then, or during the department-wide reductions in force (RIFs) in July 2025.

What the GEC Taught

As Doug Wake writes in this edition (see page 22), among the most pressing election monitoring issues in 2026 are "foreign interference and disinformation, deepfakes, AI, and online harassment." Does the continued threat mean that the GEC was a failure?

Our inability to articulate to the public the importance of our work, and its effectiveness, is certainly a failure, although one might say the same today about USAID or many other components of the State Department. In one sense we were successful: After years of trying to raise awareness about the rising threat of disinformation, recent data shows that the public is increasingly concerned about the issue (in a 2025 Pew Research Center poll, a majority of citizens in 20 nations identified "fake news" as the greatest threat to their nation's security). But in making the concern more tangible, we also inspired some in today's politically polarized climate to blame the doctor for the disease diagnosis.

For many of us, our mobile phone is the first thing we check when we wake up and the last thing we look at before we sleep. It is the source of our news and weather, our favorite way to chat with distant relatives and friends, where we go for entertainment and music, the easel for our creativity, and our mobile encyclopedia, guidance counselor, and spiritual adviser (and AI-driven personal valet) all rolled into one.

Social media's growth soon expanded the reach of malign influence.

We are addicted to its flattery, speed, and accessibility, while we overlook its slow-acting poisons and crafty traps.

Just as the problem of disinformation lies glowing in front of our faces, so does the solution. Besides periodic *election monitoring*, to protect our democracy we also need to make *information-monitoring* a 24/7 priority. We should train every information consumer to rely on nonpartisan reliable sources and to distinguish data-driven facts from biased opinion. We should measure information once, and count twice, double-checking with a search engine or second source when we have any doubts. We should learn disinformers' rhetorical techniques (e.g., exaggeration, conspiracy hints, urgency) and flag such messages for extra verification efforts (you may find the latter works well on most political advertising, too).

I do not believe that we should bring back the GEC in the same structure in the future. That model had its strengths (one leader called it "a five-year-old start-up company inside a 235-year-old bureaucracy"). But at the same time, it did not integrate across the State Department and the interagency as well as it could have, nor did it win every battle to expose its findings to wider audiences. Yet, as long as we face ongoing threats from authoritarian states and violent extremist organizations to undermine democracy around the world, I believe that we need a reformed GEC to fight back, one that brings together all interested parties in a transparent effort to fight foreign information manipulation and interference.

Trolls are very good at hiding and skilled at regeneration. They can only be defeated through vigilant detection, strength of resolve, and international collaboration—virtues that also work very well in other ways as we strive to protect our democracy. ■



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In Their *Own* Write

The Foreign Service Journal is pleased to present our 25th annual Foreign Service authors roundup. With "In Their Own Write," we celebrate the wealth of literary talent within the Foreign Service community and give our readers the opportunity to support their storytelling colleagues (in time for holiday shopping).

Many of these titles are excellent resources for anyone contemplating a career in international affairs. You can also find biographies, books on history and foreign policy, memoirs, works of fiction, young adult books, and more. All were written, edited, translated, and even narrated by Foreign Service personnel and their family members.

Additionally, we offer a selection of recent books "of related interest" to diplomats and their families that were not written by FS authors (see page 42).

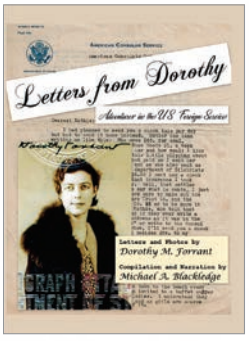
As always, we rely on the authors themselves to bring their books to our attention. If your recent book is not listed here or you have one forthcoming, please let us know, and we can add it to next year's collection—for more information, email InTheirOwnWrite@afsa.org.

Note: Inclusion of a book in this collection does not imply endorsement by AFSA or the *FSJ*. AFSA welcomes the opportunity to share the news of books published by members of the FS community but does not vouch for the contents of the books.

—*The Editors*

MARIA CARLUCCIO/THE I SPOT

MEMOIRS



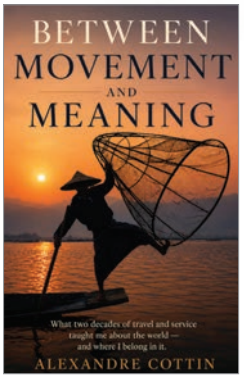
Letters from Dorothy: Adventures in the U.S. Foreign Service

Dorothy Marita Forrant Blackledge, ed. Michael A. Blackledge, Blackledge Books, 2025, $37.99/ hardcover, print only, 224 pages.

Dorothy Forrant was a recent high school graduate and skilled typist from Massachusetts when she joined the U.S. diplomatic team in 1928 for the Sixth International Conference of American States in Havana. As her Foreign Service career unfolded across the globe, with postings in Buenos Aires, Tokyo, and Beijing (then Peking), she sent numerous letters home. Those letters and photos make up this 224-page memoir, which offers a unique window into Depression-era challenges as well as her own personal triumphs.

The 70-plus original letters that form the core of this memoir have been formally archived by the Massachusetts Historical Society, which established the Dorothy Forrant Blackledge Collection for her personal correspondence and artifacts. Additionally, the Young Men's Library Association in Ware, Massachusetts, has created a Dorothy Forrant Collection to preserve further materials related to her life and legacy.

Dorothy Marita Forrant Blackledge was a secretary in the Foreign Service from 1927 to 1934. Her son, Michael Blackledge, compiled this memoir.



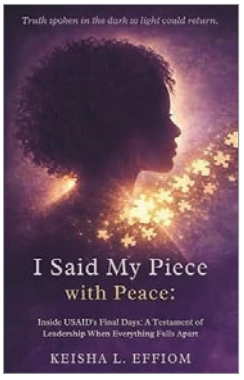
Between Movement and Meaning: What Two Decades of Travel and Service Taught Me About the World—and Where I Belong in It

Alexandre Cottin, independently published, 2026, $14.99/paperback, e-book available, 210 pages.

Between Movement and Meaning spans Alexandre Cottin's experience on five continents over two decades—from Haitian cholera wards to remote clinics in South Sudan, from the Andes to the Himalayas, from a lost passport in Istanbul to an earthquake in Mandalay. Part memoir, part a reflection on service, identity, and belonging, the book follows a life shaped by diplomacy, humanitarian work, crisis response, and constant movement across borders and cultures.

Beneath the missions and travel lies a deeper question: What does all this movement mean, and where does one ultimately belong? At its core, this story is about transition, family, loss, purpose, and learning when to move, when to stay, and how to trust a path that is still unfolding.

Alexandre Cottin is a Foreign Service officer with the State Department. His postings include Belgium, Madagascar, Morocco, and Burma, where he most recently served as the embassy's spokesperson. Cottin also taught public diplomacy courses at the Foreign Service Institute. He is currently on leave without pay (LWOP) while he works for the World Central Kitchen as director of strategic relations.



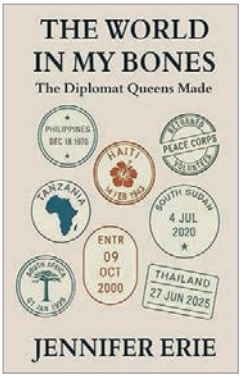
I Said My Piece with Peace: Inside USAID's Final Days: A Testament of Leadership When Everything Falls Apart

Keisha L. Effiom, independently published, 2026, $16.99/paperback, e-book available, 102 pages.

I Said My Piece with Peace is Keisha Effiom's story of leadership written from inside the U.S. Agency for International Development during its final days, when she bore witness to the dismantling of a 64-year-old institution and the effects on those who served it.

The book is her attempt to record what she saw, what she refused to surrender, and what she learned about leading with grace when the ground beneath gives way. This faith-grounded memoir asks the question: How do you serve, lead, and remain whole when the institution you have built your life around begins to fall apart?

Former USAID Foreign Service Officer Keisha Effiom spent 18 years with USAID, including 15 in the Foreign Service, before the agency was dismantled in 2025. She was posted in Nigeria, Liberia, Washington, D.C., Tanzania, Ghana, and Rwanda/Burundi. She most recently served as mission director for Rwanda and Burundi, one of eight Black American women serving as USAID mission directors at the same time—the most ever to hold the title concurrently. Based in Johannesburg, Effiom travels regularly to the United States and across Africa for speaking engagements.



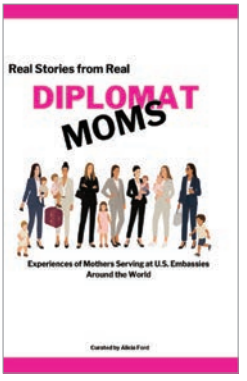
The World in My Bones: The Diplomat Queens Made

Jennifer Erie, independently published, 2026, $19.99/paperback, e-book available, 260 pages.

This memoir by Jennifer Erie covers her life in international development, where she served on the front lines for USAID, working across Africa and Southeast Asia to advance HIV and AIDS advocacy and public health resilience. For years, she writes, her vision for the future was coming together, but when she finally reached the bridge to the life she had spent decades building, the bridge collapsed.

The author, who was born and raised in Queens, New York, by a Haitian single mother, also shares her education in how grief, responsibility, and leadership coexist and examines what happens when leadership demands certainty while life offers none.

Jennifer Erie spent 15 years with USAID, serving in the Philippines, Tanzania, South Africa, South Sudan, and Thailand.



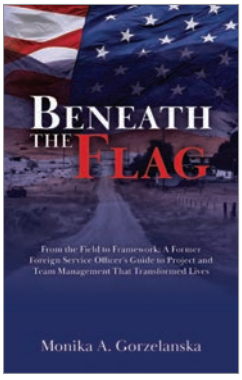
Real Stories from Real Diplomat Moms: Experiences of Mothers Serving at U.S. Embassies Around the World

Alicia Ford, ed., independently published, 2026, $19.99/paperback, e-book available, 143 pages.

Here, 15 women of the U.S. Foreign Service pull back the curtain on one of diplomacy's least visible roles: motherhood. Through stories of birth, adoption, international relocations, career sacrifices, and family

resilience, they reveal what it takes to build a life and raise children across borders. Honest, inspiring, and often humorous, this anthology celebrates the women who serve their country while nurturing the next generation of global citizens.

Alicia Ford has been with the State Department for 19 years. She has been assigned to the Boston Passport Agency, Bureau of Budget and Planning, Tegucigalpa, Lima, Istanbul, Bucharest, and Bridgetown. She is currently posted in Port of Spain.



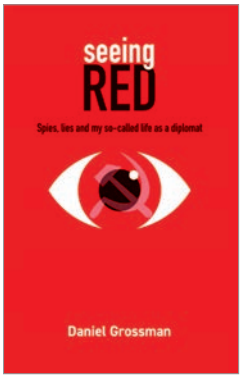
Beneath the Flag: From the Field to the Framework: A Former Foreign Service Officer's Guide to Project Management That Transformed Lives

Monika A. Gorzelanska, Palmetto Publishing, 2026, $15.99/paperback, e-book available, 178 pages.

Blending memoir with professional insight, former USAID Foreign Service Officer Monika Gorzelanska argues that this agency turned U.S. foreign policy ideas into real-world results across some of the world's most complex environments. With nearly two decades of experience leading programs in conflict zones and fragile states, she explores how policy is translated into action through effective project management, stakeholder engagement, and disciplined execution.

Grounded in globally recognized Project Management Institute (PMI) principles, each chapter connects practical lessons with core management frameworks. *Beneath the Flag* shows federal employees how to lead with purpose and deliver measurable results in high-stakes international environments.

Monika Gorzelanska was with USAID from 2008 to 2025. She served in Kyiv, Accra, Tbilisi, Almaty, Washington, D.C., and Mogadishu.



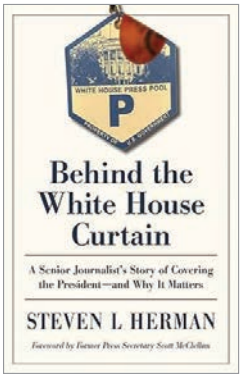
Seeing Red: Spies, Lies and My So-Called Life as a Diplomat

Daniel Grossman, independently published, 2026, $17.95/paperback, print only, 275 pages.

This memoir in essays covers Daniel Grossman's time serving as a U.S. diplomat in Leningrad during the Cold War. When he served in the Soviet Union at age 26, his phones were tapped, his home bugged, his neighbor defenestrated, his houseguest attacked, his consulate rocked by the Chernobyl disaster, and his movements even tracked by an ambitious young KGB officer named Vladimir Putin.

With autocracy rising around the world, Grossman has written a meditation on the politics of oppression, the nature of dreamers, and the resilience of ordinary people under siege in this private peek behind the Iron Curtain.

Daniel Grossman was in the Foreign Service from 1983 to 1989, with assignments in New Delhi, Leningrad, Vienna, and the Soviet desk at the State Department.



Behind the White House Curtain: A Senior Journalist's Story of Covering the President—and Why It Matters

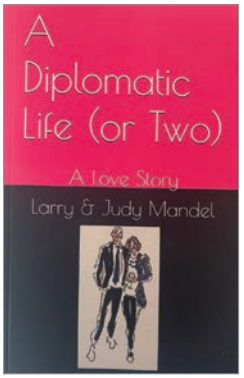
Steven L. Herman, Kent State University Press, 2026, $24.95/paperback, e-book available, 258 pages.

Originally published in hardcover in 2024, this memoir by Steve Herman, a former Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), is now in paperback and with a new preface covering the destruction of Voice of America early in the second Trump administration. He pulls back the curtain on the inner workings of the White House press corps, giving readers a glimpse into the historic and current relationship between the president and the press.

Tracing the trajectory of his career as a journalist and the challenges of covering the Trump administration for VOA, Herman also convincingly argues that public access to accurate, unbiased information is essential to a healthy and peaceful democracy. Further, he continues, journalists can and should play a key role in pressing government officials to be truthful and transparent.

At a time when misinformation is rampant and the need for unbiased coverage of current events more urgent than ever, Herman reminds readers that freedom of the press is a foundational American right.

Retired FSO Steve Herman was VOA's senior White House correspondent from 2017 through 2025.

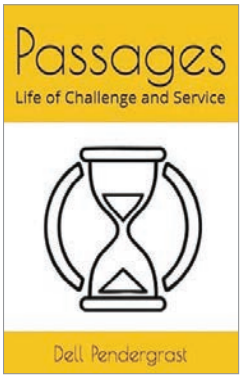


A Diplomatic Life (or Two): A Love Story

Larry and Judy Mandel, independently published, 2025, $12.99/paperback, e-book available, 129 pages.

During his career as a Foreign Service officer with the State Department, Larry Mandel spent more than 32 years living overseas and in Washington, D.C., with his spouse, Judy. Together, they raised their four children to appreciate and enjoy all the world has to offer. This account spans their journey from meeting on their first day at American University, to how they wound up with "two careers, one salary."

Larry and Judy Mandel served in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), London, Tokyo, Budapest, Tel Aviv, Jakarta, Amman, and Ankara. After retiring in 2016, he served on the Foreign Service Grievance Board (2017–2022), including as chair (2019–2022).

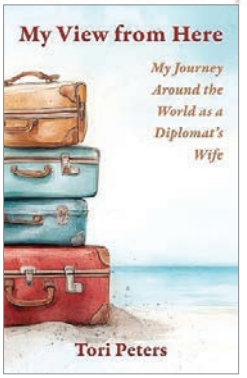


Passages: Life of Challenge and Service

Dell Pendergrast, independently published, 2025, $12.00/paperback, print only, 176 pages.

In *Passages*, retired FSO Dell Pendergrast has published memories and reflections from his Midwest origins, his 32-year career as a Foreign Service officer, and his passion for acting. Each short chapter shares a vignette from his career overseas, his family life, or his community theater performances in Washington, D.C.

Dell Pendergrast served in the U.S. Information Agency for more than three decades beginning in 1965, with postings in Belgrade, Zagreb, Saigon, Warsaw, Brussels, and Ottawa.



My View from Here: My Journey Around the World as a Diplomat's Wife

Tori Peters, Sidekick Press, 2026, $19.95/paperback, e-book available, 292 pages.

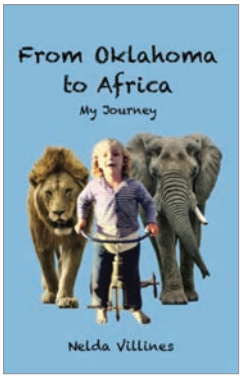
In 1977 Tori Peters arrived in Bamako, Mali, with her husband, four young children, and a cat, to begin her life as a spouse of a U.S. diplomat. She didn't speak French, didn't know what was expected of her, and was unprepared for the poverty and heartbreak she'd encounter.

In the women of Mali, Peters discovered strength, resilience, and a deeper understanding of herself. She had postings in six more countries over the next two decades—years marked by cultural discovery, political unrest, and personal growth.

When tragedy struck, she learned to stand on her own, ultimately walking the Camino de Santiago alone to honor her courage and the spirit of women across time.

In this memoir, she shares her stories of adventure, loss, and transformation.

Tori Peters is the wife and widow of retired Foreign Service Officer Ronald J. Peters. The family was posted in Bamako, Kigali, Tunis, Kabul, Taipei, Ottawa, and New Delhi.



From Oklahoma to Africa: My Journey

Nelda Villines, Genesis Publishing House, 2025, $20.00/paperback, e-book available, 348 pages.

This memoir chronicles Foreign Service Specialist Nelda Villines' 31-year journey from rural Oklahoma to Africa. She writes of training in Washington, D.C., having surgery overseas, supporting communities struggling with HIV/AIDS, and visiting her first game reserve in Africa, which sparked an interest in wildlife photography. Through her experience with people from various cultures and traditions, she shares with readers insight into their lives and challenges.

Nelda Villines joined the State Department as an office management specialist (OMS) in 1991 and served in Helsinki, San José, Maseru, Harare, Lusaka, Mbabane, Khartoum, and Accra. She also spent time as an OMS "rover" in Bamako, Juba, Conakry, Lomé, Cape Town, Yaoundé, Malabo, Nairobi, Praia, Banjul,

Ouagadougou, Libreville, N'Djamena, Monrovia, Abidjan, and Lagos. In addition to *From Oklahoma to Africa*, she has published 46 photo books about African wildlife and people.



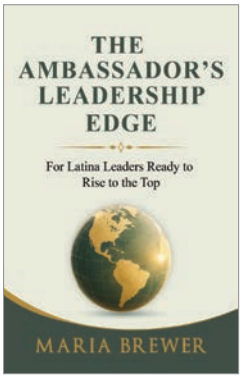
Born in Kansas but Made in Africa: An American Man's Recollections of 50 Years in Africa
Mark G. Wentling, independently published, 2025, $16.99/paperback, e-book available, 463 pages.

At 21, Mark Wentling left life on a farm near Wichita, Kansas, for three years in Honduras as a Peace Corps volunteer. From there he joined USAID and spent the next five decades traveling and working in 54 nations on the African continent.

This new memoir shares Wentling's experiences throughout Africa, with each chapter focused on a new country. He writes of living in rural villages and capital cities, working in war zones and on development projects, and reflects candidly on African traditions, challenges, humor, and hope.

Mark G. Wentling retired from USAID in 1996 as a Senior Foreign Service officer and then continued to serve in Africa as a USAID contractor and with NGOs.

LEADERSHIP



The Ambassador's Leadership Edge: For Latina Leaders Ready to Rise to the Top
Maria Brewer, independently published, 2026, $19.99/paperback, e-book available, 186 pages.

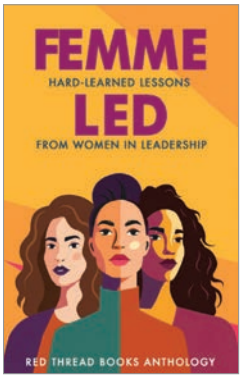
First-gen FSO Maria Brewer understands the struggles Latina professionals can face, especially in questioning if they belong in the C-suite, board-room, or most senior ranks of public service.



In *The Ambassador's Leadership Edge*, she draws on three decades of diplomatic service, including two ambassadorial appointments, to distill lessons from global leadership into actionable strategies for Latina professionals and other women of color.

Through her signature framework of "power, presence, and purpose," she shares with readers how to navigate complex organizations, cultivate strategic alliances, strengthen influence, and rise with confidence, empowering them to lead with authenticity, intentionality, and strategy.

Maria Brewer joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1996 and served with the State Department for 29 years, including as ambassador to Sierra Leone and Lesotho.



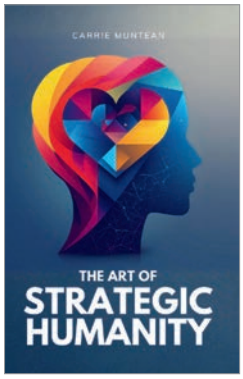
Femme Led: Hard-Learned Lessons from Women in Leadership

Sierra Melcher, et al., Red Thread Publishing, 2026, $19.99/paperback, e-book available, 198 pages.

Leadership has long been defined by systems that reward dominance, extraction, certainty, and visibility at all costs. This award-winning anthology challenges that narrative, bringing together women who are leading differently, through lived experience, integrity, relational intelligence, courage, and choice.

Rather than offering a single definition of leadership, *Femme Led* presents a collective reimagining: leadership as actually lived by women today. The 16 contributors—including Foreign Service spouse Tracy MacDonald—are founders, creatives, entrepreneurs, educators, healers, and changemakers who have turned ideas into impact and values into action, often without permission and rarely by following the script.

FS family member Tracy MacDonald is the author of chapter 5, "Becoming Brave," in the anthology. She is married to Diplomatic Security Agent Brad MacDonald. Together, they have served in Gabon, Honduras, Egypt, and Swaziland.



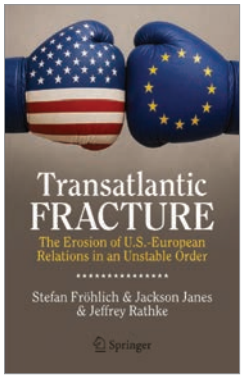
The Art of Strategic Humanity: Leadership Lessons from the Frontlines of Diplomacy

Carrie Muntean, independently published, 2026, $10.99/paperback, e-book available, 130 pages.

This book focuses on how to lead with what the author calls "strategic humanity," which she describes as balancing your head (logic), heart (compassion), and spine (courage). It focuses on being a balanced leader for yourself, your team, and your organization. Make sure to also check out a leadership self-assessment the author offers at https://strategic-humanity.com.

Carrie Muntean was a consular officer with the State Department from 2001 to 2025 and served in Luanda, London, Panama, Moscow, Managua, Porto Alegre, and Washington, D.C. Retiring at the rank of counselor in the Senior Foreign Service, she now works as a leadership coach.

POLICY/ISSUES



Transatlantic Fracture: The Erosion of U.S.-European Relations in an Unstable Order

Stefan Fröhlich, Jackson Janes, and Jeffrey Rathke, Springer Nature, 2026, $44.99/paperback, e-book available, 96 pages.

Transatlantic Fracture provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving transatlantic relationship in light of recent domestic upheavals in the United States, which have lasting effects on foreign and security policy. With the liberal international order under increasing strain, Europe must respond to shifting global dynamics with strategic foresight and resilience. The authors share their insights into how Europe can address these challenges and what they mean for the future of the global order.

Co-author Jeffrey Rathke was a State Department Foreign Service officer from 1991 to 2015. His postings included Moscow, Berlin, Brussels (NATO international staff), Kuala Lumpur, Riga, and Dublin.

(Continued on page 40)

MOST PEOPLE DON'T FAIL
BECAUSE THEY'RE INCAPABLE.

THEY FAIL BECAUSE THEY STOP WALKING.

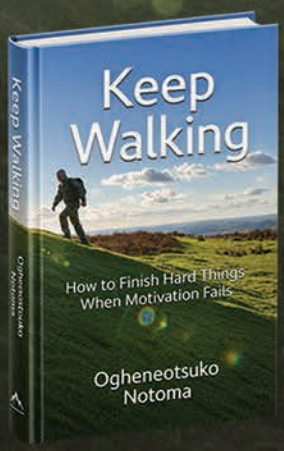


Every meaningful achievement begins the same way. One decision. One step. One day at a time.

Success is rarely the product of perfect motivation. It is the result of consistent forward motion.

Drawing on a life spanning military service, diplomacy, international living, and higher education, *Keep Walking* offers a practical approach to finishing hard things when motivation fades.

Extraordinary lives are rarely built in giant leaps. They are built one deliberate step at a time.



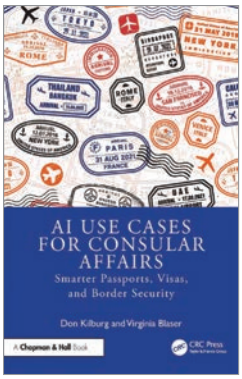
"You don't need to sprint.
You just need to walk.
And walk again."

OGHENEOTSUKO NOTOMA

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AI Use Cases for Consular Affairs: Smarter Passports, Visas, and Border Security

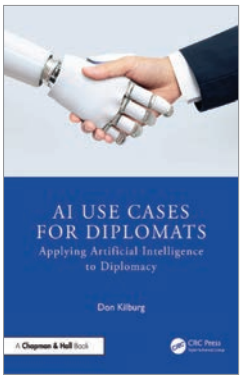
Don Kilburg and Virginia Blaser, Chapman & Hall, 2026, $45.99/paperback, e-book available, 264 pages.

In this book, retired FSOs Don Kilburg and Virginia Blaser examine how artificial intelligence can improve consular workflows including visa and passport adjudication, border security, disaster evacuation, identity verification, fraud detection, multilingual access, and crisis alerts.

Drawing on decades of combined diplomatic experience, they show diplomats, policymakers, and public servants how AI can expand access, improve consistency, and return valuable time. The book also confronts the ethical risks of AI directly, arguing that AI should strengthen rather than replace human judgment.

