

FRIENDS OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE BULLETIN

AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION & DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR OFFICERS, RETIRED

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Contents:

An Unusual Election Year: Foreign Affairs: A Key Factor in 2004 Campaignpage 1
AFSA & DACOR: Promoting Foreign Service Interestspage 2
AFSA's Regional Retiree Representatives: A Source for Speakerspage 2
Extreme Diplomacy: Foreign Service Duty in Iraqpage 3
Foreign Service News Briefspage 3
Elderhostel News & Book Cornerpage 4

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An Unusual Election Year

Foreign Affairs: A Key Factor in 2004 Campaign

If you ask anyone in the Foreign Service, the US role in the world should always loom large in national elections. Elections in other countries often turn on foreign policy issues. In contrast, they rarely do here. One major poll found in 1996 that one percent of Americans thought foreign policy was the key issue. The figure had risen to three percent in 2000. Another poll found that five percent were “basing their decisions” on foreign policy/security issues in 1996, and twelve percent in 2000. We all know – or least we’re repeatedly told – that what really matters to US voters is the economy.

Things are looking a lot different this year. The same two polling groups show that 38 to 41 percent of Americans now think that international issues are the most important ones facing our country. Senator Kerry has already taken issue with the Bush administration not just on Iraq, but on dealing with terrorism, controlling the country’s borders, relations with allies and with the UN, strategic doctrine, and force deployments. Campaign debates can scarcely avoid focusing on these and other challenges. AFSA President John Limbert discusses the impact of Iraq on the Foreign Service below in more depth.

What is the appropriate way for active duty Foreign Service people to react, when issues that they’re involved in are being debated publicly and politically? The Hatch Act sets clear limits for government officials’ involvement in campaigns. Beyond that, professional ethics requires silence, or at least careful, non-partisan balance in any open commentary. After all, the mission of the Foreign Service is to carry out the law and to implement the president’s agenda in foreign relations, not to argue with him. Such a rule certainly applies to all employees on active duty in official positions. The only acceptable alternative is resignation.

In contrast, no such rule can be said to govern the many retired members of the Foreign Service community, who are also represented by AFSA and DACOR, the organizations described below who sponsor this newsletter for friends in the wider community. Several groups of former senior career officers have gone public with strong dissents on current issues. The first to do so was highly critical of the administration’s perceived favoritism toward Israel in Middle East peace matters. Another group, which includes a number of retired generals and admirals as well as ambassadors, issued a declaration in June sharply criticizing the administration for “relying on military might and righteousness, insensitive to the concerns of traditional friends and allies, and disdainful of the UN,” and demanding a change. (See www.diplomatsforchange.com) A separate group of retired officers has signed on to an effort to abolish completely the death penalty in the US.

Although the dissenters reflect widespread concerns, their views are by no means unanimous. One group of retired ambassadors and flag rank military officers has offered a rejoinder supporting the administration’s foreign policies, and another has enlisted former Republican cabinet members in a group of “diplomats for a nonpartisan Foreign Service” to argue that “supposed disenchantment” in the career services is “simply wrong.”

However the active and retired members of the country’s Foreign Service come down on the issues, all welcome a more informed national discussion of foreign policy issues. There is no question about the need to brush up the US image in the rest of the world. The fact that the country’s leaders feel an increasing need to address foreign affairs in their campaign statements is a small first step in the right direction.

AFSA and DACOR

Promoting Foreign Service

Readers sometimes ask what our sponsoring organizations do, apart from appealing to a wider audience of “friends” for support with the Congress for the foreign affairs appropriations that the State Department, Agency for International Development, and sister agencies need for all the international activities we pursue to avoid conflict and enhance world cooperation through US leadership.

The answer is “a lot.” But the key theme for both the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) and for Diplomats and Consular Officers, Retired (DACOR) is promoting the interests and maintaining the high standards of the American Foreign Service. AFSA was formed in 1924 when Congress united the American diplomatic and consular services into a single career service. It has grown to nearly 13,000 members, about two-thirds of them on active duty, and serves a purpose similar to the much larger American Bar Association and American Medical Association. When a presidential order stipulated in 1969 that federal agencies must have “exclusive bargaining agents” to defend against arbitrary management practices, the Foreign Service elected AFSA as agent. AFSA now helps argue the cases of employees with grievances and bargains about assignment and promotion rules (but cannot strike or negotiate pay). It also provides Foreign Service professional views to Congress on draft legislation. Within the Foreign Service community, it publishes a monthly journal for members and other subscribers, provides scholarships to high school students based on merit, and recognizes employees and their families with annual awards for their service to the community and/or for their courage in speaking out on controversial issues.

