

FRIENDS OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE BULLETIN

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The Bush Administration and the Foreign Service

As we begin President George W. Bush's fourth year in office, some early judgments are possible about the impact that developments during his administration have had on the professional corps of Foreign Service people, for whose "friends" this periodic update is designed. On the positive side, personnel shortages have been reduced; there is a welcome new emphasis on training; and communications and security shortcomings are being rectified. In large part these improvements are due to Secretary of State Colin Powell's efforts within the administration and with Congress. On the downside, the psychological environment for Americans serving abroad is arguably worse. Terrorist killings of Foreign Service people at home and in church in Jordan and Afghanistan illustrated the need for security protection of "soft targets" beyond official buildings abroad. New homeland security requirements since September 11 have put heavy new work burdens on our overseas consular people, who issue visas. This impact is addressed below in an article by the editor. Regime change in Iraq created new strains. In the article that follows retired Foreign Service officer Greg Thielmann describes how the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which is largely staffed with experienced Foreign Service people, took issue with other agencies on Iraq's nuclear program. Other behind-the-scenes differences within the administration over policies vis-à-vis "axis of evil" countries and others have been aired at length by the national press, often pitting Secretary Powell and his Foreign Service advisers against "neo-conservatives" in other agencies favoring more confrontational U.S. stances and less reliance on the United Nations. Some of these arguments were covered in our last bulletin on former Congressman Newt Gingrich's blast against the State Department and the range of replies that it brought forth.

What "Friends of the Foreign Service" Can Do For You

In addition to the update bulletins that we send to you twice a year (to your mailing address, or if you prefer to your e-mail address), our organization provides experienced and knowledgeable Foreign Service speakers on world affairs issues of current interest (e.g., Iraq, Arab-Israel talks, the US and the UN, China, Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan/India, etc.) for social or fraternal groups throughout the US. We also plan to send you a sample copy of the *Foreign Service Journal*, the magazine of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) in March. Subscriptions are available for interested readers. In any event, we appreciate your feedback. Send your requests and comments to fsfriends@afsa.org or to:

Friends of the Foreign Service, AFSA, 2101 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.

David vs. Goliath: State's Small Intelligence Bureau vs. the "Intelligence Community" on Iraq



Greg Thielmann

David Kay, who resigned after a nine-month stint leading the U.S. Government's search for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction for nine months, is quoted in the *New York Times* on January 26 as saying about U.S. intelligence analysts before 2003 that "everyone believed they had weapons of mass destruction..." and that "no one stood up and said: 'let's examine the footings for these conclusions.'" In fact Dr. Kay is glossing over a major pre-war interagency intelligence disagreement, in which State's small Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR, which is about 40 percent Foreign Service people) strongly dissented from that assessment with regard to nuclear weapons. And this disagreement occurred even before former Ambassador Joe Wilson, a veteran Foreign Service Officer, reported back from his now-famous trip to Niger that the claim that Saddam Hussein was seeking uranium ore for weapons there was probably not true.

If Dr. Kay had looked more closely at pre-war intelligence estimates of Iraq's military capabilities, he could not have failed to note that one member of the "intelligence community" did not join in the so-called "consensus," and had in fact arrived at the very different conclusion that Iraq was not reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. That member -- the State Department's INR -- formally took issue with the other agencies' alarming interpretation of the available evidence on Iraq's nuclear program in a joint "National Intelligence Estimate" in October 2002. INR's disagreement with the other agencies was reinforced by the growing body of contrary evidence in the months preceding the invasion of Iraq, including information gained by UN inspectors on the ground. Despite INR doubts, and going beyond even the position of other intelligence agencies, U.S. cabinet-level spokesmen went on warning ominously that Iraq could have such weapons "fairly soon" and that the first "smoking gun" could be in the form of a "mushroom cloud."

It is not unusual for INR to stand alone in an official estimate against the consensus views of all other components of the U.S. intelligence community. During seven years in INR on two different tours, I have been personally involved in crafting INR dissents to the majority position on a number of different issues in several such "Estimates." While INR's crystal ball can be as clouded as those of other agencies, the record shows that the bureau's dissents have usually proven more prescient than the majority opinion of the CIA and the other larger intelligence agencies -- and not just on Iraq.