Don Kilburg was a Foreign Service officer for 21 years, leading State Department efforts to responsibly integrate generative AI into diplomatic work. His assignments included tours in Beijing, Almaty, Mexico City, Santo Domingo, and Washington, D.C.

Virginia Blaser spent 34 years in the Foreign Service, including as chargé d'affaires in five countries over five years.



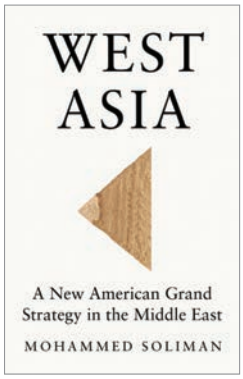
AI Use Cases for Diplomats: Applying Artificial Intelligence to Diplomacy

Don Kilburg, Chapman & Hall, 2025, $45.99/paperback, e-book available, 314 pages.

Retired FSO Don Kilburg explores how artificial intelligence can be practically, responsibly, and ethically integrated into diplomatic work. The book bridges the gap between technical AI concepts and real-world diplomatic practice, offering concrete use cases for policy analysis, negotiation preparation, public diplomacy, crisis response, and internal workflow efficiency.

Written specifically for diplomats and foreign policy professionals, the book emphasizes human-centered AI, guardrails, and professional judgment. Kilburg argues that when used wisely, AI can enhance diplomatic effectiveness, strengthen international cooperation, and help diplomats navigate an increasingly complex global environment without replacing the human skills at the heart of diplomacy.

Don Kilburg was a Foreign Service officer for 21 years, leading State Department efforts to responsibly integrate generative AI into diplomatic work. His assignments included tours in Beijing, Almaty, Mexico City, Santo Domingo, and Washington, D.C.



West Asia: A New American Grand Strategy in the Middle East

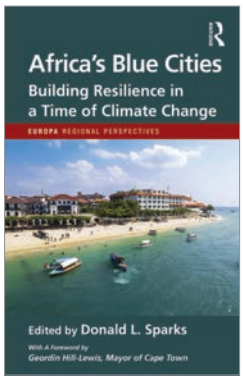
Mohammed Soliman, Polity Press, 2026, $24.95/paperback, e-book available, 272 pages.

In *West Asia*, author Mohammed Soliman examines Shinzo Abe's "Confluence of the Two Seas," which reframed the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions as the Indo-Pacific, and brings that logic back to where it originated: Dara Shikoh's 17th-century attempt to synthesize Islam and Hinduism as interconnected civilizational traditions.

From here Soliman makes the argument that the Middle East is merging with South Asia into a single expansive region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean—what he calls "West Asia"—and contends that contemporary geopolitics makes no sense through a Middle East lens.

Turkey aligning with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; India joining forces with the UAE, Cyprus, Greece, and Israel; infrastructure projects like the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor or the Saudi-Jordan-Syria-Turkey initiatives—none of this fits the old framework of the Middle East, according to Soliman, who instead positions these alliances within an Asia-focused American grand strategy.

Mohammed Soliman is a Foreign Service family member who has served with his spouse, FSO Colleen Quigley, in Jeddah (2022–2023) and Mexico City (2023–2025).



Africa's Blue Cities: Building Resilience in a Time of Climate Change

Donald Sparks, ed., Routledge, 2026, $200.00/hardcover, e-book available, 306 pages.

Coastal towns and cities in Africa are on the front lines of the climate crisis, while also having to sustain their national economies.

Drawing on rich case studies from

small island developing states to mainland Africa, this contributed volume, edited by Donald Sparks, showcases how ports, fisheries, tourism, and urbanization currently contend with sea level rise, storms, inequality, and "blue crimes"—or transnational maritime offenses—that take place across oceans or cause harm to marine environments.

Donald Sparks was a Foreign Service Reserve officer from 1976 to 1980.



Profit vs. Progress: Why Socially Responsible Investment Doesn't Work and How to Fix It
Brad Swanson, MIT Press, 2026, $32.95/hardcover, e-book available, 216 pages.

Socially responsible investment promises to make investors richer and the world better, but fails at both. *Profit vs. Progress* dissects the massive $30 trillion "socially responsible" or "sustainable" finance industry—and finds the emperor has no clothes.

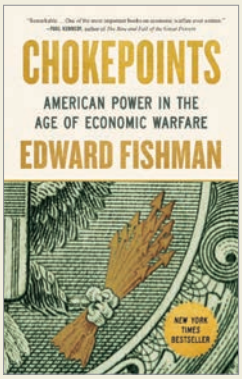
Sustainable investing makes social and environmental crises harder to overcome by using financial gimmickry to distract our attention from real solutions. Corporations in competitive markets act without moral values, and ethical investment can't prod them to take greater social responsibility. The solutions will have to come from legislatures, not corporate boardrooms.

The author shows that in previous eras of social crisis caused by corporate excess, meaningful reforms emerged through the political process. The path forward is clear—if we have the will to follow it.

Brad Swanson was an FSO with the State Department from 1979 to 1986, serving in Dakar, Monrovia, and Washington, D.C. He is currently based in Vienna, Virginia.

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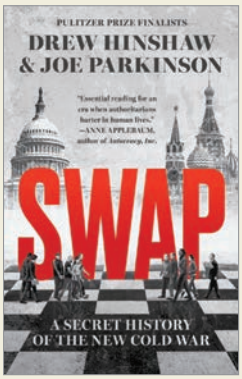
OF RELATED INTEREST



Chokepoints: American Power in the Age of Economic Warfare
Edward Fishman, Portfolio, 2025, $40.00/hardcover, e-book available, 555 pages.

Author Edward Fishman takes a close look at what he calls "the Age of Economic Warfare"—the period from 2006 to the present, which saw the development of "novel economic weapons" deployed against Iran, Russia (twice), and China. Fishman argues the sanctions imposed against Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine marked a "hinge in history," and the economic fragmentation that resulted, is leading us to a new geopolitical map and the end of globalization as we know it.

Edward Fishman was a State Department sanctions official who helped design and negotiate sanctions against Russia after its 2014 annexation of Crimea. He has also served at the Pentagon and in the Treasury Department. Fishman currently teaches at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and is a senior research scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy. He worked previously as an editor at *Foreign Affairs* and has published articles in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and other outlets.



Swap: A Secret History of the New Cold War
Drew Hinshaw and Joe Parkinson, Harper, 2025, $30.00/hardcover, e-book available, 304 pages.

After their *Wall Street Journal* colleague Evan Gershkovich was kidnapped and held by the Kremlin, investigative reporters Drew Hinshaw and Joe Parkinson worked with Gershkovich to uncover the previously unknown Russian intelligence agency responsible for arresting him and other Americans and using them as bargaining chips in negotiations with the U.S. government.

Swap tells the complex, behind-the-scenes story of the prisoner trades that ultimately brought Gershkovich home, along with American basketball star Brittney Griner, Paul Whelan, and others who were pawns in this secret conflict between superpowers. All told, 24 people from seven nations were exchanged in the August 2024 prisoner swap that brought Gershkovich home. This true story reads like a thriller but takes you deep inside the real-world spycraft and diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Russia.

Drew Hinshaw is a veteran *Wall Street Journal* reporter and a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist who has reported from more than 50 countries.

Joe Parkinson leads the *WSJ*'s world enterprise team and was previously the Africa bureau chief in Johannesburg and Turkey bureau chief in Istanbul.

Hinshaw and Parkinson won the Overseas Press Club's 2021 Book of the Year award for *Bring Back Our Girls*.

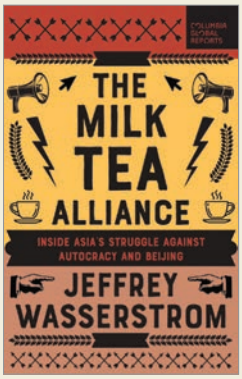


Here Comes the Sun: A Last Chance for the Climate and a Fresh Chance for Civilization
Bill McKibben, W.W. Norton & Company, 2025, $19.99/paperback, e-book available, 240 pages.

Last summer's fires ravaged the west coast of the United States, Canada, and Europe, making it yet more obvious that climate change is coming for us all. Environmentalist Bill McKibben's latest book focuses not on the climate disasters unfolding globally, but on a solution that suddenly seems possible: harnessing the power of the sun to fuel the planet.

Energy from the sun and wind, he argues, has become the cheapest power source on the planet and has the potential to save us from the ravages of climate crisis while also building more humane political and economic structures that benefit us all. He points to successes such as in Pakistan, where ordinary citizens learned how to bypass the energy grid by installing their own solar panels, and California, which has nearly halved its use of natural gas in recent years.

Bill McKibben is a scholar in residence at Middlebury College and the author of *The End of Nature* (1989), *Deep Economy* (2007), and other books. He is the co-founder of Third Act, which mobilizes people over 60 for action on climate and justice and a past winner of the Gandhi Peace Prize.



The Milk Tea Alliance: Inside Asia's Struggle Against Autocracy and Beijing

Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Columbia Global Reports, 2025, $18.00/paperback, e-book available, 104 pages.

In April 2020, netizens in Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Taipei joined forces to push back against supporters of mainland China. This online resistance movement became known as the Milk Tea Alliance—because most people in these countries use dairy products in their iconic tea drinks, whereas those in Beijing do not.

The author explores how alliance members—particularly, young activists Agnes Chow of Hong Kong and Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal of Thailand as well as an older Burmese activist, Ye Myint Win—have united to oppose the Chinese Communist Party. Through exchange tactics and pop culture, they have displayed solidarity and given young people hope for a better future.

Jeffrey Wasserstrom is a professor of history at the University of California–Irvine and the editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies*. He is also the Asia editor of the Los Angeles Review of Books and an associate fellow of the Asia Society.



The Struggle for the Market: Life and Hustle in Cuba's New Economy

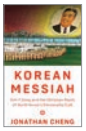
Ståle Wig, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2025, $64.95/hardcover, e-book available, 224 pages.

Two years after Raúl Castro succeeded his brother as president of Cuba, he announced the country would begin reforming its economy. In a 2010 speech, he pointed to "the positive experience of capitalists" and made self-employment legal in the notoriously socialist country.

In *The Struggle for the Market*, anthropologist Ståle Wig looks at the market reforms that unfolded after that speech, telling the story of the Cubans who grappled with building a private market and the extent to which the government should stay involved in its development. Wig interviewed *cuentapropistas*—a newly invented term for now-legal private entrepreneurs who arose in the new economy—giving this book both an academic layer and personal angle.

Ståle Wig is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oslo and author of *Havana Taxi*.

Other Recent Books of Interest



Korean Messiah: Kim Il Sung and the Christian Roots of North Korea's Personality Cult
Jonathan Cheng, Knopf, 2026, $36.00/hardcover, e-book available, 768 pages.



Shattered Lands: Five Partitions and the Making of Modern Asia
Sam Dalrymple, W.W. Norton, 2026, $21.00/hardcover, e-book available, 534 pages.



Diplomatic Notes: Canada's Foreign Service Community in Its Own Words
Pamela Isfeld and Lillian Thomsen, eds., Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers, 2026, hardcover available for purchase, e-book free on PAFSO website, 391 pages.



Into the Wood Chipper: A Whistleblower's Account of How the Trump Administration Shredded USAID
Nicholas Enrich, S&S/Summit Books, 2026, $19.00/paperback, e-book available, 240 pages.



The Long War on Iran: New Events, Old Questions
Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, OR Books, 2026, $17.00/paperback, e-book available, 249 pages.



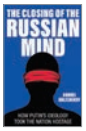
A Daring Enterprise: A US-Egyptian Partnership and a Case for Soft Power
James Harmon, Cornelius Queen, and Mark Warren, American University in Cairo Press, 2026, $35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 278 pages.



Motherland: A Feminist History of Modern Russia, from Revolution to Autocracy
Julia Ioffe, Ecco, 2025, $22.00/paperback, e-book available, 512 pages.



As the Pentagon Burned: Leadership and Human Excellence in the Face of the 9/11 Attack
Matthew S. Klimov, Palmetto Publishing, 2026, $21.99/paperback, e-book available, 190 pages.



The Closing of the Russian Mind: How Putin's Ideology Took the Nation Hostage
Andrei Kolesnikov, Polity, 2026, $29.95/hardcover, e-book available, 256 pages.

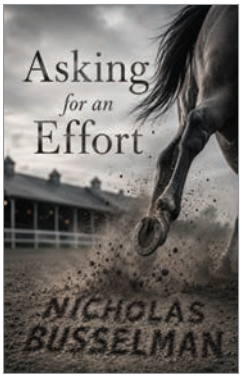


Apple in China: The Capture of the World's Greatest Company
Patrick McGee, Scribner, 2025, $21.00/paperback, e-book available, 480 pages.



The Jackal: The Rise and Fall of Carlos, the World's First Super Terrorist
Joby Warrick, Scribner, 2026, $30.00/hardcover, e-book available, 384 pages.

FICTION



Asking for an Effort

Nicholas Busselman, Novelty Fiction, 2026, $11.99/paperback, e-book available, 112 pages.

Unlike his infamous and legendary older brothers, Mitch lacks initiative and purpose. A half-hearted, months-long job search on foot finally leads him to the Pimlico Race Course, where an attractive girl on horseback ignites a flame deep inside him. Suddenly stubborn and determined, he seems bound to become a fixture or a failure at the racetrack, where the thoroughbreds stand ready to run.

Set in the late 1970s to early 1980s, *Asking for an Effort* gives the reader a detailed and authentic understanding of the horse racing culture, social norms, and family synergies of that era.

Nicholas Busselman is the spouse of a Foreign Service financial management officer currently posted in Libreville, Gabon, with an onward assignment in Lilongwe, Malawi.



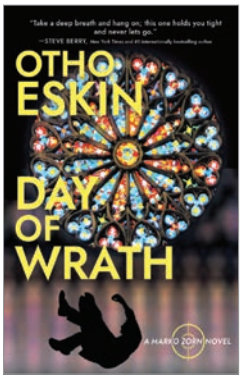
The Expediter

Kenneth Dekleva, independently published, 2026, $10.99/paperback, e-book available, 189 pages.

When a grieving Bosnian refugee mother asks Father Ishmael, a retired hostage negotiator turned parish priest, to reopen her murdered son's cold case, the investigation carries him from Texas to Sarajevo, Vienna, Jerusalem, Rome, and Tehran, where he meets with diplomats, intelligence officers, and Vatican officials and moves toward a reckoning that will test his faith and resolve.

A forensic psychiatrist and former Foreign Service specialist, Dr. Kenneth Dekleva knows the world of *The Expediter* from the inside. This thriller is for anyone drawn to stories of forgiveness and redemption, and for readers looking for insider-written espionage fiction.

Kenneth Dekleva served as a regional medical officer/psychiatrist (RMO/P) with the State Department from 2002 to 2016 in Moscow, New Delhi, Mexico City, Vienna, Washington, D.C., and London.



Day of Wrath

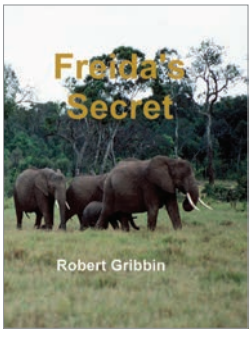
Otho Eskin, Meridian Editions, 2026, $19.95/paperback, e-book available, 258 pages.

When Washington, D.C., homicide detective Marko Zorn is called to the city's cathedral, he finds a scene as chilling as it is surreal: the bloodied body of the cardinal archbishop lies on the church floor, a playing card clutched in his hand. Marko learns the card is a key to an ancient secret from the mountains of Mexico, where the archbishop once encountered a shadowy cult devoted to Holy Death.

As Marko digs deeper, he's pulled into a secretive world of ritual and power that stretches from a remote desert village to the inner sanctums of the Vatican. What begins as a murder investigation quickly spirals into something far more dangerous: a calculated plot to infiltrate the Catholic Church and extend the cult's reach into the modern world. With bodies mounting, time running out, and the pope on his deathbed, Marko must expose the truth before the cult's influence becomes unstoppable.

This is the fifth and final book in the Marko Zorn series.

Otho Eskin joined the Foreign Service in 1961 and retired in 1982. He served in Damascus, Belgrade, Reykjavík, Berlin, and Washington, D.C.



Freida's Secret

Robert Gribbin, independently published, 2025, $13.99/paperback, e-book available, 181 pages.

This novel opens with the real-life 1887 effort to rescue Emin Pasha, governor of Equatoria, Sudan, from the clutches of Islamist jihadists hiding in the Congo Basin. The governor is found but only reluctantly agrees to be rescued and to leave Equatoria for the coast. At this point the narrative shifts its focus to Pasha's daughter, Freida. A multiracial child, she is sent to Germany where she adapts to life and culture, even into the Nazi era, all the while hiding a secret from long-ago Africa.

Robert Gribbin joined the Foreign Service in 1973 and was posted in Bangui, Kigali, Mombasa, and Kampala. He was U.S. ambassador to the Central African Republic (1993–1995) and Kenya (1996–1999). After retiring in 1999, he served as a short-term WAE in Mauritius, Djibouti, Bujumbura, N'Djamena, Abuja, Freetown, Monrovia, Kinshasa, Juba, and Accra.



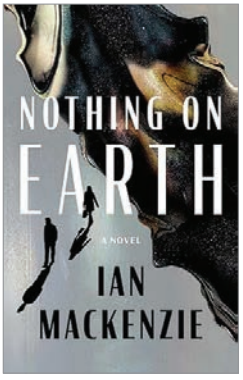
Missing—Tipping Point III

George Alfred Kennedy, SETAF Publishing, 2026, $20.00/paperback, e-book available, 289 pages.

In the third book of the Tipping Point series, the airplane carrying President Hinton's husband has disappeared, leaving her to face the uncertainty of his fate while preparing to raise their unborn child alone. But the demands of the presidency leave little room for sorrow.

Hinton relies on the strength of her vice president and the support of the American people as she confronts one of the greatest threats the nation has ever faced. Surrounded by political enemies, international threats, and the crushing loneliness of grief, President Hinton must navigate a world where every decision could alter the course of history. And in the quiet hours of the night, she is forced to confront the one battle no power can shield her from—her own heartbreak.

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

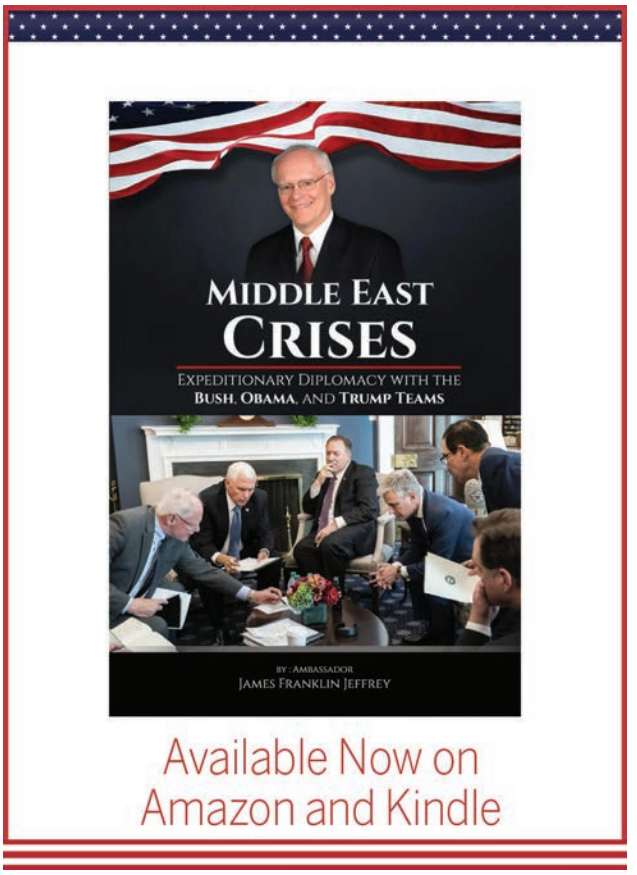


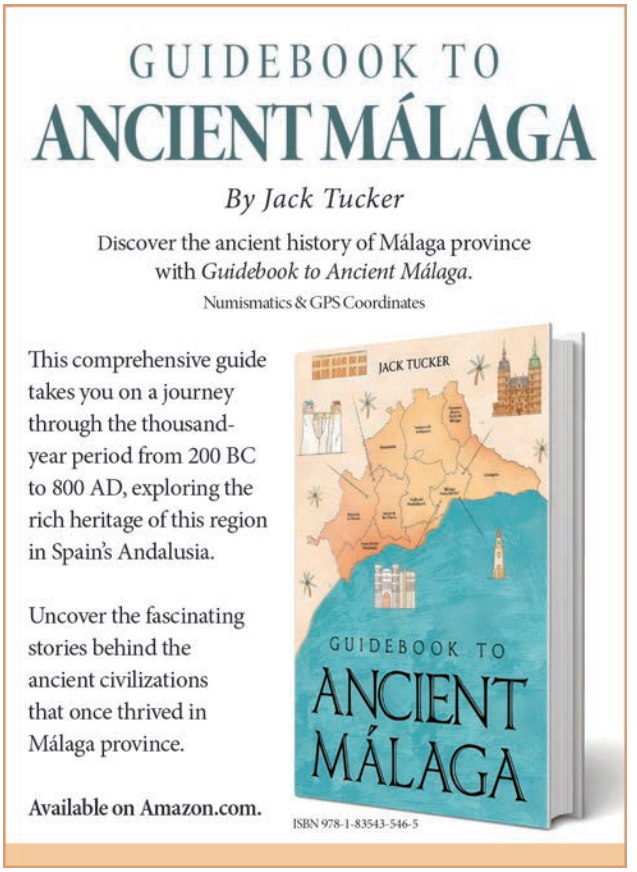
Nothing on Earth

Ian MacKenzie, The Unnamed Press, 2026, $35.00/hardcover, e-book available, 488 pages.

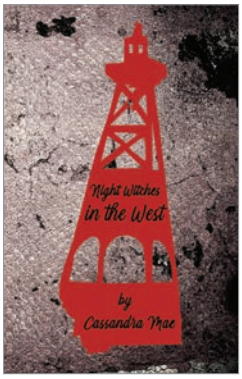
This propulsive novel tells the story of an American spy, Anna Hendrix, as she seeks to learn the nature of an unknown, potentially powerful material that is appearing at seemingly random points around the world and that science can't explain. No one knows what it is; and everyone wants to find it. Anna's pursuit takes her from the Horn of Africa to Southeast Asia, through expatriate enclaves that play host to aid workers, diplomats, foreign correspondents, energy magnates, insurgents, dissidents, and, inevitably, other spies.

In *Nothing on Earth*, Ian MacKenzie reimagines a pivotal decade in the United States, from the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 to the storming of the Capitol in January 2021. Anna's voice—lean, wry, coolly intimate—guides the reader through the dark topography of geopolitical power and, in the end, the outer limits of human comprehension.





Ian MacKenzie is an active-duty FSO with 17 years in the Foreign Service. He is currently the deputy political and economic counselor in Maputo and has previously served in Ethiopia, Brazil, Myanmar, and in the Bureau of African Affairs.



Night Witches in the West: An All-Woman Insurgency

Cassandra Mae, independently published, 2025, $21.99/paperback, e-book available, 352 pages.

When America fell, oligarchs stripped it for parts and corporate interests bought what was left. Now they're coming for everything: nuclear bases, national parks, natural resources, women's rights, prison labor. The Night Witches, though, are taking something back. A decentralized all-women insurgency operating across the former United States, they run honeypot intelligence operations, coordinate prison breaks, infiltrate billionaire gatherings, and move women across the Canadian border through an underground network.

Inspired by the Soviet World War II pilots who terrorized Nazi forces through stealth and precision, *Night Witches in the West* grounds its resistance in operational reality—asymmetric tactics, gendered power, and the actual mechanics of organized insurgency. This dystopian resistance fiction has the political urgency of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the tactical grounding of Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

This is the first novel in a series.

Cassandra Mae (a pseudonym) is a career crisis response and counterinsurgency professional who joined the Foreign Service in 2014.



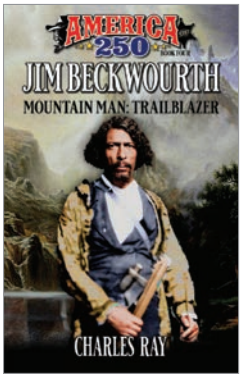
Daily American

Douglas E. Morris, Lulu Press, 2025, $12.99/paperback, e-book available, 372 pages.

Set in 1970s Italy, this atmospheric thriller is based on actual events and revolves around a newly transplanted American reporter who discovers that the English-language newspaper he is working for is actually a CIA front.

Once this subterfuge is discovered, he becomes entangled in a web of intrigue, espionage, and political extremism. Taking great risk along the way to expose the truth, he shows how an ordinary individual imbued with the courage of their convictions can make a difference in the world.

Former FS family member Douglas Morris served with his partner, retired FSO Kelly Degnan, in Ankara, Brussels, Pristina, Rome, Naples, Tbilisi, and Washington, D.C.



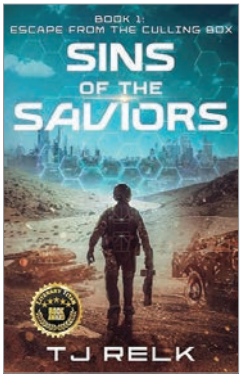
Jim Beckwourth: Mountain Man: Trailblazer

Charles Ray, DS Productions, 2026, $9.99/paperback, e-book available, 114 pages.

Enslaved at birth, James P. Beckwourth joined the Rocky Mountain Fur Company after being freed and went west as a trapper in the 1830s, carving out a reputation as a master scout, trapper, fighter, and adventurer.

Throughout his six-plus decades of life, he was involved in many pivotal events in U.S. history, from the California Gold Rush to the Seminole Wars. For many years, James lived among the Crow Nation, becoming a noted war chief and blazing a trail through the mountains from Nevada Territory to California that today bears his name.

Charles Ray was an FSO from 1982 to 2012, with assignments in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. He was the first U.S. consul general in Ho Chi Minh City and was U.S. ambassador to Cambodia and Zimbabwe. Other recent books include *The Fugitive from Texas: Adventures of Marshal Boone Collins* (2026), *Precious Cargo: The Adventures of Deputy U.S. Marshal Bass Reeves* (2026), and *Caleb Johnson Mountain Man: Trouble in the Tall Timber* (2025).



Escape from the Culling Box

TJ Relk, Dystopian Dreams Press, 2025, $14.99/paperback, e-book available, 199 pages.

In 2028 a tech billionaire is elected president as part of global conspiracy to replace governments with an AI network of control and deception. A U.S. soldier, David, returns from the forever war to a twisted shadow of the country and family he left decades ago. David's faith in family, nation, and truth itself is shattered, and he must rediscover who he is as he tries to decide if this new world is worth saving. Ruling network elites must also

decide whether to kill David to preserve control or use him to resurrect free will.

This is the first book in the Sins of the Saviors series.

Joe Relk served as a Foreign Service officer in Venezuela, Bolivia, Germany, Ecuador, Guatemala, Suriname, and Afghanistan. He is the author of *Afghanistan Through the Humvee Window* and the series prequel, *The Network Apostate*. Before joining the Foreign Service, he was a U.S. Army cryptology analyst, public relations specialist, journalist, talk show host, and photographer.



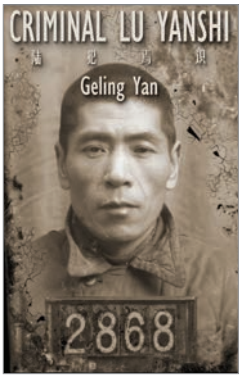
Voices on the Wind—Assault: A Novel of Malta in WWII

Helena P. Schrader, Cross Seas Press, 2026, $23.95/paperback, e-book available, 450 pages.

In 1942, control of the Suez Canal and access to Middle East oil depend on the fate of an island just 17 miles long by 9 miles wide: Malta. Determined to destroy the British forces threatening Rommel's supply lines, the Axis powers drop more bombs on Malta than were dropped on London throughout the Blitz. The population is forced underground, while the Royal Air Force struggles with inadequate resources to fend off defeat. Meanwhile, Britain's Atlantic lifeline is fraying.

Voices on the Wind tells the story of four of Malta's defenders.

Helena Schrader lived in Germany for 26 years, earning a PhD in history from the University of Hamburg before becoming a Foreign Service officer in 2005 and serving in Oslo, Lagos, Leipzig, and Addis Ababa. She retired from the Foreign Service in 2018 and now writes full-time from an island in Greece.

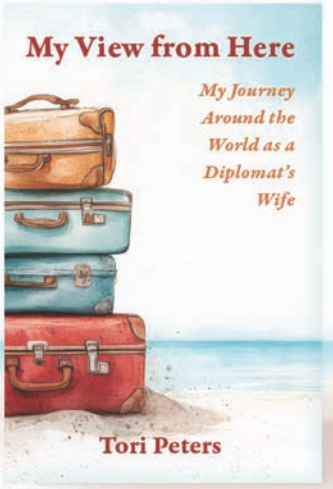


Criminal Lu Yanshi

Geling Yan, trans. Lawrence A. Walker, New Song Media GmbH, 2025, $32.99/paperback, e-book available, 536 pages.

Twentieth-century Chinese intellectual Lu Yanshi, a prodigy from a wealthy Shanghai family, travels to the United States to earn a PhD and sow his wild oats, but cannot escape his stifling social milieu, an overbearing stepmother, and his forced marriage to her niece. As war and revolution engulf China, Lu Yanshi speaks out for intellectual integrity but pays the price for it in prison and labor camp.

My View from Here
"★★★★/★★★★"
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"Before I knew it, a half-century of living, eating, and dreaming about Africa had passed."
—Mark G. Wentling

BORN IN KANSAS BUT MADE IN AFRICA
An American Man's Recollections of 50 Years In Africa

An extraordinary account of a man born and raised in Kansas who spent a lifetime in Africa, visiting all 54 countries.

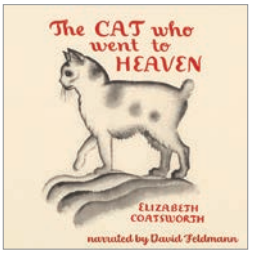
Readers will be interested to learn how the humble farm boy became a senior U.S. Foreign Service officer.

Available on Amazon.com

Written by Geling Yan, the spouse of retired FSO Lawrence Walker, and translated by Walker, the novel is based on the life experiences of Yan's grandparents and served as the inspiration for two films by Chinese director Zhang Yimou. The original Chinese-language book sold more than a million copies. Artist Ai Weiwei designed the front cover for this English-language edition.

Lawrence Walker, Yan's husband, joined the State Department in 1980 and served in Mexico City, Bonn, Taipei, Shenyang, and Washington, D.C. He worked for Bank of America from 1991 to 2004 before returning to the department and serving in Abuja, Taipei, Berlin, and Stuttgart. He retired in 2013.

FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULTS



The Cat Who Went to Heaven

Elizabeth Coatsworth, narrated by David Feldmann, independently published, 2026, $8.99/audiobook, 1 hour and 16 minutes.

While generations have treasured *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*—1931 winner of the Newbery Medal—this is the first audiobook production of the work.

When Elizabeth Coatsworth originally wrote the book in 1930, she broke the narrative into eight parts, ending each part with a "song of the housekeeper," which provided an emotional summary of the preceding scenes. Coatsworth presented the songs, however, as simple poems, never offering the chords or melodies that would allow a narrator to easily sing the songs.

Narrated by retired public diplomacy officer David Feldmann, this audiobook contains original musical compositions based on Coatsworth's lyrics from the text.

David Feldmann joined the Foreign Service in 2004 and served in Chennai, San Salvador, Laskhar Gah, Dar es Salaam, Maputo, Johannesburg, and Washington, D.C. He retired in 2026.



Lilly Bug and Friends: Hoedown Hulabaloo

Kevin Manly, independently published, 2026, $11.99/paperback, print only, 34 pages.

In *Hoedown Hulabaloo*, Taylor Spot heads to the tiny town of Wee Whoa for the biggest country hoedown ever. But when a malfunctioning invention transforms Lilly Bug and her friends into hilarious animal hybrids and scatters machine parts across town, they must work together to fix the chaos before the show begins.

This is the latest book in the heartwarming children's book series that follows Lilly Bug and her friends as they navigate exciting adventures in the magical community of Wee Whoa. Each story combines fun, humor, and colorful characters with valuable lessons about friendship, resilience, teamwork, and protecting the world around us.

Kevin Riha, who publishes under the pen name Kevin Manly, has been a Diplomatic Security Service agent for 16 years. He has served in New York City, Lahore, Bogotá, Nairobi, and Detroit. He is currently posted in Nuevo Laredo.



Hum Rise

Nancy J. Nelson, Brown Leaf Press, 2025, $16.99/paperback, e-book available, 341 pages.

They told you disclosure would change everything. It did, but not in ways the powerful could accept. The corporations lost. But the Pentagon hasn't. And the people who profit from keeping humanity sick and dependent are not done fighting.

Vicki Heywood is back at the State Department, this time running the office nobody wanted to create: the Office of Multispecies Relations. Washington is more dangerous than ever. The Department of Defense wants control of the alien question, and it's willing to kidnap, smear, and silence anyone who gets in the way. The old guard has one weapon left: to make people afraid. The young people—human, Suede, and Alpha Centaurian—have something stronger.

This is the second book of the Disclosure Files series.

Nancy Nelson spent 25 years as an economic officer with the State Department, serving in Caracas, Managua, Tallinn, Ottawa, and Washington, D.C.



Avatars of the Pantheon: Four Girls Come Together

Jackson Owens, independently published, 2026, $15.00/paperback, e-book available, 334 pages.

In this fantasy for young adults about goddesses, power, and found family, a mysterious letter brings together four girls from very different worlds: Sophie Griffin, a Sentinel of the proud Aurorium clan; Annabelle Salazar, an unruly privateer with a dangerous past; Regina Fournier, a silver-eyed scholar from the land of libraries; and Lisa Nozaki, a highborn heir of Verdantia.

For 14 years, Brother Albert Thompson has watched over them in secret, knowing their births foretold a coming darkness. But when assassins and witch-crafted machines strike from the shadows, his quiet vigil comes to an end. Drawn together by fate, the girls are forced to face the truth: they are Avatars—living vessels of the goddesses who shaped their world.

This is the first book of four in the Avatars of the Pantheon series. All are now out and available for purchase.

Jackson Owens joined the State Department in 2013 and has served in Johannesburg, Frankfurt, Vienna, Brussels, and Washington, D.C. He is currently posted in Frankfurt.



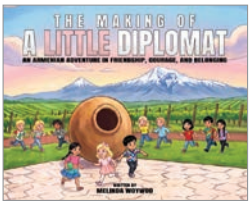
"Chulo": The Great Journey of the French Bulldog: A True Story of Love, Family, and Home

Nury Stemple, Storytime Publisher House, 2026, $15.99/paperback, e-book available, 38 pages.

This bilingual children's tale was inspired by the true story of Chulo, a French bulldog who traveled throughout Kenya, Europe, and the United States with his Foreign Service family, discovering family, friendship, and home along the way.

Author Nury Stemple wrote *"Chulo"* during a season of grief, after losing both her husband and her dog. It also grew out of a deeper need for more bilingual, culturally rich children's books that encourage youngsters to celebrate culture, love, and family.

Nury Stemple is a first-tour Foreign Service officer posted in Monterrey, Mexico.



The Making of a Little Diplomat—An Armenian Adventure in Friendship, Courage, and Belonging

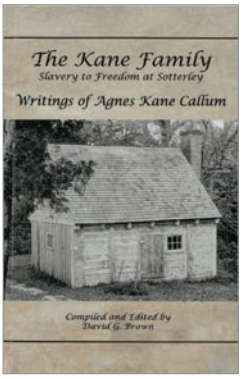
Melinda Woywood, Inspired Journal, 2026, $23.00/paperback, e-book available, 76 pages.

Every year, thousands of children pack their bags, say goodbye, and follow their families to the far corners of the world. If that sounds familiar, this book is for you—whether your family serves overseas at a diplomatic post, in the military, Peace Corps, or a corporate position, or just simply travels often.

Violet's mom served with USAID until she was caught up in the 2025 reductions in force (RIFs). Her story, intended to teach children ages 5–9 diplomatic skills and good behavior, demonstrates that the best adventures begin with a goodbye. Through it children and their parents will learn to navigate tricky conversations about leaving one place and starting anew.

Melinda Woywood served nine years as a USAID FSO posted in Washington, D.C., Afghanistan, and Armenia. She lost her job in last year's RIF and says writing the book helped her and her family process the sudden loss of her career.

HISTORY



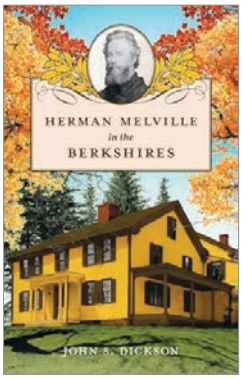
The Kane Family: Slavery to Freedom at Sotterley

David G. Brown, ed., The Printing Press, 2025, $20.00/paperback, print only, 111 pages.

Born in 1925, Agnes Kane Callum was the descendant of enslaved workers at the Sotterley Plantation in St. Mary's County, Maryland. Callum joined the Board of Trustees of Historic Sotterley in 1991 and shared her research concerning the story of her ancestors' enslavement at the plantation and their transition to freedom following emancipation. In this book, retired FSO David Brown collects Callum's writings and offers endnotes that provide editorial context.

David Brown spent 32 years in the Foreign Service, including assignments in Ho Chi Minh City, Tokyo, Beijing, Taipei, and as deputy consul general in Hong Kong. His last assignment was as director of Korean affairs in Washington, D.C. He retired in 1996.

To purchase the book, write to officemanager@Sotterley.org.



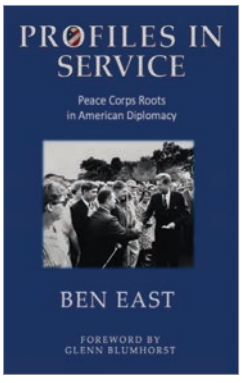
Herman Melville in the Berkshires

John S. Dickson, The History Press, 2026, $24.99/paperback, print only, 160 pages.

The mountains, rivers, forests, waterfalls, and lakes of the Berkshires in western Massachusetts have long attracted artists and writers. Author Herman Melville first came to the Berkshires as a young boy and was so inspired by the surroundings that he returned to live there for 13 years, in one of the most productive writing periods of his life. He finished his masterpiece *Moby Dick* in his first year there, seated in his study with a view of Mount Greylock.

Writing about Melville's experience there, retired Foreign Service Officer John Dickson thinks his wanderings will strike a chord with FSOs, noting that Melville once wrote: "No matter how long I stayed in a foreign country, I was not of it, but an observer, looking in from the outside."

John Dickson joined the Foreign Service in 1964 and was posted in Taipei, Saigon, Yokohama, Tokyo, Vienna, Beijing, Oslo, Hong Kong, and Washington, D.C.



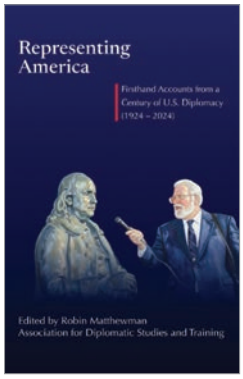
Profiles in Service: Peace Corps Roots in American Diplomacy

Ben East, Arlington Hall Press, 2026, $19.95/paperback, e-book available, 307 pages.

From the founding of the Peace Corps in 1961 to more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, *Profiles in Service* recounts how JFK's bold experiment shaped diplomatic careers and influenced modern U.S. diplomacy, tracing how the volunteer experience contributed to the successful careers of many leading Foreign Service members.

Drawing on Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) oral histories and contemporary interviews, the book follows volunteers who tracked looted antiquities in Iraq, built relations in Kabul after 9/11, secured village infrastructure in Vietnam, and were taken hostage in Iran. As the Peace Corps turns 65, *Profiles* offers a timely reflection on how citizen diplomacy contributes to U.S. foreign policy—and why those roots matter.

Ben East was a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi from 1996 to 1998. He joined the Foreign Service in 2002 and served in Jeddah, Managua, Accra, Mexico City, Mumbai, and Washington, D.C., before retiring in 2023. East, a member of the FSJ Editorial Board, has also written two novels: *Two Pumps for the Body Man* (2016) and *Patchworks* (2017). This is his nonfiction debut.



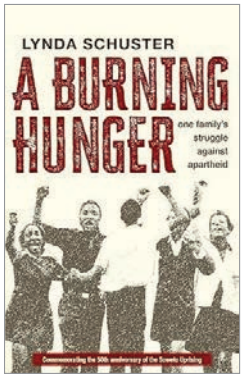
Representing America: Firsthand Accounts from a Century of U.S. Diplomacy (1924–2024)

Robin Matthewman, ed., Arlington Hall Press, 2025, $29.95/paperback, e-book available, 374 pages.

History comes alive when told through firsthand accounts, and U.S. diplomats tell a host of riveting, unforgettable stories, from the amusing to the tragic to the headline-making.

Representing America is an anthology of more than 300 of these stories from the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training's Foreign Affairs Oral History collection, a decades-old treasure trove of great moments in history for historians, authors, journalists, genealogists, foreign policy specialists, and students. Opening a window into a century of U.S. diplomacy, this book reveals how members of the U.S. Foreign Service have shaped historic events, served the American people, and faced both sacrifice and danger in the line of duty.

Editor Robin Matthewman retired from the Foreign Service in 2022 after 35 years. She then joined ADST as a staff oral historian and has worked with interviewees from all levels and specialties. She led a team of retired U.S. diplomats, including Chris Sibilla, Peter Eicher, Carol Peasley, David Reuther, and Teresita Schaffer, to select and edit these excerpts and was aided by dozens more who suggested topics and reviewed draft chapters.



A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid

Lynda Schuster, Ohio University Press, 2026, $35.00/paperback, e-book available, 472 pages.

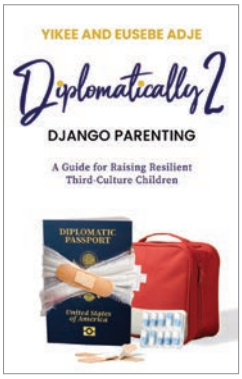
On June 16, 1976, the youth of Soweto rose up in protest against a new rule making Afrikaans the language of instruction in their schools. Tsietsi Mashinini, a charismatic high school student, led them in demonstrations that quickly turned into South Africa's biggest rebellion.

Tsietsi's actions that day changed his country irrevocably and forever defined his family. The Mashinini name became the stuff of legend; many of Tsietsi's 12 siblings and even his parents found themselves pulled into the fight against apartheid. If the Mandelas were the generals in the fight for liberation, the Mashininis were the foot soldiers.

Originally published in the United Kingdom to critical acclaim and now being reissued in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Soweto uprising, *A Burning Hunger* tells the tale of this remarkable family.

Lynda Schuster is married to Ambassador Dennis Jett, a retired career Foreign Service officer and U.S. ambassador to Mozambique and Peru. She accompanied him to postings in Malawi, Liberia, Mozambique, and Peru.

SELF-HELP



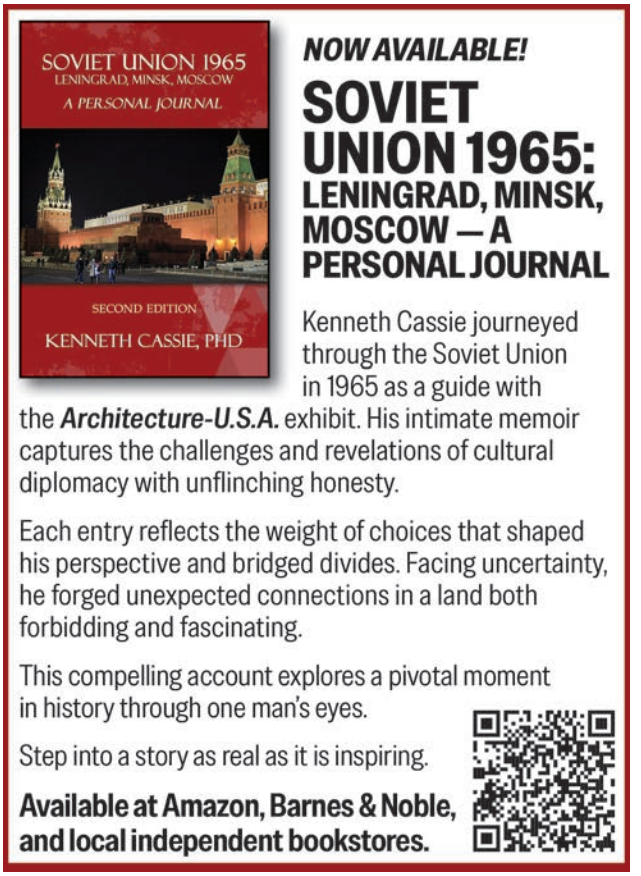
Diplomatically 2: Django Parenting, a Guide for Raising Resilient Third-Culture Children
Yikee and Eusebe Adje, independently published, 2026, $16.95/paperback, e-book available, 141 pages.

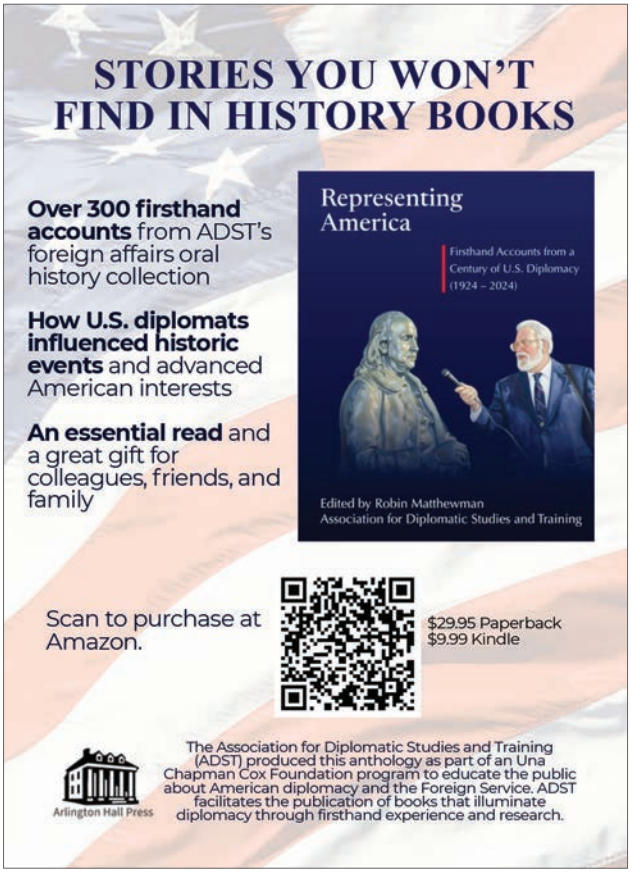
In a world of shifting global politics, rapid AI advancement, and economic whiplash, many parents are haunted by the same question: How do I prepare my children for a future I can't predict?

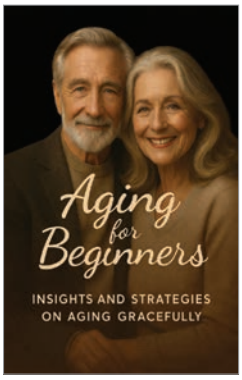
Yikee Adje returns with the second book in her Diplomatically series, this time challenging modern parenting norms. To navigate the constant upheaval of moving and raising five multicultural children across Africa, Adje and her husband turned to the generational "tough love" wisdom of Benin.

With a blend of storytelling and self-deprecating humor, Adje shares her 23 "Django Parenting for Resilience Principles" for raising hardworking, self-sufficient children who are prepared for any challenge in life.

Yikee Adje joined USAID in 2012, became an FSO in 2016, and moved to the State Department in 2025. She has served in Cotonou, Kinshasa, and Senegal, and is currently based in Dakar as the deputy assistance coordinator for the West Africa Foreign Assistance Hub. Adje is also an adjunct leadership coach in the State Department's coaching program.





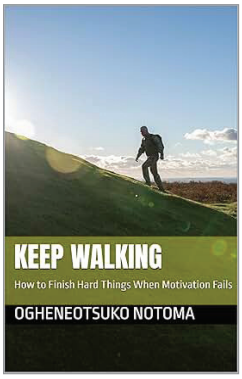


Aging for Beginners: Insights and Strategies on Aging Gracefully

Leroy Elder, independently published, 2026, $9.99/paperback, e-book available, 136 pages.

This guide is for anyone seeking clarity, confidence, and peace of mind while navigating the natural journey of growing older. Through approachable insights and practical guidance, readers are invited to embrace each stage of life with grace rather than apprehension. Instead of viewing aging as decline, this book reframes it as a meaningful season of growth, resilience, and deeper connection. Growing older is inevitable, but this book reminds readers that aging well is a choice.

Leroy Elder is the pen name for Alfred Vincent, a retired Foreign Service security officer who joined the State Department in 1985. He served as a security attaché in Ankara, Zambia, Bonn, Almaty, Yaoundé, Sarajevo, and Rangoon. His last assignment was as security inspector with the department's Office of the Inspector General. He retired in 2011 and now lives in Durham, North Carolina.



Keep Walking: How to Finish Hard Things When Motivation Fails

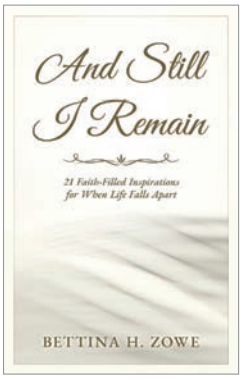
Ogheneotsuko Notoma, Kindle Direct Publishing, 2026, $14.99/paperback, e-book available, 200 pages.

From growing up in Nigeria to joining the U.S. military and working in the cybersecurity, diplomacy, and academic realms, Ogheneotsuko Notoma shares personal stories on how discipline, resilience, and consistency can turn ordinary effort into a lasting legacy.

Built around the W.A.L.K. Framework—why you started, accountability to progress, legacy through consistency, keep walking—the book is both memoir and practical guide for anyone rebuilding momentum in adulthood. For those wondering if it is too late, *Keep Walking* offers a clear reminder: You do not need to sprint. You just need to keep walking.

This is the second and final book in the author's W.A.L.K. series.

Ogheneotsuko Notoma joined the Foreign Service as a specialist in 2012. He has served in Colombo, Zagreb, Paris, Tokyo, Islamabad, and Frankfurt.



And Still I Remain: 21 Faith-Filled Inspirations for When Life Falls Apart

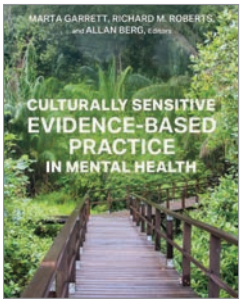
Bettina H. Zowe, independently published, 2026, $13.99/paperback, e-book available, 122 pages.

For more than two decades, Bettina Zowe served with international NGOs and USAID, helping disaster-affected people navigate devastating crises. This was more than a job: It was her calling. Nothing prepared her for the emotional trauma, deep spiritual wounds, and financial turmoil that would ensue following the agency's dismantling.

This devotional is a spiritual lifeline for anyone experiencing personal loss or unexpected crisis, intended to help them reconnect with God, confront the voices that might be drowning out their purpose, and adopt intentional, daily habits to stay anchored through any storm.