Understanding how State's small INR can out-predict the giants can lead not only to greater appreciation of INR's contributions, but also to clarity in contemplating procedural reforms for the entire intelligence community and for the nation. In my opinion, INR's current competitive edge rests

on the following:

•**Field Experience.** The bureau relies heavily on Foreign Service people with personal experience with the individuals and countries they are assessing, and with the way that reports from abroad are produced. Then there is a mix with personnel from other agencies who bring their own field experience to bear. My office, for example, benefited greatly from the insights of expert Air Force officers who had served in strategic weapon commands.

•**Independence.** INR has long had a strong tradition of independence from policy pressures. During my years in INR, the bureau's leadership never wavered from its commitment to objectivity and integrity. I can recall pressure on occasion from the policy bureaus or from elsewhere in the government to alter INR's analyses when they did not conform to policy. But analysts were trained to resist the pressure and were consistently encouraged by INR's leadership to "let the chips fall where they may."

•**Size.** INR's small size means that each line analyst must cover a much larger portfolio of issues than counterparts in other agencies. This increases the chances they will integrate related issues -- focusing on the forest rather than merely on the trees. For example, a missile analyst may have opportunities to compare and contrast related developments in a various countries of proliferation concern. Or a weapons expert might collaborate with colleagues who have regional political expertise concerning countries on both the receiving and sending side of proliferation. The smaller size of the bureau also allows senior INR officials to take account of differing capabilities and eccentricities of individual analysts. Finally, there are fewer layers between INR analysts and their agency chiefs, allowing for clearer communications.

This list of INR advantages does not fully capture the complicated reality of institutionalized intelligence analysis. It should not be read as questioning the competence or integrity of my able former colleagues in the wider intelligence community nor as seeking to exempt INR from the need to continually search for ways to improve its own performance. But it may help to explain the bureau's superior record of prognostication -- a secret so closely held that it seems to have been withheld even from Mr. Kay.

By Greg Thielmann.

Mr. Thielmann joined the Foreign Service in 1977 and served in Germany, Russia, and Brazil. Prior to his retirement in 2002, he was the acting director of INR's office of strategic intelligence. A more ample rendition of his views on the issue of nuclear weapons in Iraq is given in the March 2004 issue of the Foreign Service Journal.

9/11 and Homeland Security:

The Foreign Service Role in Stricter Visa Controls

Soon after 9/11, we learned that all of the 19 terrorist hijackers appeared to have entered the country with unchallenged documents, including US visas in their passports. The congressional commission that is looking into 9/11 in depth has yet to finish and publish its report, but has already revealed even more unsettling information; some of the hijackers' documents were in fact fraudulent, and some were allowed to enter in spite of suspicious behavior.

The obvious need to tighten up our border security was one of the major reasons for the November 2002 Homeland Security Act. Among many changes, the law moved both the Customs Bureau from Treasury and the Immigration and Naturalization Service from Justice to the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), where they have been reorganized to respond to today's needs. Congress also debated reassigning the entire process of issuing visas from State to DHS, but in the end assigned only overall policy authority specifically to DHS. With experienced personnel on site and host country expertise, the State Department's Foreign Service is to continue interviewing visa applicants and issuing visas. The act creates overlapping jurisdictions and the two departments are still working them out. Both are short of funds to carry out their mandates; DHS has sent representatives abroad to Saudi Arabia, announced plans to send them to five more countries, and may eventually send them to others.

Among the new procedures, visitors from countries exempt from the U.S. visa requirement must have "machine-readable" passports with "biometric" data by late this year. (If not, they too will need visas.) "Low-risk" applicants from other countries who could get their visas previously through travel agencies or other "express" routes must now make personal appearances at consulates for interviews. Student visa applicants are more closely scrutinized and tracked. And visitors from all but the 28 "visa waiver" countries must be fingerprinted and photographed at entry. Beginning in 2005, all departures from the country as well as all entries are to be monitored.

The new processes are difficult and at times aggravating to

visitors. On one hand, existing Foreign Service personnel and resources are limited; visa interviews must still be perfunctory. Applicants are now checked more thoroughly in security agency files for any terrorist associations, but those who have no adverse records could still slip through.

On the other hand, increased screening even if imperfect causes delays. Some American businesses and academic institutions have complained about the delays because of the importance of foreign visitors for their operations. A group of agribusiness leaders asked in a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Ridge whether "redundancies in the system and overzealous scrutiny aren't working against other vital interests of the U.S." Some of the visitors themselves, particularly from Islamic countries, have been dismayed not only about visa delays, but about searches and unforeseen holdups singling them out at the border. Many also express understanding for the need for these measures, but not all governments have been passive. Brazil for instance instituted cumbersome reciprocal measures in January, in retaliation for the new US requirements being applied to Brazilians.