Bettina Zowe is the pen name of former USAID FSO Betty Kraus. She spent 10 years at the agency, first as a contractor. Her first post as an FSO was Abuja (2022–2024). At the time of the 2025 reductions in force, she was studying French in preparation for an onward assignment to Kinshasa.

POTPOURRI



Culturally Sensitive Evidence-Based Practice in Mental Health

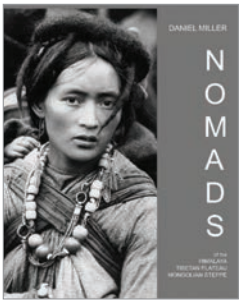
Marta Garrett, Richard M. Roberts, Allan Berg, eds., Cognella Academic Publishing, 2025, $54.95/paperback, e-book available, 442 pages.

This book gives graduate students and current practitioners a foundation in evidence-based practice (EBP) by laying out the fundamentals of research consumption at the master's level and production at the doctoral level.

Emphasizing the practicality of several evidence-based therapies, it does a deep dive into how these therapies can be culturally friendly and implemented in various contexts beyond their Western origins. Case studies throughout the text offer real-world scenarios to demonstrate the application of these interventions.

Co-editor Richard M. Roberts is a retired Foreign Service

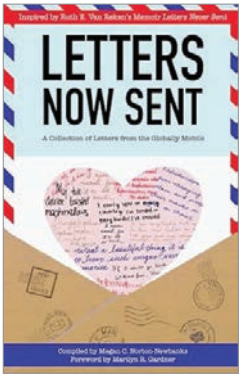
officer who served in Niger, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil. He previously taught psychology in Europe and Asia with the University of Maryland Global Campus.



Nomads of the Himalaya, Tibetan Plateau, and Mongolian Steppe
Daniel Miller, independently published, 2026, $36.00/paperback, print only, 160 pages.

With 81 black-and-white photographs covering 50 years from 1975 to 2025, this book provides an overview of nomadic pastoralists in Nepal, Bhutan, Tibetan areas of China, and Mongolia. It was published this year to celebrate the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

Daniel Miller spent 14 years as a Foreign Service officer with USAID, serving in Washington, D.C., Kabul, New Delhi, Manila, Port Moresby, Ulaanbaatar, and Islamabad.



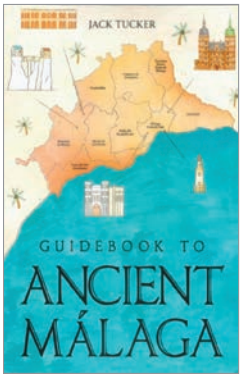
Letters Now Sent: A Collection of Letters from the Globally Mobile
Megan C. Norton-Newbanks, ed., Beyond Borders Publishing, 2025, $15.99/paperback, e-book available, 339 pages.

Letters Now Sent is a collection of letters written by and to individuals who have lived cross-culturally. Inspired by Ruth E. Van Reken's seminal *Letters Never Sent*, this first volume opens a window into the emotional landscapes of identity, belonging, and transition.

Compiled by lifelong letter-writer and third culture kid consultant Megan Norton-Newbanks, *Letters Now Sent* is more than a book—it's a cultural archive. These are not anonymous reflections or polished essays. They are primary source documents that preserve and speak directly to the challenges and beauty of crossing cultures and borders.

Together, they offer an intimate view into layered identities and the enduring power of handwritten connection as both art and historical record.

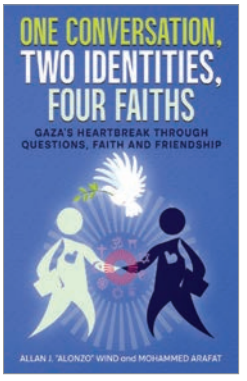
Megan C. Norton-Newbanks is the daughter of retired Foreign Service Officer James Norton. She grew up in South Africa, South Korea, Germany, Japan, and Israel and continued her travels as an adult in Austria, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and six U.S. states. She is also the author of *Belonging Beyond Borders: How Adult Third Culture Kids Can Cultivate a Sense of Belonging* and *A Work of Heart: A Collection of Artwork from Multicultural Individuals.*



Guidebook to Ancient Málaga
Jack Tucker, Olympia Publishers, 2026, $28.99/paperback, print only, 220 pages.

This guide provides precise GPS coordinates to numerous ancient sites in Spain's Málaga province and shares information about first-century BC coins and mint cities. It's a must-read for visitors to Andalusia interested in archaeology and numismatics.

Jack Tucker was a Foreign Service officer from 1980 to 2006, serving in San Salvador, Melbourne, El Arish, Santo Domingo, Baku, Tashkent, and Riyadh. Upon retiring, he worked as a reemployed annuitant (REA) in Jalalabad, Baghdad, Kyiv, Yekaterinburg, Dhaka, and Jerusalem until 2023.



One Conversation, Two Identities, Four Faiths: Gaza's Heartbreak Through Questions, Faith, and Friendship
Allan J. Alonzo Wind and Mohammed Arafat, Enable & Ennoble, 2026, $37.99/paperback, e-book available, 358 pages.

Retired USAID FSO Allan Wind spent two years leading medical missions in Gaza. Poet Mohammed Arafat grew up in Gaza, surviving blockade after blockade before fleeing to the United States. This book represents a dialogue between these two unlikely friends that is by turns heartbreaking, funny, furious, and full of hope.

Through memoir, poetry, and honest conversation, they take readers inside the Gaza most Americans never see—the fish markets and fig groves before October 7, staff meetings under rocket fire, the 12-kilometer walk along the shore under a sky full of stars—and into the moral questions that haunt us all. The book includes photos from Gaza before and during the war, and practical steps toward interfaith understanding.

Allan J. Alonzo Wind was an FSO from 1999 to 2019, serving in Santo Domingo, Lima, Managua, Luanda, Abuja, Baghdad, Kabul (TDY), and Pretoria. He also served in Gaza/East Jerusalem as a mission director with International Medical Corps. ■

FEATURE



Only What YOU CAN FIT in Your Lap

After the author's house was attacked and looted, other embassy family members were evacuated across the river, into an uncertain future.

BY JOHN DUNLOP



John Dunlop was the USAID mission director in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central Africa region when the story below took place. He began his Foreign Service career as a health officer and has served in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Madagascar, Jordan, Iraq (two tours), and Afghanistan. He is a two-time recipient of the State Department Award for Heroism. Dunlop retired from USAID in September 2025 as a minister counselor.

Read about Dunlop's harrowing escape from rioters in DR Congo in the September-October 2026 FSJ.

The fall of Goma in mid-January 2025 sent shockwaves through the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) that reached all the way to the capital, Kinshasa.

The U.S. embassy had announced on January 27 that unrest was possible. Early the next morning, it was already clear that the usual low-level protesting outside the embassy was going to be something else entirely. Staff traveling to work and buses going to the international school were turned around. Those already at embassy or USAID facilities were told to shelter in place.

By 7:30 a.m., large-scale demonstrations had erupted across the city, targeting foreign embassies and expatriate-owned businesses. By late morning, cars were burning in the streets and explosions could be heard in areas of town where many embassies were located. Both the U.S. embassy and its administrative compound, located roughly half a mile apart, came under attack.



COURTESY OF JOHN DUNLOP

U.S. embassy family members on the Congo River arriving in Brazzaville.

Across the city, embassy and USAID mission staff sheltered behind compound walls with their families, monitoring radio traffic and waiting. They heard my radio calls, heard me report that my gate had been breached by demonstrators. Far from embassy security services, in a city with impassable roads, they called their children inside and secured their doors, waiting for instructions.

Later that afternoon, as the situation in the city stabilized, the deputy chief of mission (DCM) convened an Emergency Action Committee, and the ambassador approved its recommendation: immediate evacuation of all nonemergency personnel and their dependents.

The evacuation route had been rehearsed several times. All staff and their families were to go to the DCM's residence before moving in groups to the river docks, where small boats would carry them across the Congo River to relative safety in neighboring Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville). The plan was straightforward. The execution, beginning at 2 a.m. on January 29, was not as smooth.

The first complication had already occurred before the protests began. On January 27, most senior USAID leadership in Washington had been placed on administrative leave. In the preceding week, the new administration had systematically restricted USAID's operational and financial systems, locking controllers and financial staff out of the payment platforms that govern everything from procurement to emergency reimbursements. By the time the evacuation was ordered, USAID had been badly hobbled at a system-wide level.

There were almost no officials in Washington with both the authority and the system access to support USAID's share of the operation. Emergency support meetings in Washington that would normally have been filled with experienced and specialized staff dwindled rapidly as participants lost access or were directed to stand down. The dedicated staff who remained did what they could, but they operated in a near-vacuum of leadership, authority, and tools.

The DCM's residence told its own story. Anxious adults, children of all ages, toddlers, dogs, and cats covered every available surface, trying to rest before their group was called. The evacuation had begun at 2 a.m. and no one had slept meaningfully the night before. The air in the house was thick with exhaustion and worry. Potable water ran low.

Evacuation instructions had been clear: Bring one carry-on bag or backpack per person. Only what you can fit in your lap. Some families used their single bag to bring a pet. Others had to leave animals behind. Many evacuees had winter coats tied around their waists, an incongruous sight in the equatorial heat of Kinshasa, but everyone on those docks understood they were heading to Washington, D.C., in late January.

Each river crossing took less than 10 minutes. On the far side, staff from U.S. Embassy Brazzaville were doing their best to support this sudden and overwhelming influx.

In Brazzaville, evacuees were housed in hotels overnight as the full weight of what had happened began to settle. Children who had been managing on adrenaline started to cry, from exhaustion, from confusion, from missing a parent who had stayed behind.

Far from embassy security services, in a city with impassable roads, they called their children inside and secured their doors, waiting for instructions.

On the flight itself, people pulled together. Adults who were not parents circulated through the cabin entertaining the small children of their tired colleagues. Older children built blanket forts in the empty seats. Amid everything—the shock, the grief, the uncertainty about what waited on the other end—the people on that aircraft supported one another.

State Department personnel were met on arrival at Dulles, assisted with temporary housing and other needs. The system, though imperfect, functioned. People were seen and cared for.

But for USAID staff, the arrival in the United States marked the beginning of a second ordeal. Stepping off the plane on a Friday evening, USAID employees were met by a few Africa Bureau professional staff—but in an informal capacity.

With talk of reductions in force (RIFs) widespread, it was unclear if USAID would support the evacuees at all. The first blow: Staff who were hoping to move on to safe havens elsewhere in the United States were told they would be required to stay in or near Washington, D.C., under newly imposed rules prohibiting telework.

Over the next few days, with hostility radiating from USAID HQ at the Ronald Reagan Building, staff scrambled to find and sign leases for expensive D.C.-area housing. They had no choice and no time; it was winter and shelter was critical.

That Sunday night, just before the start of the workweek, an email arrived instructing USAID employees that the Reagan Building was closed and that no one would be allowed to enter. The email was unsigned. No explanation was offered.

APPLY FOR AN AFSA SCHOLARSHIP



Recipients of AFSA's 2025 Merit Award Scholarships with D-MR Michael Rigas, FYSF President Paul Sutphin, and former AFSA President, Tom Yazdgerdi.

Over the course of the program's history, AFSA has awarded nearly $8 million to Foreign Service kids attending college.

Applications will be accepted starting **December 11, 2026**.

Deadline to apply for Merit Award Scholarships is **March 15, 2027**.

Deadline to apply for Financial Aid Scholarships is **April 19, 2027**.

For more information, visit **www.afsa.org/scholar**.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT | ART MERIT | COMMUNITY SERVICE | FINANCIAL AID



COURTESY OF JOHN DUNLOP

Evacuees on the bus with their dog headed to the port in Kinshasa.

That same weekend, public statements began to circulate from senior officials in the new administration describing USAID as a criminal organization, calling for it to be destroyed, to be "fed into the wood chipper."

For these FS members—parents and children who had just spent 20 hours on a plane after evacuating under threat of violence from a high-threat posting in service to their country—the words were not abstract. They were a direct betrayal of the contract of support and protection from the organization and the country they had spent their careers serving, just when they needed that support most.

No senior political leadership within USAID was willing to engage with the newly arrived evacuees, and requests directed to both State and USAID were met with silence. USAID families began accumulating significant debt to pay for food and temporary lodging, with no assurance that any of it would be reimbursed. Real fear began to set in: Did evacuees still have jobs? Were they facing liability for housing leases that would never be reimbursed? How would they enroll their children in school? Were they perhaps even facing homelessness?

The few USAID Washington employees who heroically worked to support people and keep them informed had almost no information to share. They explained, honestly, that they were reading the same news headlines and court filings as everyone else, trying to understand what was happening to the agency.

Only after a direct appeal from the U.S. ambassador in Kinshasa did the State Department agree to extend evacuation subsistence and related allowances to USAID staff—initially promised for one month only. Even then, USAID's internal payment systems had been largely locked, and reimbursement processing was repeatedly interrupted. Financial staff occasionally managed to regain temporary access to the system and began to process payments, but that access would again be revoked within a day or two.

Staff waited months for reimbursement. Several entry-level officers and contractors faced the genuine prospect of bankruptcy. For weeks at a stretch in February and March, evacuees did not know whether they were authorized to work. Communications from Washington were cryptic by design, calibrated more to intimidate than to inform.

Within a week of the evacuation, it was apparent that USAID itself was being systematically dismantled. Evacuated staff faced the threat of immediate termination as well as the real possibility that the agency would not support their return to post to retrieve household effects abandoned in their rush to escape ahead of the rioting mobs.

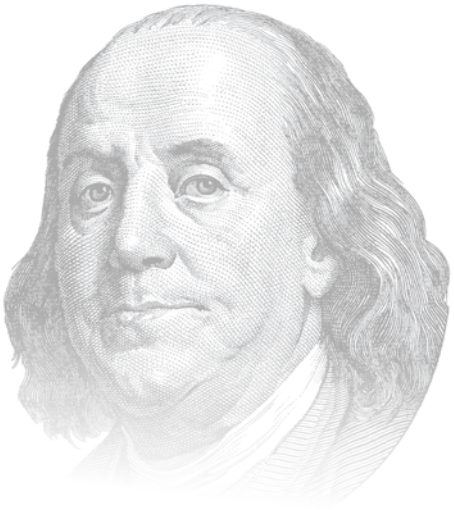
As USAID mission director, I remained in Kinshasa while my wife was evacuated with the rest of the families. I left for the United States about one month later, returning to the DRC that summer with my deputy mission director, contracting officer, and deputy executive officer. Like so many others at missions around the world, we oversaw the closure of a $1.3 billion annual program for the Central Africa region and managed the termination of approximately 250 Congolese and regional staff.

The evacuation from Kinshasa was, technically, a success: Everyone got out, no one was hurt in the process, and the logistical machinery of river boats, airplanes, consular officer support, and host-country cooperation performed largely as designed.

But the USAID personnel who boarded that plane tell a different story, one of deliberate abandonment by the institution they had served, financial precarity, professional erasure, and the particular cruelty of being told, after risking everything, that their service had not mattered and their agency did not deserve to exist.

The emotional accounting of that year is harder to measure than the financial one, and it is far from complete. ■

FS HERITAGE



Building a Constituency *for* U.S. Diplomacy

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training celebrates four decades of work to support diplomats and foster greater public appreciation for their work.

BY FRAN LESKOVAR

For 40 years, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) has served the Foreign Service community by capturing, preserving, and sharing the experiences of U.S. diplomats, ensuring that their historical insights and lived experiences continue to inform and inspire practitioners, students, policymakers, and the broader public.

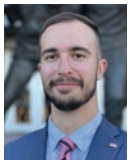
ADST was founded in 1986, when Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Director Stephen P. Low and Ambassador Richard B. Parker envisioned a nonpartisan, nongovernmental 501(c)(3) educational membership organization whose mission would be to support instruction at FSI and the future National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC), then in the early stages of construction. ADST was conceived to not only support diplomatic tradecraft instruction at FSI/NFATC but also foster greater appreciation for U.S. diplomatic tradition and practice among Americans.

As Low reflected in the late 1980s: "The association can help a great deal to make the new campus not just another training center, but a center of focus for American diplomacy. It can help build that constituency that we always complain that we don't have; a constituency of Americans who recognize that we've played a role in the world and that we can feel some pride in that."

The Oral History Project Is Born

Around the same time that Low and Parker were laying the foundation for ADST, newly retired Foreign Service Officer Charles Stuart Kennedy was beginning an effort that would eventually become one of its signature programs. The inspiration came while attending the funeral of his former boss, Ambassador Burke Elbrick. As Kennedy later explained in his oral history: "I realized how many stories [Elbrick] had told us in Belgrade about things he did as a junior officer, and what he had done throughout his career, and I thought, 'Gee, somebody really should have gotten those stories on the record.' I thought maybe somebody better start doing something about it. I started to see the glimmers of an oral history program."

Together with another retired consular officer, Vic Wolf, Kennedy quickly set about turning the idea into reality, identifying best practices in oral history, and exploring funding



Fran Leskovar is ADST's special projects coordinator, focused on integrating emerging technologies into diplomatic tradecraft training and instruction. His work includes developing AI-based training tools and initiatives for diplomatic practitioners, as well as digital storytelling projects designed to educate the broader American public about our nation's diplomatic history. A passionate oral historian, Leskovar is committed to making the experiences of past generations accessible.

ISTOCKPHOTO/RA3RN

opportunities. What began largely as a volunteer effort aimed at preserving the experiences of U.S. diplomats found its first home at The George Washington University, later moving to Georgetown University.

The paths between Kennedy's vision and Parker and Low's organization first crossed in an unlikely place—an article introducing ADST in the pages of *State Magazine*. As Kennedy later recalled, with his unique sense of humor and candor: "An organization started over at the Foreign Service Institute, which we hadn't heard about before. We read about it in *State Magazine*, and we thought, 'We're two retired consular officers of no great distinction, and here was an outfit with a bunch of ambassadors running it, and they were going to do oral histories [among other programs].' We looked at each other, thinking 'We're dead.'"

As it turned out, Kennedy had little reason to worry. In 1988 Parker invited him to incorporate his oral history work into the association, and ADST's Foreign Affairs Oral History Program as we know it today was born. Stu Kennedy received the 2014 Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award from the American Foreign Service Association. Read the interview with him in the September 2014 *Foreign Service Journal* (https://afsa.org/turning-tables-interview-stu-kennedy).



ADST

Charles "Stu" Kennedy, founder of ADST's oral history program, interviewing the Ben Franklin statue at the NFATC campus in the early 2000s.

The close relationship between ADST and FSI was embedded in the association's identity from its earliest years. In 1987 the Department of State detailed its first Foreign Service officer to the organization to serve as executive director, establishing a practice that would continue uninterrupted for nearly four decades, until July 2025.

ADST was also closely involved in preparations for the 1993 inauguration of NFATC. Reflecting on his first year as ADST president following his retirement as director of FSI, Low recalled: "The first year was largely taken up with preparing for the inauguration of the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. … We [ADST] wanted to make a big splash, and I think we succeeded."

Becoming a National Treasure

ADST eventually found its home on the newly built campus, where it became a long-standing partner in supporting NFATC's mission and initiatives. For Low, the association's presence at NFATC offered an opportunity to "create an awareness of the history of American diplomacy" and foster "a climate of interest in [the] study of U.S. foreign policy" through the oral history collection.

As ADST entered its second decade, it expanded its activities by developing new programs that documented and narrated the experiences of U.S. diplomats. In 1995 ADST inaugurated its book program as "a service to the Foreign Service," as Low told newly hired Publishing Director Margery Boichel Thompson. Conceived to not only preserve diplomatic experiences but also encourage FSOs to write about diplomacy and help them publish their works, the program flourished under Thompson's leadership.

The ADST-DACOR Diplomats and Diplomacy Book Series, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, was the first to be launched. The Memoirs and Occasional Papers series soon followed, as did ADST's own imprint, Arlington Hall Press. The ADST book program has grown into a respected source of books on diplomacy and the U.S. Foreign Service, with more than 120 titles to date, including many award-winning publications.

While the book program broadened public access to diplomatic experiences and insights, ADST continued to search for ways to reach new audiences beyond its traditional foreign affairs circles. As Low would often remark, "Diplomacy is well known for its lack of constituency." To raise awareness of U.S. diplomatic history and illustrate how diplomacy has contributed to the nation's development since 1776, ADST created an exhibit that narrated the story of diplomacy from its founding, highlighting the oft-overlooked role it has played in advancing U.S. interests and shaping the nation's history.

Display panels were put up at both NFATC and the National Defense University. Eventually, with the help of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation—a longtime supporter of the association—

The close relationship between ADST and FSI was embedded in the association's identity from its earliest years.

ADST updated the exhibit and developed a traveling version, as part of its Century of Service initiative, bringing the story of American diplomacy to communities across the country.

Yet the program Charles Stuart Kennedy first envisioned in the mid-1980s as a retirement hobby project remains at the center of ADST's mission. Over time, the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program has become the association's flagship initiative. With more than 3,100 oral histories publicly available on the ADST website and, since 2004, at the Library of Congress, the collection, which gradually expanded from senior diplomats alone to capturing voices across foreign affairs, documents more than a century of U.S. diplomacy and engagement with the world.

Rich in historical insights, personal anecdotes, and lessons learned from those who lived it, the archive has become what former Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) aptly described as a "national treasure" for practitioners, congressional offices, scholars, students, and the American public. Today it stands as one of the largest and most comprehensive diplomatic oral history collections in the world.

Sustaining and growing a small nonprofit organization has not been without challenges, however. Through it all, under a succession of senior FSOs serving as ADST president, countless staff, volunteers, and supporters, together with the hundreds of interns taken under their wings, have remained committed to carrying ADST's mission forward. They dreamed, innovated, adapted, and persevered. They remained committed to public service and to ensuring that the experiences of U.S. diplomats would be preserved and passed on to future generations. While small in numbers, these men and women have left a big mark on the organization and even on the study, understanding, and appreciation of U.S. diplomatic history.

Going Strong at 40

Forty years later, ADST remains committed to its roots. While much has changed since the time of Low, Parker, and Kennedy, the association continues to thrive, building on their vision while embracing new opportunities, technologies, and audiences. Whether collecting oral histories, developing AI tools to support diplomatic tradecraft instruction, publishing books on diplomacy, providing diplomatic history resources to active-duty foreign affairs professionals, bringing the experiences of U.S. diplomacy to communities across the country through the Portraits in Diplomacy initiative, or honoring American diplomats and U.S. Marine Security Guards through the U.S. Foreign Service Commemorative Coin Act, ADST remains guided by the conviction that our history is enriched by the experiences and voices of those who lived it.

As Senate Historian Emeritus Don Ritchie—whom Kennedy consulted while establishing ADST's oral history program—noted during the opening reception for ADST's exhibit, "U.S. Diplomacy: From Its Beginnings to Today," in the Senate's iconic Kennedy Caucus Room in early 2026, it was remarkable to witness an organization that began as a hobby grow into the professional institution it is today.

For me personally, as a young foreign affairs professional, it has been an honor and a true privilege over the past two years to contribute to ADST's mission and learn valuable lessons from generations of our nation's diplomats. As ADST enters its fifth decade, its story—like the history of U.S. diplomacy itself—belongs as much to the future as to the past. So, let's keep writing it! ■

"A Passport to Diplomacy"—The ADST Internship Program

ADST's internship program has become an important component of its mission, introducing hundreds of American students to the practice of diplomacy, the experiences of America's diplomats, and careers in the U.S. Foreign Service.

Although its structure and size have evolved considerably since the program was established more than 30 years ago, its central objective has remained the same: bridging generations of foreign affairs professionals and inspiring the next generations of Americans to answer the noble call of public service.

Recently the program has undergone a comprehensive revitalization, blending a traditional internship with a structured educational component. Informally called the Diplomatic Leadership Academy, it provides interns with opportunities to engage directly with diplomatic practitioners through sessions exploring various dimensions of diplomatic work.

For many interns, the experience becomes a first "passport to diplomacy," bringing a profession observed from afar and often misunderstood into sharper focus. Interns are encouraged to see themselves not only as learners but also as contributors, pursuing new ideas, taking ownership of projects, and leaving behind initiatives that continue to shape the association's work.

For more information or to apply, go to https://adst.org/about-adst/interns.

2026 AFSA Awards

Honoring Distinguished Service and Constructive Dissent



AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

AFSA is proud to announce the winners of the 2026 AFSA Awards recognizing outstanding achievement, constructive dissent, and exemplary service across the Foreign Service community.

- **Award for Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy:** Ambassador William J. "Bill" Burns
- **Foreign Service Champions Award:** the Federal-Postal Coalition
- **F. Allen "Tex" Harris Award for a Foreign Service Specialist:** Eric Burkett
- **Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy:** Greg Bauer
- **Nelson B. Delavan Award:** Vicky Ward
- **M. Juanita Guess Award:** Janessa Schilmoeller
- **Avis Bohlen Award:** Mary Millburn
- **Award for Achievement and Contributions to the Association:** Morton Dworken Jr.
- **Special Achievement Awards:** Charlee Doom, Leslie Fenton, and Our USAID Community (OUC)

An interview with Lifetime Contributions award recipient Bill Burns, as well as profiles of all the honorees, and coverage of the award ceremony will appear in the January-February 2027 edition of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

CALENDAR

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

November 11
Veterans Day
AFSA Offices Closed

November 18
12–1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

November 26–27
Thanksgiving
AFSA Offices Closed

December 9
12–1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board Meeting

December 24–31
Christmas
AFSA Offices Closed

2027 AFSA ELECTIONS

Consider Running for Office

AFSA election season begins in January. Learn how to get your name on the ballot.

See page 70.





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This Is Not Normal

By the time you read this column, I will no longer be an active-duty Foreign Service officer, though I will remain AFSA State VP. Retiring at the peak of my career had not been my plan.

The Foreign Service gave me the privilege of serving our country for more than two decades in a career I cherish. As the child of Indian immigrants, I've had a chance to give back to my country, one that had given me so much opportunity.

But after more than 24 years, I reluctantly realized that the State Department no longer had a place for me and my family.

I did my part: serving in hardship posts, loyally advancing multiple presidents' agendas (including during the first Trump administration), taking care of my teams, and doing my best to build the institution.

Leading Embassy Amman as deputy chief of mission (DCM) and chargé d'affaires, through the war in Gaza and the 2025 Israel-Iran war, was the privilege of a lifetime. The department recognized my efforts, including with senior performance pay three years in a row.

Yet, after the department canceled my detail assignment as AFSA State vice president in July 2025, I found myself, like so many colleagues, unable to find a job for the first time in my career.

If you are in a similar position in today's department, you are not alone. Many of us are out here, struggling to understand what happened.

Being sidelined and pushed out is not our fault. It's about what the department has become since January 2025. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan: I didn't leave the State Department; the State Department left me.

I'll be the first to admit that the Foreign Service has never been perfect. Far from it. We all know there is much to improve if we are to truly harness the extraordinary talent of our people.

But what we've seen over the past year and a half, despite leadership's platitudes, isn't reform. It is the demolition of the nonpartisan, meritocratic Foreign Service we knew, and its replacement is something much darker.

Meritocracy and nonpartisanship came under attack on day one. Career ambassadors who had served with distinction were recalled without explanation. Outgoing DCMs selected through the rigorous DCM/Principal Officer process in the previous administration had their assignments pulled on the eve of departure.

Entry-level employees were elevated into significant senior roles for which they were not prepared, apparently because of their closeness to senior political appointees.

And in the coup de grâce to any semblance of meritocracy, the department fired more than 1,300 Foreign Service and Civil Service employees based on the positions they happened to encumber on a given date.

These RIFs targeted bureaus and offices whose work the new leadership disliked while ignoring employee performance entirely, making a mockery of the Foreign Service's long tradition of merit.

The 2025 promotion boards underscored the absurdity when they recommended at least 10 of our RIFed colleagues for promotion, judging them ready to serve at the next level at precisely the moment the department was casting them out.

Then there is the pervasive partisanship. We have all, unfortunately, grown accustomed to government shutdowns. But until 2025, I had never seen official department communications blame one political party. In the past, we received neutral messages explaining the mechanics of a lapse in appropriations.

In 2025 the State Department website carried a banner blaming the "Democrat-led shutdown," and emails to the workforce echoed the same partisan tone. Leadership's embrace of partisanship has predictably filtered throughout the institution. Previously unheard-of levels of political vetting in the bidding and hiring process, including inquiries into employee party affiliation, are now all too common.

Colleagues wonder whether past political donations or assignments will count against them in bidding. Political minders at the Foreign Service Institute edit course curricula and screen outside experts' presentations to ensure ideological alignment.

For those new to State, I can assure you: This is not normal. I went more than 20 years in the Foreign Service without once thinking about my political donation history or whether to scrub my experience as a civil rights attorney from my résumé.

Despite the protestations of the relatively few but empowered defenders in the building that this is all simply an effort to correct past ideological imbalances, I think most of us can see this for what it is: the systematic politicization of a once nonpartisan bureaucracy—the same thing we've seen in compromised political systems around the world. I shudder to think what things will look like if this trajectory continues unchecked.

Finally, though it may be uncomfortable to hear, it has become impossible to ignore the white nationalism that has taken hold. The department has embraced rhetoric about the primacy of "Western civilization" and Christianity, decrying non-white immigration as "civilizational decline." This profoundly narrows the idea of what it means to be an

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The World Still Needs Us

There is a version of this moment that the administration would like Americans to accept: that USAID was wasteful, its mission redundant, its workforce replaceable. The evidence for these claims is thin, and it is getting thinner as the consequences of dismantling the agency become visible in real time.

But even among those who accept that the expertise was real and the investment was significant, a quieter argument is gaining ground: that none of it was America's responsibility from the beginning. Why should U.S. taxpayers keep children alive in Africa?

It is worth answering directly. The argument is a moral but also strategic and economic one—and we have failed to make this case loudly enough.

What we did. Start with the breadth of what the agency actually did. USAID did not just deliver food and medicine.

It built water and sanitation infrastructure that kept disease outbreaks from becoming epidemics.

It supported governance reforms that gave fragile democracies a fighting chance against authoritarian backsliding.

It invested in agricultural development that created functioning economies and, in turn, markets for U.S. exports.

It funded the surveillance systems that served as the world's early warning network for the next pandemic.

For every $1 invested in USAID agricultural programs, studies have found returns of more than $8 in economic value. The cuts put more than 200,000 U.S. jobs at risk and could cost the United States $23 billion in exports.

I have said it before, but it bears repeating: USAID was not charity. It was investment, and the American taxpayer benefited from the returns in ways both easy and hard to quantify.

What we lost. Now look at what the withdrawal has produced. An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, declared a global health emergency by the WHO in May, is spreading at a pace that experts trace directly to the collapse of U.S.-funded surveillance infrastructure.

In Kenya, the cancellation of more than 80 USAID-funded programs, including water and sanitation projects already under construction, has left communities exposed to disease spikes those projects were designed to prevent.

And people have died. Journalists have documented deaths from interrupted antiretroviral therapy, malaria medication that never arrived, and abandoned treatment regimens.

We do not have a precise count, and we will not get one. The systems that tracked those outcomes were dismantled along with the programs. But the absence of a number is not the absence of a toll.

The suffering wrought by these decisions is not staying overseas.

Losing the race. Which brings us to the competition argument, because this is where the "it's not our job" framing completely breaks down.

Consider the reputational damage. For every deceased child, a community watched and knew exactly why: The U.S. assistance keeping them alive was withdrawn. They know this because we told them. Every clinic, every food distribution, every water point carried the words "from the American people." We spent decades making sure our generosity was visible. We should not be surprised that our absence is equally visible.

And where the gaps *are* being filled, it's Chinese infrastructure investment, development financing, and influence purchased at scale doing the filling, in precisely the countries where USAID used to work. Russia fills the space with security arrangements that trade stability for loyalty.

The question was never whether the world would be shaped by outside powers. It is which ones, on whose terms, and with whose interests at the center.

Every dollar USAID spent abroad was a dollar that improved the standing of the United States in the world and limited our strategic competitors' ability to advance their interests. That competition did not end when USAID did. It simply became a competition for which we stopped showing up.

What comes next? A reckoning is coming. Whoever wins the next election will inherit the consequences of these decisions. They will have to decide what to rebuild, how fast, and at what cost.

The case for doing so will be easier to make, and the path clearer, if we set the record straight now, before the decisions calcify and the institutional knowledge needed to reverse them fades further from reach.

The people who understood all this—who spent careers making these arguments, building these systems, and sustaining these relationships—are no longer in government. The knowledge they carried did not transfer to a spreadsheet when they left. It went with them.

Nearly two years on, the evidence is not ambiguous. The world still needs this work, and America still needs the people who know how to do it.



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Neither Fish Nor Fowl, but Not Toast

AFSA has represented the Foreign Service for more than 100 years. Since the 1970s, we have been both a union and a professional association, a comfortable role appreciated by our members in multiple agencies.

Part of that comfort stems from so many Governing Board members over the years having been in senior management positions—ambassadors, assistant and deputy assistant secretaries (DAS), office directors, counselors, and heads of embassy divisions—before volunteering to serve as AFSA leaders.

From my own experience as a DAS and as acting Director General, working with AFSA at that time on promotion precepts and other policies affecting the Foreign Service provided useful ideas to effectuate our work and ensure fairness in our treatment of colleagues.

The current administration is attempting to undermine that deeply productive relationship at the State Department.

We remain both the professional organization and the union for other foreign affairs agencies and continue to work constructively with their leadership, with some exceptions. We are also challenging the change in status at State and elsewhere through multiple court cases.

Despite the hostility directed at our union by some senior leaders in the department, we continue to stand up for our members' interests through many vectors. Our Office of General Counsel is not only litigating cases but also working through other avenues to combat unfair labor practices and executive actions in contravention of the Foreign Service Act.

Our communications team does a fabulous job of educating the public about the importance of our work. AFSA President John Dinkelman and other Governing Board members have made numerous appearances in the press, further proliferating this message. And you, our alumni, have done a great job with op-eds and networking to spread the word even further.

As alumni and retirees, you help us through your messaging and interaction. When our legislative director visits members of Congress, legislative staff, and others on the Hill, the engine of information has an effect. Members of Congress learn from us: We are deeply nonpartisan. Our work and our mission are to look after U.S. interests, help Americans in trouble abroad, and assist our businesses in foreign markets.

So our success on the Hill in ensuring your benefits are not reduced depends on both sides of the aisle seeing the Foreign Service as it is—deeply invested in our country's welfare, often at personal risk to us and our families.

Please keep up your good work in letting your communities know of the Foreign Service's sacrifices, work, and commitment to the United States. ■

State VP
Continued from page 62

American—and this isn't just rhetoric.

In one of the crueler turns, colleagues who devoted much of their careers to resettling refugees of every race, ethnicity, and religion now find themselves allowed to help, in practice, only one community: white Afrikaners.

What message does the department send to its many first- and second-generation American employees when it establishes an "Office of Remigration"? Are we included in the call to go back to where we've come from?

What does that say to the thousands of locally employed staff who serve alongside us around the world, some of whom hope one day to immigrate to the United States?

When you couple the white nationalist rhetoric with the elimination of DEIA and the end of employee affinity groups, it feels an awful lot like we've gone back decades, in less than two years, from a State Department that welcomed all its employees to one that values white people only.

While I, like many others lately, have left the department, I recognize that most of you reading this will stay, for a variety of reasons. Some of you must. Some of you want to continue nobly serving the American people. And some of you welcome the department's new direction. Whatever your reasons, one thing I've observed over the past year is that many of us, myself included, have become compartmentalized.

When things are this chaotic, it's natural to keep your head down and focus on what's within your own orbit. As we move forward as a Foreign Service community, I encourage everyone to step back and see the full picture of the department and the Foreign Service as they are now—the bad and the good.

Without a complete record of where we've landed, it will be difficult to restore and reimagine the department when the opportunity comes. In the meantime, I will take heart knowing the seriousness with which each of you honors your oath—an oath to the U.S. Constitution rather than to any one president.

As for me, I will keep working from the outside (and through AFSA) to protect and defend the nonpartisan, meritocratic Foreign Service that all Americans deserve. ■

End-of-Year Advocacy Update

In the House of Representatives, the Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) has been focusing on Foreign Service Act reform.

Anticipating this effort, AFSA used findings from its *State of the Foreign Service in 2025* survey and previous surveys to identify priorities, with a central goal of preserving the foundational elements that make the Foreign Service and its workforce a distinctive and effective instrument of U.S. statecraft.

AFSA also worked with members of Congress throughout the year to introduce several of our priorities through stand-alone legislation. During this process, AFSA has emphasized that meaningful reform requires resources to implement new policies and programs.

A major development came on June 2 with the introduction of the Foreign Service Modernization Act (HR 9086), the centerpiece of the House's Foreign Service Act reform effort and a significant compromise from both sides of the aisle.

On June 9, HFAC considered and reported out HR 9086 alongside other legislation affecting Foreign Service personnel.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee leaders pursued reform through a Fiscal Year 2027 Department of State Authorization Act, submitted as an amendment to the Senate's FY27 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

On September 16, the House passed HR 9086 by voice vote. The bill largely reflects the text HFAC reported out on June 9, but it omits the section that would have preserved Foreign Service members' state residency for purposes such as income and personal property taxes while serving abroad or in another state under official orders.

The removal was expected, since the provision is a tax policy change outside HFAC's jurisdiction, and AFSA will continue to advocate for this protection.

The bill retains several provisions AFSA supports, including protections for employees who take external training or detail assignments, a 12-month deadline for hiring decisions for Foreign Service fellows after they complete their educational requirements, and measures to prevent unnecessary delays in sending promotion and tenure lists to Congress.

As of early September 2026, however, the Senate had not formally considered its version of the NDAA or adopted the manager's package containing the latest State Department authorization legislation.

AFSA communicated its support for provisions that would strengthen the workforce while raising concerns about those it believes could harm employees' careers or the institution in both efforts. We will continue to emphasize these points over the coming months.

AFSA's advocacy efforts also delivered meaningful results at the state level over the past year.

AFSA expects provisions from both the Senate authorization bill and the House's Foreign Service Modernization Act to be considered for inclusion in the final FY27 NDAA. Bipartisan amendments contained in HR 9087, which amends HR 9086, are also expected to be part of negotiations.

Still, the path forward remains uncertain. Consideration of the final FY27 NDAA is unlikely before the lame-duck session following the 2026 midterm elections.

Tensions surrounding the war with Iran have brought additional scrutiny to the NDAA, while the unpredictable nature of lame-duck sessions could affect the legislation's ultimate outcome.

AFSA's advocacy team reviewed these congressional efforts in a series of member town halls in August. We'll have a full readout on outcomes in late 2026 or early 2027.

AFSA's advocacy efforts also delivered meaningful results at the state level over the past year, advancing policies that directly benefit Foreign Service members, retirees, and their families.

In Minnesota, AFSA-supported legislation secured a full state income tax exemption for Foreign Service retirement income. Florida enacted new homestead tax protections allowing eligible Foreign Service families serving overseas to maintain their residency benefits, while Maryland codified federal provisions allowing Foreign Service members and their spouses to use valid out-of-state professional licenses when relocating to another state on official assignments.

These successes build on AFSA's ongoing state advocacy and relationships with legislators across the country.

In 2027 AFSA will continue pursuing opportunities for Foreign Service pension tax exemptions and other policies that recognize and support the unique needs of the Foreign Service community. ■

—Kim Greenplate, director of congressional advocacy, and Sean O'Gorman, advocacy and policy manager

Meet the 2026 AFSA Essay Contest Winner

Diem Jennings, a senior at Convent of the Sacred Heart in New York, New York, has won AFSA's 2025–2026 National High School Essay Contest. Her winning essay, "Present at the Destruction: American Foreign Policy and the Abandonment of Diplomatic Engagement," argues that the United States cannot sustain global leadership following deep cuts to its diplomatic corps and soft-power institutions.

Theodore Kinsella, a junior at Venice Senior High School in Los Angeles, California, took second place for his essay, "The Pen, the Sword, and the Diplomat: On American Soft Power."

This year's contest asked students to respond to the prompt "The Fragile Front Line: U.S. Diplomacy and the Future of Soft Power," addressing how the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the effective closure of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, the suspension of exchange programs including Fulbright, and a roughly 25 percent reduction in the Foreign Service have affected the United States' ability to build and sustain relationships abroad.



Diem Jennings



AFSA/HANNAH HARARI

Diem Jennings with AFSA's Director of Professional Policy Issues Lisa Heller at AFSA HQ in Washington, D.C. on August 19.



AFSA/HANNAH HARARI

Diem Jennings with U.S. Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins at Le Diplomate in Washington, D.C., on August 19.

In her winning essay, Jennings explores what she describes as a pattern of American self-sabotage in foreign relations, from a proposed U.S. hospital ship deployment to Greenland that Denmark declined, to a January 2026 military operation in Venezuela conducted without UN authorization, to shifting trade alliances in Latin America.

She writes that the erosion of U.S. soft power has created openings that competitors, particularly China, have moved to fill, but also argues the damage is not irreversible with sustained investment in the Foreign Service and renewed alliance-building.

Jennings traces her interest in diplomacy to studying Mandarin in Taiwan through the State Department's NSLI-Y program. "Diplomacy can seem abstract, but to me, it's deeply personal," she says. "What we need [in a world full of conflict] are listeners, connectors, and relationship-builders."

She plans to major in international politics and economics at Middlebury College and pursue a career as a Foreign Service officer.

As the contest winner, Jennings received $2,500 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., along with an all-expense-paid Semester at Sea voyage. Her school will also receive 10 copies of *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*.

On August 19, Jennings traveled to Washington, D.C., where she visited the Royal Embassy of Denmark for a meeting with the Greenland Representation, had lunch with Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, toured AFSA headquarters, and visited State Department headquarters.

"Popsicles with Dink" Caps Off Summer

AFSA staff and Governing Board members took to the streets again on August 26 for "Popsicles with Dink," handing out frozen treats, AFSA swag, and membership information to Foreign Service and Civil Service employees during the hot afternoon commute.

Wearing AFSA-branded merchandise and holding signs to draw attention, staff distributed cards with a QR code linking to AFSA's join/renew page alongside the refreshing popsicles.

AFSA President John Dinkelman, a fixture at both events, reflected on the initiative in his September-October *FSJ* column, writing that the popsicle giveaway was part of what AFSA is all about: "being here for you when things get hot."

The outing followed on the heels of this summer's popular "Donuts with Dink" event, which gave members a chance to see a familiar face outside the usual channels of email and social media.



AFSA/NADJA RUZICA

President John Dinkelman, popsicles in hand, greets members of the Foreign Service community on a hot D.C. afternoon, August 26.

AFSA Opens Its Doors

This fall AFSA welcomed members of the Foreign Service community to headquarters for a series of events aimed at building connections with colleagues and leadership.

The season opened on September 9 and 10 with lunch open houses for the September A-100 class. On September 23, AFSA hosted a member happy hour, and on October 8, it welcomed the September orientation class to HQ.

All the events were well attended, giving guests the chance to talk with AFSA leadership and network with colleagues. AFSA President John Dinkelman and State Vice President Rohit Nepal spoke, reaffirming that AFSA stands by its members and remains committed to protecting the Foreign Service community.



AFSA/MARK PARKHOMENKO

Left: The State Department Federal Credit Union has generously sponsored many member happy hours in partnership with AFSA.

AFSA thanks everyone who joined, including the State Department Federal Credit Union, our sponsor for the member happy hour, and looks forward to seeing more members at future events.



AFSA/MARK PARKHOMENKO

Below: Colleagues and friends gathered at AFSA headquarters on September 23 for an evening of catching up and meeting new faces.

We Track the FAM, So You Don't Have To

Changes to Discipline, RIFs, Assignments

We're continuing our regular feature highlighting instances in which the administration has been implementing important changes in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) without negotiation or consultation about impacts on those in the workforce.

In the September-October AFSA News, we noted changes to the FAM dealing with the annuity exception, public communications, and the list of offenses subject to disciplinary action, as well as the special needs education allowance.

In this edition, we look at updates to discipline procedures, reduction-in-force (RIF) protocols, and senior leadership assignments. All these updates were made without explanation or, notably, consultation with AFSA. As the ways members can land in trouble keep growing, we will keep you informed through our regular communications.

AFSA staff review the FAM regularly, but we also encourage members who notice changes to the FAM or the Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH) to let us know at member@afsa.org. ■

—Lisa Heller, AFSA director of professional policy issues

To highlight this issue:

3 FAM 4340, 4350, 4360—Disciplinary Action

These three sections—4340 (Reprimand), 4350 (Suspension), and 4360 (Separation for Cause)—are all sections of the disciplinary chapters of the FAM and all have similar changes. "Reasonable time" to respond has been removed, and whereas in the past those stationed overseas had 30 days to respond to formal notifications of disciplinary actions, (and those working in Washington had just 15 days), in the new version, everyone has 15 days to respond. Further, the language for requesting extensions has been removed. In 3 FAM 4369 (Separation for Cause) advance notification of unsatisfactory performance of duties and a 90-day period to improve performance prior to a discipline proposal have been removed.

AFSA Take: This is consistent with other agency actions aimed at separating people from the service as quickly as possible without regard to established timelines and process.

3 FAM 2580 Reductions in Force—Foreign Service

Shortly before last year's RIFs of FS personnel, HR (formerly GTM) changed the standards for such RIFs from a global standard (i.e., all those at a given grade and cone were in one competition group) to narrow groups that were defined by office. Whereas previously those in position to potentially be RIFed were compared against hundreds of others in their grade and cone, during the July 11, 2025, RIF, at least two-thirds of those RIFed were in a competition group of one (themselves) thus rendering any notion of RIFs based on performance, tenure, veterans' status, etc., completely meaningless.

AFSA Take: This sets a dangerous precedent that essentially allows the department to define who it will RIF without consideration of Foreign Service Act requirements that tenure, performance, and veterans' status be considered.

3 FAH – 1H – 2425.8-2 (A) Chiefs of Mission, 3 FAH – 1H-2425.8-3 (DCMs and Principal Officers)

A new phrase has been added: "No category of employee shall be favored over consular officers in the selection process for assignment of [COMs, DCMs, and POs] because the U.S. Department of State and our embassies and consulates abroad have no greater responsibility than the protection of U.S. citizens overseas."

AFSA Take: This one has us scratching our heads. While we're all for protecting U.S. citizens overseas, this seems to suggest that consular officers get priority in overseas leadership roles (and also implies that those in other cones can't or won't protect U.S. interests). It's unclear the extent to which this was actually an SOP in the latest round of COM selections.

3 FAM 5300 Department Relationships with EOs

There are two changes to this section: the removal of "sexual orientation and gender identity" from the list of nondiscrimination requirements and the addition of the requirement in 3 FAM 5315 that all previously recognized employee organizations (EOs) reapply for recognition within six months of the publication of the FAM updates. As the updates were published on February 5, 2025, this deadline would have been in September 2025.

AFSA Take: Although neutral on paper, the requirement that EOs re-register is clearly designed to discourage any such activity as potential leaders of such groups would be reluctant to come forward in the current atmosphere. We are aware of some groups that have moved to register as nonprofit organizations, but most EOs at State are currently dormant.

Facing Discipline? AFSA Is Here to Help

AFSA's Office of the General Counsel (OGC) assists members facing investigations and discipline arising from alleged misconduct. Allegations of improper conduct can sometimes lead to harsh discipline that can damage a career. The situation can be stressful, embarrassing, and potentially career-altering. Know that you do not have to navigate the process alone. AFSA is here to help.

Even when an allegation does not result in a proposed separation, discipline can have serious and lasting consequences. For example, for suspensions of more than five days, the discipline letter remains in an employee's official personnel folder (OPF) until the employee is promoted (3 FAM 4355). Because promotion can be extremely difficult with such discipline in the record, the employee may be at risk of reaching their time-in-class (TIC) limit before receiving a promotion.

Changes to 3 FAM 4370

While the State Department has not issued new rules for conduct, we have seen a trend in that agency toward applying sterner penalties. Also, as we reported to our members on July 31, AFSA was alerted to unilateral changes to 3 FAM 4370, which governs penalties for misconduct and applies to all foreign affairs agencies. The requirement that disciplinary action be consistent with "like penalties for similar offenses" and take mitigating and aggravating circumstances into account was removed. The revised FAM states that proposing and deciding officials are not bound by prior decisions in similar cases.

The department also removed guidance requiring disciplinary action to be "fair and equitable" and any penalty imposed to be no more severe than sound judgment required to correct the conduct and maintain discipline.

Common Pitfalls

Many of the cases we see originate overseas. Life in an embassy or consulate comes with special pressures and strictures. The same standard of conduct, however, applies both domestically and overseas. To help members protect themselves and their careers, AFSA offers the following reminders regarding some of the most common pitfalls we see.

Relationships: The Foreign Service does not make you take a vow of chastity. You are permitted to have personal and romantic relationships with people in your office or at your post. However, some basic guidelines apply. Sexual or romantic relationships involving employees married to other people can be disruptive to a post and raise vulnerability concerns. They can therefore result in curtailment, discipline, and/or the suspension or revocation of your clearance.

An employee who becomes sexually or romantically involved with someone in their chain of command must get a carve out—you absolutely cannot supervise someone with whom you are romantically or sexually involved. If you are involved with a local national, you must report your contact in accordance with 12 FAM 270, 22 State 39456.

In all things relationship related, exercise good judgment. A romance gone wrong, especially at a small post, can prove disastrous to morale and could harm your career. They can and do result in accusations of sexual harassment.

Sexual Misconduct and Notoriously Disgraceful Conduct: The department has issued clear guidance on these topics, which we recommend everyone review (17 State 53436). In practical terms, here are some key things to avoid, based on what we see.

• Don't hire prostitutes or escorts, even if prostitution is legal in the country to which you are assigned, and even if the person calls herself or himself something else.

• Marijuana is still illegal as far as the federal government is concerned. If you are at a party where drugs are being used, you should leave (24 State 47470).

• Don't engage in "promiscuous" behavior. "Promiscuous" is not clearly defined by the FAM, but the "good judgment" standard should apply. Relationships gone wrong can have serious consequences. Having multiple relationships increases that likelihood.

• Never access pornography on your government computer or phone.

• Spousal or child abuse will have swift and serious consequences. All reports of abuse must be investigated. Be aware that what some consider acceptable methods for disciplining children may not be seen that way by others in the community and could result in reports of child abuse.

• Be careful about texts and messages sent to department employees or on group chats. Even if the messages are personal or "off-hours," they can still get you in trouble, especially if overseas.

Sometime people bridle at what they see as intrusion into their private lives, but Foreign Service members represent the United States 24/7, hold positions of public trust, and possess security clearances. Your agency has the right to hold you to specific standards of conduct. Diplomatic status does not excuse unlawful or improper conduct.

Alcohol: A huge number of discipline cases we see involve the excessive use of alcohol, which can lead

Continued on page 70

Office of the General Counsel
Continued from page 69

to physical confrontations, harassment, inappropriate comments, and impaired driving (24 State 47470).

Be moderate in your alcohol use, especially overseas, especially in public. Never drive when you've been drinking. This is true even if the country to which you're assigned has lax laws or enforcement about drinking and driving.

Pay attention to whether and how you're using alcohol to deal with life stressors. If alcohol is affecting your judgment, health, relationships, or work, seek help before an incident occurs.