Part of the difficulty of keeping track of aliens in the U.S. stems from the fact that there are some seven million undocumented immigrants in the country who have either entered illegally or overstayed the period for which they were authorized entry. The majority are Mexicans; many others are Central Americans. President Bush has proposed a new temporary worker program for both undocumented workers currently in the U.S. and new entrants. Several other proposals with similar purposes have been introduced by legislators. Regularizing rules for these workers in new legislation may help improve U.S. relations with some of our neighbors, but the longer-term dilemma of excluding terrorists without restrictive practices that can impede or delay some legitimate visitors is not likely to be resolved soon.

By Ted Wilkinson, Bulletin editor

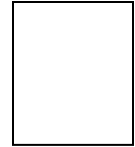
AFSA Elderhostel News

Many friends of the Foreign Service have been participants in AFSA Elderhostel programs. Some have come back more than once, taking advantage of the varied fare, locations, and site visits that AFSA offers. Program sites have included Arlington, VA, Chautauqua (NY), San Diego, Tucson, Atlanta, St. Petersburg, Austin, Colorado Springs, and Raleigh. Elderhostel information and catalogs are available online at www.elderhostel.org.

In the coming year, programs in which there is still space include Colorado Springs in the week of May 4 (#4671 in the Elderhostel catalog) and Chautauqua in the weeks of June 6 and October 3 (#6881). AFSA will be repeating its program on the Middle East (#2895) in the week of September 26, and will be offering a new program on Afghanistan (#11804) during the week of September 19, both in Arlington.

In addition, during the week of September 19 there will be a new program beginning in Vermont and ending in Canada on U.S.-Canada relations. A program will be offered in Houston combining lectures on the Foreign Service with presentations on the presidential libraries during the week of September 26.

For further information, please contact AFSA's Elderhostel coordinator at thompsonw@afsa.org.



Foreign Service News Briefs

- **US to Open Largest Embassy Ever** -- Estimates run as high as 3000 people for the staff of the US Embassy in Baghdad when the Coalition Provisional Authority turns over the reins of government to Iraq this summer. Many staffers will come from Defense and other agencies, but a core group of over 300 Foreign Service people will be needed. Despite competing personnel needs, new Director General Robert Pearson believes that the quota can be filled with volunteers. Several hundred have already signed up.
- **Government Gets Funds for 2004** -- The State Department was one of 11 cabinet departments that finally got their appropriations from Congress on January 22, almost four months after the start of the budget year. The Administration's overall request for foreign affairs (including foreign aid and UN support) was cut from \$28.3 billion to \$26.6 billion, but will still permit hiring of over 300 new Foreign Service officers above attrition to make up for shortfalls in earlier years. For 2005 the administration has requested \$31 billion from Congress, a ten percent increase that takes into account Iraq and other foreign affairs challenges.
- **Secretary Powell Speaks Out** -- In an article entitled "A Strategy of Partnerships" in the January issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the Secretary of State outlines his view of the principles that underlie the Bush administration's foreign policy. The full text can be found at www.foreignaffairs.org.
- **Career vs. "Political" Ambassadors** -- A January op-ed article by Ambassador Donald Blinken, who served in Hungary from 1994 to 1998, reopens controversy about the standard practice of American presidents of appointing a quarter to a third of their ambassadors from outside career Foreign Service ranks. Blinken asserts that the Foreign Service has come to accept this practice, but criticizes many "political" incumbents for not taking their assignments seriously, and leaving them before they have served full terms. In a rejoinder AFSA President John Limbert maintains that the U.S. should in all cases be represented by the best candidates available, and notes the advantages of having qualified and experienced career officers heading U.S. missions abroad, in particular in preference to candidates chosen on the basis of lavish contributions to political campaigns.

Book Corner

"**Inside a U.S. Embassy**," published by AFSA to describe Foreign Service work from the inside, continues to be a best seller. It's available at 847/364-1222 or at embassybook@afsa.org. A good companion piece is "**Realities of Foreign Service Life**," published by the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide, which can be ordered either through amazon.com or at 202/362-3615. "**Serving America Abroad: Real-Life Adventures of American Diplomatic Families Overseas**" is a collection of 100 stories by Florida-based retirees, edited by Irwin Rubinstein. The *Foreign Service Journal's* annual survey of Foreign Service authors can be seen at www.afsa.org. The most recent list of diplomatic memoirs and biographies published by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training is at www.adst.org.