Social Media and Electronic Communications: Social media is a part of our daily lives. But as a Foreign Service member, keep in mind that any form of communication is governed by social norms and etiquette, and requires good judgment and common sense (21 State 33406, 5 FAM 790).

Anyone who has ever said something they wish they hadn't, tried to recall an e-mail sent in haste, or deleted a comment on Facebook understands the impact that the spoken and written word can have in our personal and professional lives.

Electronic media, particularly anything put on the internet, presents its own unique perils and challenges. As the saying goes, "What happens on the internet, stays on the internet." The less you put on social media, or in an email, text, or group chat, the better.

Other Issues: Make sure to understand when and when not to use a government credit card. Likewise, be careful when using a government vehicle. We frequently see problems arising with incidental trips, e.g., someone legitimately takes a GOV home but stops along the way to pick up their child. Ensure that before you take sick or annual leave, that leave has actually been approved.

Contact OGC Early

OGC does not judge members for seeking assistance. Our role is to protect members' rights, help them understand the process, ensure that they receive due process, and provide the strongest guidance and representation available under the circumstances.

Do not avoid contacting us because an allegation is embarrassing or because you regret what occurred. Do not wait until after an interview, a written statement, or a proposed disciplinary action to seek advice. The earlier we become involved, the more effectively we may be able to assist.

Members facing an investigation, proposed discipline, a final disciplinary action, or a related security-clearance matter are encouraged to contact OGC at https://bit.ly/OGCcontact.

—Heather Townsend, AFSA senior grievance counselor

AFSA Governing Board Meetings, July 15 and August 19, 2026

At its July meeting, the board conducted a review of AFSA's summer events and discussed new business.

At its August meeting, Gross Mendelsohn, AFSA's auditing partner, presented its annual financial review in place of an audit. See page 72 for more.

NEWS BRIEF

2027 AFSA Governing Board Elections Are Coming

Every two years, AFSA members choose who will represent them, and this is your chance to shape the next chapter. The call for nominations for the 2027–2029 AFSA Governing Board is on the horizon, with positions open across every constituency.

Serving on the Governing Board means helping steer a multimillion-dollar organization with real influence in Washington, D.C., to secure congressional funding for the Foreign Service, advocate for fair treatment of members, and tell the story of U.S. diplomacy to the public.

AFSA does not recruit candidates directly; it depends on members stepping forward. The Committee on Elections encourages nominees from all backgrounds and constituencies, because a diverse board is a stronger board.

Full nomination procedures, position descriptions, and key deadlines will be detailed in the January-February *Foreign Service Journal* and via an upcoming AFSAnet. In the meantime, start thinking about whether this is your moment to lead.

Questions can be directed to election@afsa.org.

Service Disrupted

What Comes Next for Foreign Assistance?

One year after the effective end of USAID, three experts with deep ties to the agency gathered for another installment of AFSA's "Service Disrupted" webinar series on September 9 to grapple with a central question: What should come after the wood chipper?

The panelists, former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, former USAID civil servant and author Nicholas Enrich, and AFSA Governing Board member Austan Mogharabi, reflected on the human and strategic costs of the agency's dismantling before turning to proposals for rebuilding U.S. foreign assistance.

Enrich, whose book, *Into the Wood Chipper*, chronicles the agency's collapse, said the warnings he raised early on have "unfortunately" come to pass, citing hundreds of thousands of deaths in the year since USAID's programs were dismantled, with millions more projected in years ahead.

Natsios pointed to concrete consequences often overlooked by the American public, including the loss of early warning systems for natural disasters and the collapse of a health data network, established under the Reagan administration, that once helped detect disease outbreaks including Ebola.

The panelists offered different perspectives on what should replace the agency. Natsios called for a new, cabinet-level Department of International Development that would consolidate aid functions and restore a decentralized mission structure.

Enrich argued against simply reviving USAID as it existed, instead favoring a stand-alone agency built around more flexible funding. Mogharabi suggested that reviving USAID through existing legislation may prove more politically achievable than standing up an entirely new department.

All three pushed back on the administration's rebranding of foreign assistance as "trade, not aid," with Natsios citing MIT research showing USAID missions historically helped U.S. businesses enter new markets abroad.

Natsios also cited internal polling suggesting growing unease among evangelical and Catholic conservative voters over the agency's dismantling, which he said is prompting quiet political recalibration within the Republican Party.

Audience questions focused heavily on advocacy and next steps, with many attendees asking what ordinary supporters of foreign assistance could do to help reverse the damage.

Panelists urged supporters to stay engaged through storytelling, community outreach, and continued pressure on lawmakers. "It's not over," Mogharabi promised.

This webinar coincided with the release of the *FSJ*'s September-October issue, dedicated to documenting USAID's legacy and the consequences of its dismantling.

A full recording of the webinar is available at https://www.youtube.com/@AFSAtube.

Money Worries

Beyond the Numbers

Why do so many financially secure Foreign Service members still worry about money? That question anchored AFSA's September 15 webinar with William Carrington, a certified financial planner, and Dr. Huong Diep, a board-certified clinical psychologist and certified financial therapist.

Carrington has found that "understanding your financial life often relieves more anxiety than simply having more money." Diep focused on what happens when the numbers look fine but the worry persists. The brain, she explained, can react to a market drop as it would to a snake on a trail: "The numbers may say safety, but our body may remember danger."

Diep walked through four "money scripts" identified by researchers Brad and Ted Klontz: avoidance, worship, status, and vigilance. Vigilance is a common pattern—in a poll of registrants, 68 percent said closely monitoring their finances helps them feel safer. That habit can be healthy, Diep noted, until it keeps people from enjoying money they can afford to spend.

A recording of the webinar is available on the AFSA website at https://afsa.org/afsa-videos, and more from the presenters is at https://carringtonfp.com and https://drhdiep.com.

For retirement questions, contact AFSA Counselor for Alumni and Retirees Brian Himmelsteib at himmelsteib@afsa.org.

Strong Fiscal Stewardship in FY 2025

AFSA has completed its fiscal year 2025 financial review, once again demonstrating the organization's strong financial management and commitment to responsible stewardship of member resources.

For the first time in 17 years, AFSA elected to undergo a financial review rather than a full independent audit. The decision was made after careful consideration as a practical way to reduce costs and administrative burden while still obtaining an independent assessment of the association's financial statements. This approach reflects AFSA's confidence in its long-established financial controls and its commitment to using member dues efficiently.

AFSA partnered with its accounting firm, Gross Mendelsohn, to conduct the review. During the review process, the firm's professionals examined AFSA's financial records and accounting practices and performed procedures designed to identify any material issues that would require further attention.

The review found no concerns regarding AFSA's finances, internal financial reporting, or accounting practices. The positive outcome continues a long-standing record of sound fiscal management.

For nearly two decades, AFSA has maintained rigorous accounting standards, transparent financial practices, and effective oversight of its operations. The FY25 review provides additional assurance that the association remains on solid financial footing and is well positioned to continue serving the interests of Foreign Service professionals around the world.

The decision to move from a full audit to a review for FY25 was a strategic choice intended to save both time and money while still preserving independent verification of the organization's financial statements. The successful completion of the review confirms that AFSA's financial systems and controls continue to function effectively.

Executive Director Ásgeir Sigfússon welcomed the results, noting that they reflect the dedication and professionalism of AFSA's staff and leadership: "The fiscal year review confirms what our members expect and deserve: prudent financial management, strong internal controls, and complete accountability for the resources entrusted to AFSA.

"We are pleased that Gross Mendelsohn found no issues with our finances, and we remain committed to maintaining the highest standards of transparency and fiscal responsibility while ensuring that member dues are used wisely and effectively."

The final FY25 financial review has been posted on AFSA's website at https://afsa.org/sites/default/files/2025statement.pdf and is available for members who wish to learn more about the association's financial position and operations. ■

—Ásgeir Sigfússon, AFSA executive director

Mark Matthews Joins FSJ Editorial Board



The Foreign Service Journal is pleased to welcome Mark C. Matthews to its Editorial Board.

Matthews brings more than 20 years of experience in U.S. foreign policy and foreign affairs, most with the State Department. He currently serves as unit chief for the UK and Ireland desks in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs' Office of Northern European, Baltic, and Arctic Security Affairs, where he leads a five-person team covering the diplomatic, economic, and military dimensions of those relationships and supports the special envoy for Northern Ireland economic affairs.

His Foreign Service career has spanned assignments across the globe and within the department, including as foreign policy adviser to the Joint Staff's J5 Deputy Directorate for the Middle East and Africa at the Pentagon; political-military affairs officer at Embassy Amman, where he led post's COVID-19 response; chief of staff at Embassy Islamabad; watch officer in the department's Operations Center; senior general services officer at Embassy Hanoi; and consular officer at Embassy San Salvador. He also served as a line officer in the Executive Secretariat, supporting the Secretary of State's overseas travel.

Before joining the Foreign Service, Matthews served as a Peace Corps volunteer and volunteer leader in Kingston, Jamaica, and later returned to the Peace Corps' Washington, D.C., headquarters in several staff roles, including Caribbean country desk officer and agency FOIA officer.

Matthews holds an MA in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College and an MBA from Marquette University, and speaks German, Spanish, and Arabic. He is based in Washington, D.C.

In his candidacy letter, Matthews described a "profound and enduring interest" in U.S. foreign policy and said he looks forward to contributing to the *Journal*'s mission of fostering dialogue within the Foreign Service community. ■

AFSA Hits a Home Run at Nationals Park

AFSA members and guests packed into Nationals Park on September 25 for a night of baseball, ballpark snacks, and camaraderie as the Washington Nationals took on the New York Mets. More than 300 members of the Foreign Service community came out to see the game in person.

The home team gave the crowd plenty to cheer about, edging the Mets 7-6. The first 20,000 fans through the gates also received a free Nationals jersey. The Peace Corps also had a section near AFSA's, giving Foreign Service members and returned volunteers a chance to cheer side by side.



AFSA/MICKEY JOHNSON

AFSA members and their families cheer on the Nationals from the stands at Nationals Park on September 25.



AFSA/MICKEY JOHNSON

"I'm a fan of diplomacy" paddle fans were handed out to attendees.

AFSA thanks everyone who came out for the evening. Keep an eye on AFSA News and the AFSA events calendar for details on the next member gathering. ■

AFSA Autumn in Chautauqua

As part of its mission to educate our fellow Americans about the Foreign Service and the importance of diplomacy, AFSA brought six retired diplomats to the Chautauqua Institution in western New York from September 27 to October 2.

One hundred forty participants came from as far as California, Washington, New Mexico, and Colorado to hear from these veteran Foreign Service members, who together represent service in close to 40 countries.

Retired Ambassadors Elizabeth Aubin, John Limbert, John O'Keefe, and Eric Rubin were joined by retired Public Diplomacy Officer Lisa Heller and retired Foreign Agricultural Service Officer Phil Shull to discuss topics including Russia and Ukraine, NATO, Canada, China, Iran, diplomacy and negotiations, and Algeria.



AFSA/ÁSGEIR SIGFÚSSON

From left: AFSA Treasurer John O'Keefe, retired Foreign Service Officer Phil Shull, Ambassador Elizabeth Aubin, AFSA Professional Policy Issues Director Lisa Heller, Ambassador Eric Rubin, and Ambassador John Limbert at the Chautauqua Institution in New York on September 27.

As has been customary for the full 30 years of this collaboration, the program received extremely high ratings from those in attendance.

We were honored to be joined at our orientation session by the brand-new president of Chautauqua, retired FSO Mark Coolidge Johnson, who wrapped up a long diplomatic career this past summer. We are thrilled to have "one of our own" in this prestigious and important position and hope it bodes well for the future of these outreach programs.

AFSA will next offer this program in early June 2027. ■

FOREIGN SERVICE **DEPARTURES**

AFSA continues its ongoing series listing recent retirements and other departures from the Foreign Service.

If your last day of service was on or after January 1, 2025, and you would like to be included, please share your information by completing this form at https://bit.ly/AFSAdepartures. Note: This is entirely voluntary.

We will include your name and agency under the month that you completed your service. Please wait until you are "departure official" before reporting your separation and report only your own departure. Encourage your friends and colleagues to also send in the form. AFSA thanks the following colleagues for their service to the nation.

April 2025
Benjamin Dille—State
Lisa Schuyler Jewell—State

May 2025
Stephen Banks—State

June 2025
James Kovar—APHIS

July 2025
Penelope Thomas—USAID

August 2025
Robert Forden—State

September 2025
Tracey De Rosa—State
Eric Falls—State
Todd Flower—USAID
Jeff Gringer—State
Todd Hamner—USAID
Alexandra Riboul—USAID

October 2025
Tom Canahuate—State
Michelle Shirley—USAID

November 2025
Lisa Johnson—State
Philip Laidlaw—State
Anne Marie Moore—State

December 2025
John Barbian—State

March 2026
Warren Leishman—USAID

April 2026
Edward Burkhalter—State
Claire Pierangelo—State

May 2026
Jean Akers—State
Olga Bashbush—State
John Dinkelman—State
Melissa O'Shaughnessy—State
Oscar Rivera—State
Sharon Weber—State

June 2026
Bradford Bell—State
W. Patrick Murphy—State

July 2026
Edward Allen—State
Hannah Kamenetsky—FCS

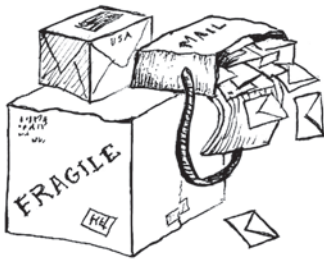
September 2026
Cathleen Carothers—State
Grace Choi—State
Lawrence Fields—State
Elizabeth Gracon—State
Jennifer Johnson—State
Helen LaFave—State
Michael McMahon—State
Heather Merritt—State
Kimberly Morales—State
Maria Mussler—State
Bridget Premont—State
Erin Sawyer—State
Lian von Wantoch—State
Jonathan Webster—State

NEWS BRIEF

Missing Your *FSJ*?

Have you moved recently? If so, don't miss an issue: Update your mailing address to keep your subscription to the *FSJ* current.

You can update your address, along with any other contact information on file, at https://afsa.org/address-change, or by emailing member@afsa.org. It only takes a minute and helps AFSA ensure your benefits, ballots, and other member communications reach you without interruption.





ISTOCKPHOTO/OLEKSIIK

Adulting 101

What FS Teens Need to Know—and How to Teach Them

Here are some things you can do now to help set up your Foreign Service teens for life after high school.

BY LAUREN M. STEED

At the end of every college admissions cycle, as I sit with students to weigh their options and compare financial aid offers, I also have to walk them through one task that adults are all very used to, but which seems to mystify my teen students: multi-factor authentication (MFA).

Where their parents may have been taught the importance of separating their laundry by colors, not getting in a car with someone who had been drinking, or balancing a checkbook, what today's teens need to know before flying the nest is a bit different. Technical skills and financial literacy have taken on a new and urgent importance for the successful transition of Foreign Service teens to adulthood.

Basic Tech Skills

Yes, your teens are digital natives. Their hands have developed calluses exactly where their phones rest against their fingers. But while they can turn their dog's photo into a meme, they often don't know how to do basic things, like adjusting the margins of a document to match the requirements specified by the recipient. How can they learn this?

A great option, particularly if your teen is thinking ahead to getting a future office-based job, is to take the free courses offered at www.skills.google. Learners work through the modules at their own pace, earning badges to add to their résumé or LinkedIn profile.

Start with "Implement Cloud Collaboration and Productivity Workflows" and then move on through the 10-hour "Google Workspace Core Services" course to take nascent computer skills into a college-ready mastery of the day-to day-tasks done in Gmail and Google docs. There are also more complex, personalized tools like no-code app builders or Gemini they can use to design, enhance, or automate their creations.

If they're angling for a summer-hire job in the mission next year, Microsoft's learn.microsoft.com offers the same



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

progression of skills, but specifically for Microsoft Office apps. The courses are free, but each certification exam costs $100–$400.

Before they head off to college or a gap year, make sure their phone is fully synced with their online personal calendar and email apps, and that they know how to sync to their future school and work accounts as well, so that they'll never miss that important meeting with a professor or supervisor.

Money Value

In late 2026, the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program introduced a new course and credit-validating test in "Business and Personal Finance." In the marketing material for the new course, the sponsors cited declining employer confidence in student readiness for the workforce, and a perception that high school students are disengaged with their own futures.

> Most of the teens I work with cannot really distinguish between the value of $1,000 and $10,000, and cannot connect either value to the labor, effort, or working hours represented by that amount.

From my own experience working with Foreign Service teens as they prepare for those same futures, I've seen some of that disengagement. But, perhaps particularly tied to their experiences as children in the Foreign Service, they've also exhibited a bewilderment about how money works.

They can hypothesize the economic effects of social policies or perform compound interest calculations in the context of a math class, but applying that knowledge isn't as personal for them as it may be for a generation raised on cash, balanced checkbooks, and bills paid not by direct withdrawal but by monthly remittance of paper in the mail.





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www.madeira.org

Whether it is salaries and taxes, estimating both real costs and opportunity costs of their choices, or knowing how to differentiate between needs and wants, many fall short. Most of the teens I work with cannot really distinguish between the value of $1,000 and $10,000, and cannot connect either value to the labor, effort, or working hours represented by that amount.

So, other than sending them into the marketplace of adulthood with a mentality that credit cards can pay for anything and that money is magically deposited into their account each month, what are some things you can teach your teens now to set them up for life after high school?

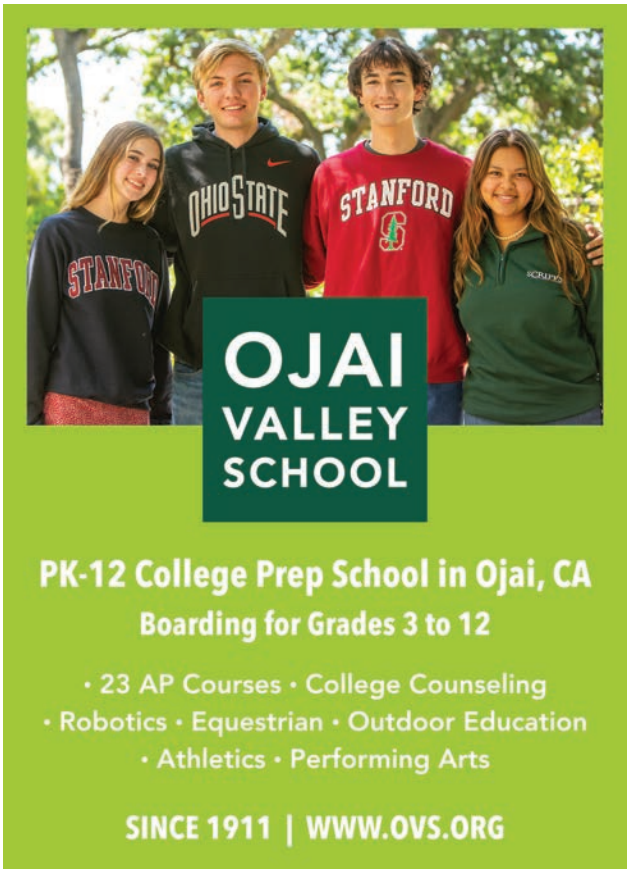
Don't forget: Teens will still need to know how to use an actual paper checkbook.

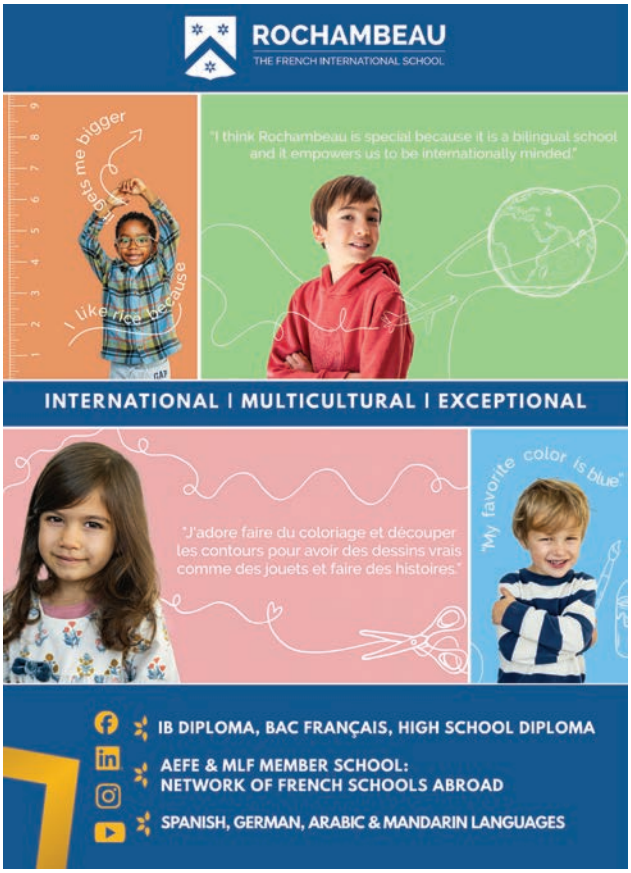
Managing Spending

At one point, perhaps in despair that I hadn't yet learned this lesson, my mother began to give me an allowance to cover not just my wants but also my needs. Other than meals that were shared as a family, I would have to use my allowance to pay for breakfast, school lunches, personal care items, clothing—essentially everything they wouldn't be paying for if I didn't live in the house.

Allowance for my own Foreign Service family now is more complex as we navigate local payment apps, local banking requirements, cash conversions, bank app age restrictions, etc. To help my teens see their spending, we track their income and expenditures in an app so they can follow the flow of their finances, even if they can't always pay for things with their own account.

(Continued on page 82)










1929

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School	Page Number	Enrollment	Gender Distribution M/F	Percent Boarding	Percent Int'l.	Levels Offered	AP/IB◆	Standard Application Online (SAO)	Accept ADD/LD◆◆	Miles to Int'l. Airport	International Students Orientation	Holiday Break Coverage◆◆◆	Annual Tuition, Room & Board (US $)
ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH													
Fairfax Christian School, The	83	330	50/50	15	20	PK-12	AP	N	Limited	3	Y	Y	60,100-68,150[abdeg]
Ojai Valley School	78	300	49/51	25	12	PK-12	AP	Y	Limited	90	Y	Limited	76,500[b]
Rochambeau The French International School	78	1318	46/54	NA	40	PK-12	AP/IB	Y	Limited	24	Y	Limited	27,965-33,580[ab]
TASIS The American School in England	81	550	47/53	41	77	PK-12	AP/IB	N	Limited	8	Y	N	69,650 - 92,230[bcd]
JUNIOR HIGH/SENIOR HIGH													
Randolph-Macon Academy	79	200	75/25	80	15	8-12, PG	AP	Y	Limited	65	Y	N	48,398[abh]
Webb School	82	295	50/50	25	16	6-12	AP	Y	Limited	50	Y	N	60,600[abc]
SENIOR HIGH													
Christchurch School	BC	250	60/40	70	30	9-12	AP	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	71,000[d]
Fountain Valley School of Colorado	83	220	50/50	70	30	9-12	AP	Y	Limited	80	Y	Limited	75,900[b]
Foxcroft School	83	158	ALL GIRLS	70	16	9-12, PG	AP	Y	Y	43	Y	N	78,200[b]
Madeira School, The	77	340	ALL GIRLS	52	15	9-12, PG	AP	y	Limited	14	N	N	77,000[b]
St. Andrew's School Delaware	81	320	50/50	100	11	9-12	NA	Y	Limited	49	Y	Limited	78,500[bdfg]
St. Stephen's School Rome	81	300	47/53	20	66	9-12	IB	N	Limited	12	Y	Y	57,141-63,987[abf]
OVERSEAS													
Berlin Brandenburg International School	77	845	50/50	8	70	K-12	IB	N	Y	22	Y	N	52,500[c]
Frankfurt International School	83	1800	50/50	NA	80	PK-12	IB	N	Limited	12	Y	N	11,590-31,365[bc]
Leysin American School in Switzerland	76	280	50/50	100	85	7-12, PG	AP/IB	N	Limited	75	Y	N	130,000[abd]
OTHER													
AAFSW	85	Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide: Publisher of *Raising Kids in the Foreign Service*. A volunteer organization that supports Foreign Service employees, spouses, partners, and members of household. Visit www.aafsw.org and FSHub.org.											
FSYF	79	Foreign Service Youth Foundation: A support network for U.S. Foreign Service youth worldwide. Go to www.fsyf.org.											
SIT Graduate	82	School for International Training: A global organization that offers more than 90 undergraduate and graduate programs across all seven Institute continents. Through SIT Graduate Institute, students pursue globally focused master's and doctoral degrees that combine rigorous academics, experiential learning, and international perspectives to prepare them to address complex global challenges. Visit www.graduate.sit.edu.											

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[e]Gap year [f]Need-blind admissions; will meet full financial need [g]Host families BC=Back Cover


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DISCOVER MORE AND ARRANGE A CALL WITH OUR ADMISSIONS TEAM

(Continued from page 78)

When your teen moves on to independent life after high school, you may still be sending them an allowance or paying their credit card expenses, but teach them to track and manage that spending using budgeting apps that sync with their bank accounts and preferred payment methods.

Consider Lunch Money or Spendee, both of which offer multicurrency support and are designed to work well even when the student has an irregular income stream and no investment portfolio to manage. These apps can connect to their bank account so they don't have to manually enter transactions. Your bank may also offer an app that works, but be sure to evaluate its utility specifically for your FS student's lifestyle.

A life of transitions, varied friend groups, and exposure to different teaching and learning styles make FS kids significantly more willing to both fail and to try again than many other teens.

Other financial apps teens will need to manage money are Venmo, Zelle, PayPal, and Splitwise. But these apps should be set up in a way that your teen won't forget they have cash sitting in the app.

And don't forget: Teens will still need to know how to use an actual paper checkbook. There are parts of the U.S. financial system that continue to rely on paper checks, the most notable being setting up direct deposit with some employers.

Your teen may also need checks to pay rent or at small businesses that do not accept credit or debit cards. While checks will likely go the way of the carbon-paper credit card imprinters in a decade or so, for now teens need to know the basics of filling one out and understand why they should never pre-sign a check.





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The advent of artificial intelligence and the significant social changes of recent years have made many more of my students interested in broader liberal arts and sciences fields.

Mandatory Basics, and Beyond

Virginia and 26 other U.S. states mandate that all students pass a class in personal finance before graduation. If your at-post high school doesn't offer a personal finance class, your teen can enroll in an online course through Virtual Virginia or the remote school in your home state.

Many private online schools, including Hemispheres Academy (run by an FS family member), also offer single-semester or yearlong courses in personal finance. Look for an accredited provider to make it easier to qualify for reimbursement under the supplemental instruction allowance.

Interested students can also look for courses that cover not just the basics but also explore investments, alternative currencies, and taxation. If they're already at university, teens can seek support from, or train to become, peer financial counselors through the financial aid office.

Other financial realities to prepare them for include: recognizing credit card traps, protecting against financial scams and identity theft, taking advantage of side hustles and gig economy work, handling an emergency, and paying personal taxes to both the IRS and to the state where they live and work.

On the Plus Side

Though today's FS teens may not be financially fluent, they have acquired significant skills that will greatly enhance their ability to build the future.

Confidence when talking to adults. The vast majority of teens I work with are ready to engage with adults on all levels of subjects. They can talk confidently about themselves and have a rather professional online presence.

I ascribe this strength to their regular exposure to adult social environments as part of the Foreign Service community, their higher-than-average levels of participation in speaking-focused activities like Model United Nations or debate club, and the smaller student bodies at international schools that give students more opportunities to participate and lead in both extracurricular activities and the classroom.

This confidence means our students are also significantly more willing to reach out for help from teachers or peers, a habit college professors and admissions officers recognize as critical to success for new college freshmen.

Willingness to try something new or try again. A life of transitions, varied friend groups, and exposure to different teaching and learning styles make FS kids significantly more willing to both fail and to try again than many other teens. This growth mindset is a direct result of the International Baccalaureate's curricular emphasis on becoming a risk-taker who approaches challenges with enthusiasm and confidence in a

FROM THE DECEMBER 2023 *FSJ* EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

A Parent's Guide to Psychoeducational Assessments

BY CHAD C. NELSON

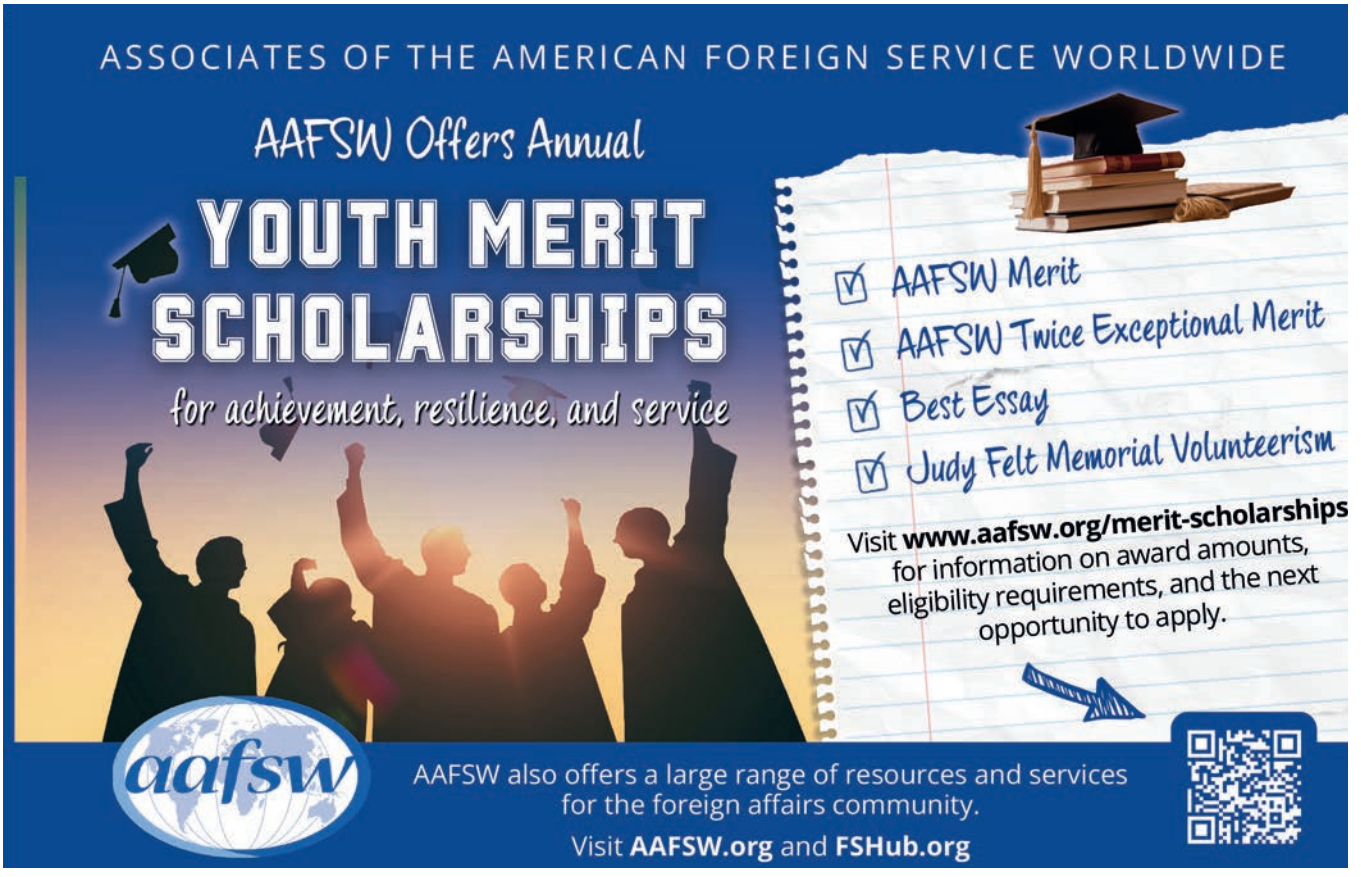
Psychoeducational evaluation can help to answer many questions regarding your child, their learning, and their overall functioning. These questions include:

- What kind of learner is my child?
- Why is my child struggling in one subject but not others?
- Why does my child cry at the thought of school or doing homework?
- Why have my child's grades declined?
- Why do I have to repeat myself over and over to get my child to do something?
- Why is my child struggling to make friends?
- Why is my child misbehaving in class?
- Why is my child so nervous?
- Why does my child seem to be more emotional than their peers?
- Why does my child appear lazy and disinterested when I know they are not?
- What does my child need to help them become a happier and more successful student?
- Why is my college student struggling with the demands that are placed on them?

While evaluators may differ in what they include in an evaluation, psychoeducational evaluations often continue to involve six areas of questioning/evaluation:

1. Background information and developmental history.
2. Assessment of abilities (cognitive functioning).
3. Assessment of processing.
4. Assessment of academic functioning.
5. Assessment of attention/executive functioning.
6. Assessment of social/emotional functioning.

Excerpt from an article by Chad C. Nelson, PhD, a licensed psychologist in private practice in Baltimore County, Maryland, who specializes in the evaluation of learning, attention, and emotional disorders in children, adolescents, and young adults. This article is an update of his very popular FSJ *article of December 2013, "A Parent's Guide to Psychoeducational Evaluations."*



Virginia and 26 other U.S. states mandate that all students pass a class in personal finance before graduation.

supportive, empathetic, and cooperative community of fellow learners.

Work-life balance. The high-stress college-bound culture of Northern Virginia schools notwithstanding, most of the FS teens I work with value a healthy work-life balance and make achieving that a basic part of their day-to-day choices. They recognize the signs of burnout and weigh the pros and cons of taking a gap year or choosing a post-secondary option that is not on the list of "Top 20 Most-Stress-Filled Colleges or Universities."

Future-readiness. It may sometimes seem like they don't have a clear enough plan for what they want to do with their life. They've got no clear major identified, no in-field internship lined up, but today's students recognize that the future of work is somewhat of a mystery.

Ten years ago, many of my students applied into clearly career-focused majors like computer programming or business management. The advent of artificial intelligence and the significant social changes of recent years, however, have made many more of my students interested in broader liberal arts and sciences fields.

They are asking why people make certain choices and how we can shape the future to be better than today. Perhaps subconsciously, they are seeking those generalist skills in creative thinking, analysis, and problem-solving that are likely to be flexible and useful in the uncertainties of the future, regardless of technological or social change.

In other words, the kids are OK, and they're about to show us all how awesome they are as young adults. ■



Timothy Michael Carney, 82, a retired U.S. Foreign Service officer and two-time ambassador, died on August 10, 2026, in Cambridge, Mass., from esophageal cancer.

Mr. Carney was born on July 12, 1944, in St. Joseph, Mo. His father was a career Army officer and served as a judge advocate general. His mother was an English teacher. The family moved frequently in the U.S. and abroad. Carney credited the family's two years in Taiwan for sparking his interest in Asia.

He received a bachelor's degree in history from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1966, followed by one year studying French in Grenoble. He became fluent in French, Khmer, and Thai.

In 1967 Mr. Carney joined the State Department as a political officer. He was assigned to Vietnam in 1968, on the eve of the Tet offensive. Next was Lesotho, and then Cambodia (1972–1975), where he served until he was evacuated by helicopter as the Khmer Rouge surrounded Phnom Penh.

During three years in wartime Cambodia, Mr. Carney widened the U.S. embassy's understanding of the society and events on the ground, despite being told to avoid taking risks.

After academic leave at Cornell (1976–1977), he was posted to Udorn, Thailand, in 1978, where he monitored events in Cambodia following Vietnam's invasion and takeover.

A year later he went to Bangkok as political officer. There Mr. Carney met and married Victoria Butler, a journalist, in 1983.

Posted to South Africa next (1983–1986), his portfolio also included Southwest Africa. He joined the Wildlife Conservation Societies of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa and developed a passion for wild game hunting following principles of sustainable conservation.

After a tour in Indonesia (1987–1989), he returned to the United States as national security adviser to President George H.W. Bush on Southeast Asian and Pacific Island affairs (1990–1991).

In the early 1990s, Mr. Carney was seconded to the UN Transitional Peacekeeping Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) (1992–1993). He also served as the special political adviser to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Somalia (1993), and as a member of the UN Observer Mission in South Africa (1994).

Mr. Carney was promoted to deputy assistant secretary for South Asian affairs in 1994 and appointed U.S. ambassador to Sudan in June 1995, a time of upset in the bilateral relationship. Against Carney's advice, the Clinton administration decided to shutter the embassy in 1997.

Ambassador Carney's final posting was as U.S. ambassador to Haiti (1998–1999), another country in turmoil where he continued his practice of immersing himself in the local society while routinely challenging Washington's assessment.

After retiring in 1999, Amb. Carney and his wife produced the book *Sudan: The Land and the People* (2006).

Amb. Carney is also the author of "Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion" (1977) and two books on Cambodia. Additionally, he advised the director of the 1984 film, "The Killing Fields."

Recently, he helped publish the English translation of *Regrets for a Khmer Soul* (2026), the only book by a Cambodian warning about the Khmer Rouge before their 1975 takeover.

Known by his colleagues as "the unflappable Tim Carney," Amb. Carney was called out of retirement to serve in the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11.

Friends and family members remember him as a great storyteller, a man who was intensely curious and sharp-witted, and a loyal friend with a delightful sense of humor.

Amb. Carney is survived by his wife, Victoria; sister, Sheri Carney; Anne Carney, his daughter from a previous marriage; son-in-law, John Ochsendorf; and two grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests supporting the MIT Class of 1966 Doc Edgerton Scholarship Fund.

Tania Chomiak-Salvi, 58, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on May 5, 2026, at her home in Washington, D.C., surrounded by loved ones.

Ms. Chomiak-Salvi was born on June 10, 1967. She graduated from McLean High School, received a BA from the University of Virginia in 1989, and earned an MA in law and diplomacy from Tufts University's Fletcher School in 1993.

That same year, Ms. Chomiak-Salvi joined the U.S. Foreign Service at the State Department, specializing in public diplomacy. Prior to that, she had worked on U.S.-Soviet exchange programs, including in Ukraine and Russia.

During a 25-year diplomatic career, Ms. Chomiak-Salvi served in a variety of postings in Europe and in the U.S., beginning as the press attaché in the newly established U.S. embassy in Almaty (1993–1996).

She served as press officer and humanitarian affairs adviser in the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (1997–1999), assistant press attaché and assistant cultural attaché in London (1999–2000), cultural attaché in Warsaw (2000–2002), and counselor for public diplomacy in Brussels (2009–2012).

Ms. Chomiak-Salvi's tours in Washington, D.C., included service in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Bureau of European Affairs, where she worked on issues of NATO and Western Europe.

Her last assignment was as deputy coordinator of the Bureau of International Information Programs (2014–2017). In that role, she led a team that developed campaigns to engage the public worldwide on foreign policy issues.

Ms. Chomiak-Salvi retired in 2018. She spoke Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, French, and Italian, as well as rudimentary German and Dutch.

She and her husband, Lucantonio Salvi, raised two sons, Paul and Stephen.

In retirement, Ms. Chomiak-Salvi taught public diplomacy at the Foreign Service Institute, the Meridian International Center, and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. She was a member of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church community.

Ms. Chomiak-Salvi is survived by her husband, Lucantonio Salvi; sons, Paul and Stephen; mother, Martha Bohachevsky Chomiak of Washington, D.C.; and sister, Dora Chomiak of New York City.

In lieu of flowers, a contribution may be made in her memory to the National Breast Cancer Coalition or to RAZOM for Ukraine.

Leo James Cyr, 92, a retired Foreign Service information management specialist, died on August 21, 2026, in Delray Beach, Fla., of cardiac complications.

Mr. Cyr was born in Madawaska, Maine, the eldest of six children, to Patrick and Aline Cyr. Graduating from high school in 1952, he moved to Hartford, Conn., where he worked for Stanley Tools.

In 1954 he joined the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and served over 20 years in New York, Wyoming, Illinois, Labrador, the Philippines, Florida, the United Kingdom, and New Mexico, and did several tours at the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) as a cryptographer.

During his U.K. assignment, Mr. Cyr skied for the USAF Ski Team. He was also instrumental in establishing DIA's "Commo" section for the 1968 Vietnam peace talks delegation at U.S. Embassy Paris, where he met his future wife, Ann, a Foreign Service secretary. They married in 1972 and returned to Washington, D.C., in 1973.

In 1974 Mr. Cyr retired from the USAF as an E-7 Master Sergeant. Though offered a promotion, he declined, choosing to start a second career in the U.S. Foreign Service as a "communicator."

The Cyrs were assigned to Beirut as a tandem couple in 1975, arriving approximately one week before civil war erupted. After 14 months, Mr. Cyr was evacuated to Athens where he worked for two months, followed by two months in Moscow.

Other assignments included Hong Kong, Tunis, Vienna, Amman, Luxembourg, and NATO Brussels. Mr. Cyr received several military service–related commendations, the State Department's Presidential Award for Valor (Beirut), and numerous Meritorious and Superior Honor Awards.

Mr. Cyr retired in 1996 but accompanied Ms. Cyr on her assignment in Kuala Lumpur. There he worked for several embassy sections and was the assistant building maintenance supervisor.

After Ms. Cyr's retirement in late 2001, the couple moved to their newly constructed home in Delray Beach, Fla. There, Mr. Cyr was active in his community's Citizen Observer Patrol (COP) program (for which he eventually served as the captain), the Community Emergency Response Team, the Emergency Medical Team, and We Care, as well as the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office COP Honor Guard.

Under the auspices of Palm Beach County, he received the President's Volunteer Service Award for volunteerism.

The Cyrs continued to travel in retirement. An avid expert skier until just a few years ago, Mr. Cyr was a member of the Palm Beach Ski Club, traveling with the club to Banff, Innsbruck, and ski resorts in the U.S. The couple also traveled throughout Florida to attend Foreign Service Retiree Association events.

They participated in more than 40 ocean and river cruises. During his lifetime, Mr. Cyr visited all seven continents and more than 115 countries. His last trip was with Road Scholar to Costa Rica in January 2026.

Mr. Cyr is survived by his beloved wife, Ann; children, Susan Canada, John Nordmann, and Nicole Nocilla; five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren; sisters, Joan Lavertu of East Hartford, Conn., and Marie St. Onge of Oro Valley, Ariz.; as well as a niece, five nephews, and their children. His parents, two sisters, and a brother predeceased him.

Memorial donations may be made to the Senior Living Foundation of the American Foreign Service in Washington, D.C., or to the Tunnel to Towers Foundation (T2T) in Staten Island, N.Y.

Roger Roland Gamble, 93, a retired Foreign Service officer and U.S. ambassador to Suriname, died peacefully at his home in Port Haywood, Va., on July 10, 2026.

Born in Deer River, Minn., Mr. Gamble enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after graduating from Deer River High School. A Korean War veteran, he was sent to Japan in December 1951 following training as a radio intercept operator at Brooks Air Force Base.

Shortly after his return to the U.S., he met and married his wife, Jera Dean Gamble.

Discharged in 1954, he went on to Bemidji State College for a BA degree in social science followed by a job as a tactical officer and later an instructor with the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell. He also earned an MA from Eastern New Mexico University in government and history.

Mr. Gamble joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1963, and following training in Washington, D.C., he was posted to Costa Rica. This was followed by assignments in the Philippines (vice consul), Mexico (assistant to the labor attaché), Bolivia (labor attaché), and Argentina (labor attaché).

Returning to Washington, D.C., in 1976, he worked for two years as deputy director and then director of the State Department Operations Center and attended the National War College.

In 1979 Mr. Gamble was posted overseas again, to Ecuador as political counselor, Nicaragua as deputy chief of mission (DCM) and then chargé, to Guatemala as chargé, and then to Mexico as DCM.

In 1989 he returned to the U.S. where he spent a few short months as a member of the U.S. Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in New York and six months as chargé in Antigua.

He received a Presidential Meritorious Service Award from President George H.W. Bush for outstanding service in the conduct of U.S. diplomacy in 1990 and was appointed director of management operations at the State Department until 1993, when he moved to acting chief financial officer for a short assignment.

In August 1993, President Bill Clinton commissioned Mr. Gamble as U.S. ambassador to Suriname, where he served until his retirement in 1996.

The Gambles retired to Mathews County, Va., where they became active in numerous civic and volunteer activities through the years, enjoying crabbing, fishing, and family gatherings at their "retreat" at the mouth of the East River and the Chesapeake.

By his side for 70 years of adventure, Jera Gamble predeceased him in January 2025 (see her entry below).

Ambassador Gamble is survived by their four children, Kelly (spouse Peter) Hartshorn, Scott Gamble, Marc Gamble, and Steven (spouse Rosa Maria) Gamble; seven grandchildren, Matthew (spouse Jeanne), Fletcher (spouse Danica), Allison (spouse Sam), Olivia, Christina, Michael, and Catelyn; and six great-grandchildren, Kane, Braxton, Theo, Frances, Parker, and Quincy.

Jera Dean Gamble, 91, spouse of the late retired Foreign Service Officer and U.S. Ambassador Roger Gamble (see his entry above), passed away peacefully in her sleep at their home in Port Haywood, Va., on January 25, 2025.

A registered nurse, Jera Gamble was born in 1933 in Roswell, N.M. Graduating from high school there in 1951, she moved to Amarillo, Texas, where she attended St. Anthony School of Nursing concurrently with Amarillo Junior College, receiving her RN and AA degrees from them, respectively.

In 1954, while in training in San Antonio, she met and married Roger Gamble.

During the early years of their marriage, and to help put Mr. Gamble through college for his BA and MA degrees, Ms. Gamble worked long and hard hours at the Bemidji Lutheran Hospital, the Eastern New Mexico Medical Center, and the University of Iowa Medical Center—all while he was working and they were building a family.

This led to Mr. Gamble's career in the U.S. Foreign Service, one that Ms. Gamble embraced and thrived in. Between 1963 and 1976, the couple was posted to Costa Rica, the Philippines, Mexico, Bolivia, and Argentina.

In addition to all the normal activities and duties of a Foreign Service spouse, Ms. Gamble had the opportunity to work as director of the Buenos Aires embassy health unit from 1974 to 1976. Then, during their time in Washington, D.C. (1976–1979), she also worked as a substitute nurse at the State Department Medical Unit.

When Ms. Gamble returned overseas in 1979, her responsibilities as the spouse of a Foreign Service officer increased as Mr. Gamble was assigned to a series of postings as either deputy chief of mission or chargé d'affaires.

Ms. Gamble accompanied him to every location, including Suriname, where he served as U.S. ambassador from 1993 until his retirement in 1996.

The couple then settled in Mathews County, Va., where Ms. Gamble was very active in the local community, putting her creative and organizational talents to work in the Mathews Women's club and various local organizations and charities.

Friends and family members recall that in all her many roles, Ms. Gamble was ever beautiful and kind, inside and out.

She was survived by her husband until July 10, 2026, and is survived by their four children, Kelly (spouse Peter) Hartshorn, Scott Gamble, Marc Gamble, and Steven (spouse Rosa Maria) Gamble; seven grandchildren, Matthew (spouse Jeanne), Fletcher (spouse Danica), Allison (spouse Sam), Olivia, Christina, Michael, and Catelyn; and six great-grandchildren, Kane, Braxton, Theo, Frances, Parker, and Quincy.

Ellen K. Haines, 86, a Foreign Service National and Foreign Service spouse, died on January 16, 2026, in Springfield, Va.

Born on June 1, 1939, in Düsseldorf, Germany, Ms. Haines began her career as a Foreign Service National at a U.S. consulate in Germany.

There she met FSO George Haines III. The couple married in 1966 and began an active life of travel and service with the Department of State.

In 1976 Ms. Haines became a Foreign Service staff member and served alongside her husband at posts around the world, including Italy, Chad, Czechoslovakia, Finland, China, and Jamaica.

She returned to Washington, D.C., in 1996, where she worked in career development and assignments (CDA) at the State Department, first as an employee and later as a contractor, continuing in that role until 2021.

Colleagues, friends, and family members remember Ms. Haines as a person whose life was a testament to living with intention, energy, and joy.

Her energy was infectious, and she was always arranging opportunities to spend time with friends—playing golf, tennis, pickleball, bridge, or mahjong, or simply enjoying dinner, a show, or the theater.

She never let the grass grow under her feet and remained active until the very last day of her life, they recall.

She will be profoundly missed, but her legacy will endure in the lives of her family, friends, colleagues, and all those she touched around the globe.

Ms. Haines was predeceased by her beloved husband on January 22, 2015, and laid to rest next to him at the Rhode Island Veterans Cemetery.

She is survived by her son, George Haines IV (and his spouse, Jillian), and two grandsons, Cooper and Davis Haines.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Anera.

David Lyle Mack, 86, a retired Foreign Service officer and U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, passed away peacefully on July 15, 2026, from neurological disease.

Born on June 10, 1940, in Portland, Ore., to a family of farmers and schoolteachers, Mr. Mack grew up in rural southern Oregon.

He studied vocational agriculture at Crater High School, Central Point, intending to be a farmer, but received a full scholarship to Harvard University, which sought to diversify its student body.

After graduating with a BA in 1962, he received a post–Sputnik National Defense Language Fellowship to study Arabic in Harvard's Middle Eastern Studies program, graduating with an MA in 1964.

After another year as a Fulbrighter in Cairo, Mr. Mack decided it was payback time and entered the U.S. Foreign Service in 1965.

Using his Arabic, Mr. Mack served in Iraq (twice), Jordan, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and as U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (1986–1989). He received service awards as deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs during the Gulf War of 1990–1991.

Ambassador Mack retired in 1995 after two years as international adviser at the National War College, but remained engaged in international affairs at the Middle East Institute and Atlantic Council, and through interviews with scholars, students, and the media.

At home, he avidly cultivated Swiss chard, tomatoes, and figs, served his church, and enjoyed continuing adventures with his family.

Amb. Mack is survived by his wife of 59 years, Rosamond; daughter, Catherine; and a granddaughter. He is also survived by his brother, Herschel Mack, and niece, Julie Felkins.

Leslie W. "Les" McBee, 79, a retired Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Information Agency and the Department of State, died peacefully on June 30, 2026, in Washington, D.C., after a short illness.

Born in 1947 in Oakland, Calif., Mr. McBee became accustomed to international traveling and living at a very young age because his father worked for USAID. His early experiences included attending high school in Tehran before the revolution.

After earning degrees from the University of San Francisco and Columbia University, he set his sights on a career in international affairs, first as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Ivory Coast and later as a member of the U.S. Foreign Service.

Mr. McBee's many overseas assignments included Yugoslavia (Serbia), Fiji, France, Congo, Italy, and Finland, with a culminating tour as U.S. consul general in Marseille from 2007 to 2009, where he covered the south of France as well as Corsica and Monaco.

Service as diplomat in residence at the University of California, Berkeley, capped his diplomatic career.

Friends and colleagues recall that wherever he worked and whatever his position, Mr. McBee was deeply respected and admired for his intelligence, professional expertise, and charm.

In addition to being an excellent public speaker and singer, Mr. McBee spoke fluent French, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian.

After retirement in 2009, he lived in California and Washington, D.C.

Mr. McBee is survived by his beloved brother, Ron McBee; a niece, Gindla McBee; Mara Vernaza; and devoted cousins, godchildren, as well as a host of loving friends.

Harry Obst, 94, the retired chief German-language interpreter to six U.S. presidents, passed away peacefully on June 10, 2026, at The Harbor in Stanardsville, Va.

Mr. Obst was born on March 4, 1932, in Königsberg, East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia). He fled communist East Germany in 1949 at age 17 and worked briefly as a coal miner in West Germany before earning a high school diploma and studying languages, translation, and law at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.

Graduating in 1956, he immigrated to the United States in 1957, becoming a citizen in 1962 after working in private industry.

In 1965 Mr. Obst joined the State Department as a diplomatic interpreter, specializing in consecutive and simultaneous German–English interpretation for high-stakes meetings, including private discussions in the Oval Office and economic summits.

He interpreted for and traveled with President Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton and was often the sole American present in sensitive bilateral talks with leaders like Helmut Schmidt, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Willy Brandt.

From 1984 until he retired in 1997, Mr. Obst served as director of the Office of Language Services, overseeing interpreter training and operations while continuing to take occasional White House assignments by special request.

In retirement, he lectured on U.S. politics and culture in Europe (until 2008), trained interpreters at institutions like Inlingua and in Mongolia, and published the 2010 book *White House Interpreter: The Art of Interpretation*, offering firsthand accounts of presidential diplomacy and the nuances of the interpreting profession. He then toured, doing book signings and speaking engagements, mostly on cruise ships.

During his diplomatic career and after, Mr. Obst was a determined advocate of elevating the standards of interpreter training in the United States. He urged the establishment of dedicated university programs to professionalize the field and the adoption of strict certification standards, once stating famously that "accurate interpretation is no less sophisticated, complex, and intellectually demanding than brain surgery."

In addition to merit awards from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on his retirement, Mr. Obst received Austria's Grand Decoration of Merit in 1972 for his contributions to international understanding.

He loved music, especially classical, opera, and New Orleans jazz. Also an avid baseball fan, Mr. Obst created "Harry's Grand Slam" baseball game in 1962. It was produced by Out of the Box Publishing, which re-released it in 2007.

Mr. Obst will be dearly missed by his family, friends, caregivers, and colleagues. Family members are especially grateful to Robert and Karen Field for their kindness and friendship.

He was survived by his wife of 61 years, Elnina, for only two months (see her entry below). They are survived by their two daughters, Mattina Michele Lloyd and Jennifer Lynn Shidler, and grandchild Cara Lynn Shidler.

Mr. Obst is also survived by his daughter Christina from an earlier relationship, and grandchildren Estelle and Elsa.

Donations in his honor may be made to Medi Home Hospice and St. Labre Indian School.

Elnina Deanna Luizzi Obst, 88, wife of the late Harry Obst (see his entry above), passed away on August 12, 2026, within two months of her husband, at Brooks-Howell Home and Hospice in Asheville, N.C.

Born on June 6, 1938, in Johnson City, N.Y., Ms. Obst grew up in Endicott, N.Y., surrounded by a strong Italian community.

Her parents, Vincent and Elnora, ran Luizzi Pharmacy on Washington Avenue and instilled in her a sense of family and the values of kindness and generosity.

She graduated in 1956 from Union Endicott High School, having served as a class vice president and been crowned homecoming queen.

Ms. Obst attended Bucknell University and then graduated from Harpur College with a bachelor's degree in social psychology. Moving to Washington, D.C., she worked as a legal secretary and eventually met Harry Obst.

The couple married on October 23, 1965, and settled in Fairfax County, Va., where Ms. Obst supported her husband's career at the Department of State and raised their two daughters in a loving home.

They often traveled and spent holidays with Dr. Diether Posser, the finance minister of North Rhine Westphalia, and his wife, Elsa.

Ms. Obst created long-standing relationships in her neighborhood and was very involved with her children's school activities and teaching English to non-English-speaking students.

She enjoyed reading, music, and gardening. Family members and friends recall her compassion, kindness, light, and grace.

Ms. Obst was predeceased by her husband, Harry, and sister, Anita Joan Angelico.

In addition to the couple's daughters and granddaughter, Ms. Obst is survived by her brother, Vincent Lawrence Luizzi (and spouse James); her niece, Heidi

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Marie Luizzi (and spouse Jeff Lewis); and many cousins, including Theresa La Buzzetta, Joe Lofaro, Mary Jane Malora, Francis Pezzolla, Marilyn Murphy, and Rick Sotis and their families.

Ms. Obst was a strong advocate for literacy and combating hunger, so donations in her honor may be made to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and Feeding America.

Norkay F. Sherpa, 64, the spouse of retired Foreign Service medical provider Dr. Mari C. Sullivan, passed away at home in Seattle, Wash., on April 9, 2026, after a courageous yearlong battle with a rare and aggressive form of stomach cancer.

Mr. Sherpa was born in the Himalayas of Nepal in 1962.

In 1988 Mr. Sherpa met Dr. Mari C. Sullivan, DNP, MSN, ARNP, a member of the U.S. Foreign Service, and the couple married in 1989.

Together, they built a life of international service, living and working in Romania, Tunisia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Germany, and the Philippines.

Raised among the world's highest mountains, Mr. Sherpa never lost his love of climbing. An accomplished high-altitude mountaineering guide, he helped lead the Romanian national mountaineering team to a successful summit of Mount Everest, sharing both his expertise and his deep respect for the mountains he called home.

At every embassy assignment, Mr. Sherpa earned the respect and affection of colleagues through his unwavering work ethic, kindness, and willingness to help wherever he was needed.

Serving primarily with the Regional Security Office and the Diplomatic Pouch, Mr. Sherpa traveled extensively, training local staff on inventory management systems and supporting embassy operations with professionalism and dedication.

Yet, as family and friends recall, it was his generous spirit that people remember most. Whether preparing food for diplomatic events, coaching Little League baseball, or quietly stepping in whenever an extra pair of hands was needed, he made every community he joined stronger.

Above all, Mr. Sherpa treasured his family. He lived a life defined by adventure, service, and quiet strength and is remembered by family, friends, and colleagues around the world for his warmth, humility, bold spirit, and unwavering devotion to those he loved.

Mr. Sherpa is survived by his beloved wife, Mari, and two sons, James Sherpa, MD, of Phoenix, Ariz., and Will Sherpa, a civil engineer, of Seattle, Wash.

Elizabeth Ann Henrichsen Smith, 92, spouse of the late Foreign Service Officer Jackson Lynn Smith, passed away peacefully on January 17, 2026, in Gainesville, Fla., with her daughter, Pamela, by her side.

Born on August 6, 1933, in Springfield, Tenn., Ms. Smith was the daughter of Sigurd and Anna Snowden Henrichsen. She had an independent spirit and a natural affinity for animals, especially horses, and grew up caring for and show-jumping horses in Springfield.

Ms. Smith began her studies at Duke University, then transferred to the University of Florida, where she earned a BA in interior design.

In Gainesville, she met Jackson Lynn Smith of Baton Rouge, La. He proposed, asking not only for her hand but also for her partnership in a future shaped by service in the U.S. Foreign Service. The couple moved to Washington, D.C., and were married at the National Cathedral on November 25, 1955.

While committing to a life of public service, Ms. Smith also pursued her life-

long passion as an artist. In Washington, D.C., she studied with Morris Louis, a leading member of the Washington Color School Painters.

In 1956 the Smiths began their Foreign Service life. Early posts included Maracaibo, London, Bogotá, Brussels, and Lima. Their daughter, Pamela, was born in Washington, D.C., in 1969.

As a diplomatic wife, Ms. Smith combined intelligence, adaptability, curiosity, grace, and a natural excellence in connecting with the new people and cultures. She embraced each post as an opportunity to learn.

After Mr. Smith retired in 1997, the couple returned to Gainesville.

Ms. Smith devoted many years to volunteering at the Retirement Home for Horses there, her work reconnecting her with the joy of her youth. She found deep fulfillment in the simple, enduring bond she shared with the animals she understood so well.

As family members recall, she and her daughter had a knack for spotting the more absurd aspects of life, sharing these with each other, and having a good giggle about it. They were lifelong best friends.

Cognizant and oriented through her final days, Ms. Smith told her daughter that she had had a wonderful life and was grateful to have always been surrounded by kind, loving, and amazing people.

Ms. Smith leaves behind a legacy shaped by thoughtful exploration and by a deep respect for the people, places, and beings she loved.

She was preceded in death by her beloved husband of 60 years, Jackson, in 2015.

Ms. Smith is survived by her daughter, Pamela Lynn Smith, a senior clinical social worker in Gainesville; two nephews, Richard Henrichsen Sollner of Tampa, Fla., and Gerhard Sollner of Lincoln, Mass.; and a niece, Diana Padrone of Atlanta, Ga.

Donations in Ms. Smith's memory may be made to the Retirement Home for Horses at Mill Creek Farm in Alachua, Fla.

Rose P. Wong, 102, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on August 1, 2026, in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Ms. Wong was born in Hawaii on September 29, 1923.

From 1942 to 1952, she worked in Washington, D.C., as a clerk in the Treasury Department. She moved to the Social Security Board as fiscal accounting clerk from 1952 to 1958 and then served as deputy chief of the Federal Aviation Agency from 1958 to 1959.

She earned a bachelor's degree from Benjamin Franklin University in 1957.

Ms. Wong entered the Foreign Service in 1959 and was assigned to Djakarta (now Jakarta) as a disbursing officer.

Next, in 1962, she was posted to Seoul as a budget-fiscal officer and in 1967 transferred to Bangkok.

Assignments to Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Rabat, and Kathmandu followed.

Ms. Wong also had TDY assignments to San Salvador and Washington, D.C., where she served on a selection panel.

Ms. Wong is survived by many nieces and nephews, grandnieces and a grandnephew, and great-grandnieces and great-grandnephews who remember her fondly.

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.

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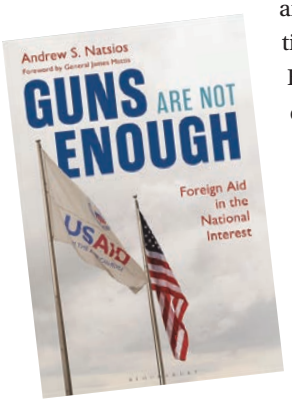
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A Self-Inflicted Act of American Vandalism

Guns Are Not Enough: Foreign Aid in the National Interest
Andrew S. Natsios, Bloomsbury Academic, 2026, $36.00/hardcover, e-book available, 480 pages.

Reviewed by
Austan Mogharabi



"Within five years we will either recreate USAID … or we will cease to be a great power."

Andrew Natsios included that line in his testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on February 13, 2025. His new book, *Guns Are Not Enough*, makes the case.

The book covers every major school of development theory. Natsios—former USAID Administrator and now a professor at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M—divides the book into three parts: a history of USAID's rise and fall, an account of how foreign aid collides with the rest of the government, and a proposal for a new, cabinet-level department dedicated to foreign aid.

It is a serious academic book, but Natsios uses stories and anecdotes to keep the theory grounded and moving, making the material genuinely accessible. Along the way, he coins a term (adding to Washington's love affair with acronyms): Obsessive Measurement Disorder (OMD), the tendency of the "counter-bureaucracy" and of policymakers to prize what can be counted over what actually matters.

A short digression: Natsios thanks his daughter-in-law, Nicole, for pushing him to defend USAID in early 2025. I want to thank her too, on behalf of the Foreign Service officers whom I represent at AFSA, for spurring him to say publicly what we knew but could not say ourselves at a time when we felt very isolated.

Development, Natsios insists, is an essential tool of statecraft, not charity, and it has been transformational, abroad and at home. But it has also been in constant conflict with other U.S. government agencies, hampered by a counter-bureaucracy—the oversight offices that respond to institutions based in Washington, D.C.—and by a Congress and White House that prefer "rapid, visible, and quantifiable" results.

That preference explains why USAID moved away from long-term investments (e.g., research, scholarships) and toward the noble but more short-term work of health and humanitarian assistance.

The technical expertise that was the heart and soul of USAID has not disappeared—it was dismissed.

What little funding remained for long-term investments was increasingly directed by Congress through earmarks, which claimed nearly all of USAID's funding before it ever reached the field. In Senegal, I managed a $120 million budget in 2024. I had $1 million in discretionary funds. That was unusual because the normal amount was zero.

In Natsios' telling, this is the underlying crisis in modern development: The client shifted from the communities and governments where USAID worked to Washington itself. To illustrate, he recounts asking a former USAID officer how much of their time went to responding to the counter-bureaucracy. Tallied up, the answer was all of it.

His sharpest chapter takes on the clash between development and diplomacy, and it speaks most directly to the practitioners now folded into the State Department. Natsios lays out the pitfalls of that merger in detail, buttressed by the experience of the British and Australian aid agencies that were absorbed into their own foreign ministries, much to the detriment of their effectiveness. The diagnosis is aimed at the policymakers in Congress who never got a say as much as the staff living with it.

The successes he identifies are real, and they are slow. Natsios points to the Green Revolution, where Norman Borlaug's work fed hundreds of millions and paid dividends to American farmers as well as foreign ones. Disease-resistant sorghum, developed by an Ethiopian scientist who received a USAID scholarship, fed herds abroad and American cattle alike. The Asian tigers took decades of patient investment before they became the trading partners and allies they are today. None of these would have survived a quarterly review.

His prescription follows from the diagnosis. Natsios wants a cabinet-level department, because a department can defend its prerogatives against other agencies and branches. A subordinate agency absorbs whatever they choose to hand it. He recommends devolving real

authority back to the overseas missions, drawing on James Q. Wilson's account of why effective agencies push decisions toward the lowest-level person who can identify and address the problem.

While I agree that a cabinet-level department for international development is the ideal outcome, I worry that foreign aid is uniquely susceptible to the counter-bureaucracy. A new department won't stop the Government Accountability Office, Congress, and the administration from saddling it with the same restraints.

The deeper problem is that institutional design means little without the people to drive it. The technical expertise that was the heart and soul of USAID has not disappeared—it was dismissed. Whatever comes next should start by bringing those people back to it.

A new department that cannot design effective programs or move money, and does not know how to build relationships, will not advance U.S. national security or foreign policy interests.

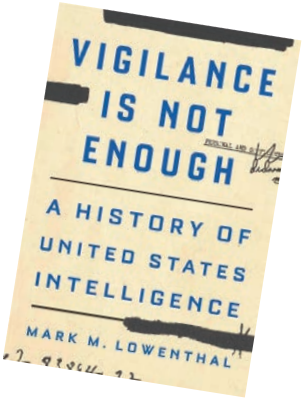
The case Natsios lays out for why this matters is hard to argue with. He describes USAID as the last line of defense against the Four Horsemen—famine, disease, tyranny and chaos, and destitution.

But USAID is gone now, in practice if not in legislation. The current administration speaks often of undermining the existing international institutions and the order they support. That order was never charity—it was how we advanced our own influence, which makes its dismantling, as Natsios deems, an act of "self-inflicted vandalism."

Austan Mogharabi is AFSA's USAID representative on the Governing Board. He was a USAID FSO for more than 15 years, serving in Haiti, Senegal, and Morocco. He also covered Syria/Iraq/Yemen crisis response.

Making Policy Smart

Vigilance Is Not Enough: A History of United States Intelligence
Mark M. Lowenthal, Yale University Press, 2025, $40.00/hardcover, e-book available, 832 pages.



Reviewed by
Charles Skinner

Ever thought about the role of intelligence in policymaking? I expect we all have, even if we have not served in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, participated in interagency meetings, or been part of a country team in allied or non-allied embassies.

Still, I think we would all benefit from getting to know the "big picture." To that end, let me strongly recommend Mark Lowenthal's *Vigilance Is Not Enough*. This 832-page book (643 pages are text) covers the history of intelligence since the American Revolution.

Its first chapter, "Revolution and War," is good reading alongside the Ken Burns documentary film, "The American Revolution." Subsequent chapters take the reader from the "Young Republic" and its expansion across the continent through the experience of Civil War and the "re-united" United States' emergence as a world power.

The bulk of the book, however, is taken up with the last century, and its focus is on the role of intelligence as an instrument of government in the broadest sense—serving, in other words, both Congress and the president.

Author Mark Lowenthal is, in the interest of full disclosure, a friend of mine from grad school (since the end of the 1960s). A graduate of Brooklyn College, Lowenthal wrote his dissertation at Harvard, "Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process from 1937 to 1942" (1975), under the direction of diplomatic historian Ernie May (1928–2009), who also played a key role at the Kennedy School and in advising a series of administrations.

Lowenthal himself served in an impressive range of senior positions during his long career in government, including as staff director of the House Intelligence Committee, deputy assistant secretary for intelligence (INR) at State, and assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

He is also the author of the standard textbook, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, which issued its "landmark" 10th edition in December 2025, as well as some 90 articles.

Vigilance is most useful as an overview of the emergence of the intelligence function during the 20th century. While many would date the development of intelligence as an institution of government from the birth of the "national security state" in the Truman administration (covered in chapter 8, "Creating National Security"), Lowenthal clearly makes the point that the demands of waging the Second World War laid the foundation and provided the range of experience that the principal actors drew on in tackling the Cold War.

And FDR, while never failing to gather intel himself, also encouraged the development of useful initiatives, ranging from espionage and codebreaking to partnership with the British and research and analysis under the leadership of

Harvard professor William L. Langer, that morphed into the intelligence institutions of the national security state.

The Cold War is the policy framework for most of the subsequent chapters—from chapter 9, "Managing the Cold War," through chapter 14, "Winning the Cold War"—but the optic for these chapters generally remains the presidencies (from Eisenhower through Reagan).

During these four decades, the environment that the intelligence community operated in was increasingly buffeted by politics, as chapter 11's title, "The End of the Cold War Consensus," indicates, and as one might expect from the era of Nixon, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War.

The final third of the book covers the past 35 years, the post–Cold War era dominated by regional wars, 9/11, and the rise of China—the world in which most readers of *The Foreign Service Journal* have worked. The same is true, of course, of the book's author, and his account reads in part as memoir, since he himself was an actor in one institution of government or another during that era.

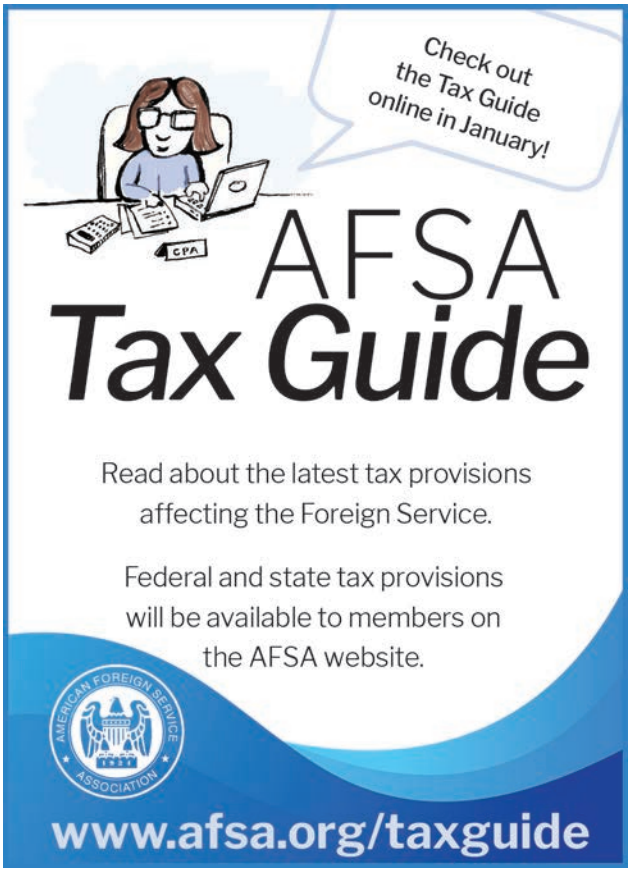
Vigilance is most useful as an overview of the emergence of the intelligence function during the 20th century.

Though Lowenthal is well informed about all the great spy stories of our time, his history sets them in the larger institutional context of policymaking.

And while acknowledging the "excitement of secret operations," he is at pains in his conclusion to stress that the role of intelligence professionals is not to *make* policy—since that "would put their objectivity at risk"—but rather to *inform* policy, and make it smart. ■

Since retirement from the U.S. Foreign Service following a 27-year career, Charles Skinner has taught courses at Duquesne (2008) and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (2009–2020).





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Lucien Horowitz and the 500 Lei Banknote

BY JONATHAN B. RICKERT

The imposing, Italianate-looking residence where my family and I lived during our second tour in Bucharest, at 2 Strada Ing. Ermil Pangratti, had been occupied by U.S. government representatives since 1948. The United States rented it first from the owners and then, after it was nationalized in 1950, from the Romanian communist regime.

Initially it housed senior U.S. military personnel, before serving for many years as the official residence for the American deputy chief of mission (DCM).

The house is semidetached, with a similar home sharing a common wall but belonging to a different owner, at least prior to the communist takeover. During our time there, the second home housed the defense attaché.

When we arrived in the summer of 1991, the facade of our residence was still pockmarked with scattered bullet holes, scars left over from the 1989 revolution. At least one bullet had penetrated the building's living spaces, and we found that the mast for the rooftop TV antenna had been severed by an extraordinarily skillful (or lucky?) shot.

The home's original owners, Mr. and Mrs. Armin Horowitz, had built the house, starting in 1944, in what turned out to be a supreme example of misplaced optimism and bad timing. Fine building materials were used and skilled, imported craftsmen reportedly participated in its construction.



NATIONAL BANK OF ROMANIA

An old 500 Lei banknote like the one Lucien Horowitz gave the author's son.

In 1948, when the communists assumed full control of the government and King Mihai I (Michael) was forced to abdicate, the Horowitz family managed to leave the country, taking one suitcase each into exile.

Mr. Horowitz had been a prominent industrialist in pre-war Romania, and one can only speculate as to the deal he must have struck with the new authorities to gain his family's freedom.

The senior Horowitzes ended up in Switzerland, while their teenaged son, Lucien, eventually settled in England, where he became a founder of the raw materials trading company Gover Horowitz & Blunt, Ltd.

Lucien had some business dealings with communist Romania before 1989, and I had met him at least a couple of times in the early 1970s, during my first tour there.

After the fall of Ceausescu, however, we saw each other more often when he came to Bucharest, both on business and in a prolonged and arduous effort to reclaim possession of his late parents' home. He invited us out to dinner with his British-born wife, Rita, more than once.

I recall, in particular, a time when he showed up at our front door unannounced one weekend with a work-related question, commenting in passing at the entrance that he had never been inside the house in all the years since he had emigrated.

My wife, Gerd, and I hastened to invite him in and offered to show him around the whole house, from attic to basement, an invitation he accepted after politely demurring at first. We told him that morally, if not yet legally, the house was his, and that he should feel free to look wherever he wished.

After his initial hesitation, Lucien showed us around with enthusiasm, explaining many features and details that his parents had incorporated into the building to fit their interests and lifestyle and telling stories about its construction.

I recall his description of playing volleyball with friends in the high-ceilinged living room while the house was still under construction.

He also explained that the wide balcony that overlooked the spacious living room had contained a piano that his mother often played to entertain guests. (Lucien was to return at a later date with his wife and their son Stephen to show them where he and his parents had lived.)



Retired Senior Foreign Service Officer Jonathan B. Rickert spent the majority of his 35-year career serving in or dealing with Central and Eastern Europe. His first assignment in the area was as Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson's staff aide at Embassy Moscow (1967–1968). His final overseas posts were as deputy chief of mission in Sofia and then Bucharest.



JONATHAN RICKERT

The former DCM residence in Bucharest as it looked following its sale by the previous owner, Lucien Horowitz. His former bedroom, the one occupied by the author's son, Jonathan, in the early 1990s, is on the second floor and included the last two windows at the far right.

When we came to the second-floor corner bedroom that our son, Jonathan, an eighth grader at the American School of Bucharest, occupied and where he was busily doing his homework, Lucien became visibly emotional for the first time, saying that the room had been his.

He politely lamented the presence of the wall-to-wall carpet, explaining that it obscured the beautiful parquet floor underneath. He added that he had been present when the workmen had fitted the final piece of wood into the elaborately patterned floor.

Then, turning to Jonathan, he reached into his pocket, removed his wallet, and took out an old Romanian 500 lei banknote that he said he had been carrying with him ever since the day he had fled from Romania.

In a show of the spontaneous generosity that is among Romanians' most endearing qualities, he handed the banknote to Jonathan. Our son has treasured that gift ever since and always has displayed it prominently in a two-sided glass frame wherever he has lived.

Lucien did not get his house back from the Romanian government until a few years after we had completed our Bucharest tour. Once he did, he hoped to sell it to the U.S. embassy, which, for a number of financial and other understandable reasons, declined to purchase it. Another buyer quickly snapped the house up.

It saddens me that the lovely home where my family spent four happy years and where our distinguished U.S. Foreign Service predecessors, many of whom later became ambassadors, had lived no longer has any connection with the U.S. embassy or the Horowitz family.

But I will never forget Lucien's kindness and generosity toward us. ■

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LOCAL LENS



This past February, I paused along Bryggen, a historic wooden waterfront district in Bergen, Norway, on my way north to the Arctic Circle in search of the northern lights. Bergen is one of the oldest port cities in Northern Europe, and its Bryggen district burned down several times over the centuries but was rebuilt every time using the original medieval timber and building techniques.

Between visits to the various historic sites, reading the *Journal* was an excellent way to linger in the cozy, colorful cafés, some nestled in narrow alleyways, also part of Bryggen's unique charm. ■

Nikki Gamer is AFSA's communications and outreach director, leading media relations and helping tell the story of the Foreign Service to U.S. audiences. She has traveled to more than 50 countries and lives in Baltimore with her husband and two dogs. She took this photograph with an iPhone 14 Plus.

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

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AFSA THANKS ALL THOSE WHO HAVE
STEPPED FORWARD IN THE PAST YEAR TO GET
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