AFSA also now has chapters of retired Foreign Service people in regional centers around the country that are active in public outreach. The chapters have periodic meetings and are often called on to provide speakers to other organizations on current international issues and to join discussions on regional media programs. Retiree chapters are listed below for readers’ information.

DACOR complements AFSA as a focal point for professional, cultural and fraternal social activities for retirees and active duty officers and their spouses, especially for those in the capital area. DACOR occupies a historic mansion near the State Department, where it organizes monthly luncheon lectures on foreign policy and cultural issues and organizes receptions honoring new officers and new ambassadors, or marking milestones in the lives of its 3,000 members. Like AFSA, DACOR provides funds for scholarships with a foreign affairs focus, contributes generously to outreach programs such as this bulletin for Foreign Service “friends,” and serves as a source of expert speakers for other organizations. DACOR also organizes an annual conference on a major foreign policy issue; the theme this November will be “Choices for America in the World: Implications of the 2004 Elections.”

AFSA’s Regional Retiree Representatives: a Source for Speakers

As we’ve noted in previous bulletins, AFSA is pleased to provide speakers on topics of interest to regional groups in the US, including such issues as how the US national elections are being seen today from other countries. Communications Director Tom Switzer can be reached at switzer@afsa.org. In addition, AFSA’s regional retiree representatives can respond flexibly and quickly to requests. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses (as available) follow:

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Extreme Diplomacy: Foreign Service Duty in Iraq

By Amb. John H. Limbert, AFSA President



Amb. Limbert

For the Foreign Service, particularly our active-duty and retired colleagues in State and USAID, Iraq has also been an opportunity to demonstrate once again that we are ready to serve our country under the toughest conditions. In fact most of us needed no such opportunity, since we had already proved ourselves in such settings as Beirut, Jerusalem, Kabul, Nairobi, Port-au-

Prince, Lagos, Khartoum, Bangui and Monrovia. Such places, with their accompanying isolation, family separations and dangers, are unfortunately becoming more and more the norm of our careers. They may sound exotic, but the realities of living and working there are anything but glamorous.

Staffing our mission in Iraq means more of the above for more of us. As it has already, it will continue to demand the best from the Service. Specifically, working there will require of us:

Self-sacrifice. Having served two short tours in Iraq during the past year, I can attest that service there is sweaty, tedious and dangerous. The hours are long and the distractions are few. An assignment there will disrupt family life and, at the end of the day, will bring few rewards beyond the satisfaction of having served the American people under difficult and dangerous conditions. Will an officer get a promotion or a dream assignment out of Iraq service? Maybe, but don't count on it.

Experience and Expertise. Iraq is difficult and complicated. The inter- and intra-communal disputes are the stuff of major headaches. Even among fellow Arabs, Iraqis have the reputation of being fractious, proud, violent

and difficult to rule. Experience, patience and understanding are all vital in helping Iraqis rebuild their society. We will need Middle East expertise and Arabic and Kurdish language skills in a quality and quantity that we have not required before.

Resourcefulness. There's no rule book for Iraq. Service there will require the maximum in improvisation, creativity and imagination. For a long time communication was via satellite phones (that worked only outdoors) and via personal Hotmail and Yahoo accounts. Those constraints placed a high premium on self-reliance and initiative. For example, what do you do when a dissident group of Shia from the hawzah (seminary) has occupied part of a government ministry for which you are responsible? The Foreign Affairs Manual isn't much help! And how do you build an effective team made up of Iraqis, members of the regular military, reservists, Foreign Service personnel, contractors, and officials from multiple agencies of the U.S. government? Very carefully.

From AFSA's point of view, our work in Iraq is just more evidence of why we are proud of what we do and why we do not tolerate cheap shots from those who would question our professionalism and our devotion to service. We must recall that a barrage of such unfair charges was loosed last year by Newt Gingrich, Richard Perle, and Pat Robertson, among other critics. When the State Department in early 2004 announced the need to urgently staff up a new U.S. embassy in Iraq, more than 1000 Foreign Service personnel around the world eagerly placed bids for the some 145 positions to be opened in Baghdad and other posts in Iraq.

Our colleagues – active-duty, retired, specialists, generalists and civil servants – are working side by side with the U.S. military and with like-minded Iraqis in carrying out the mission of rebuilding what the late Ambassador Hume Horan called Iraq's "shattered mosaic." They deserve our (and the public's) full support and respect.

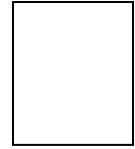
Foreign Service Elderhostel Programs in 2005

Retired and active members of the Foreign will again present several programs at sites around the U.S. Many are listed in the Elderhostel catalog covering programs through next April. (Please note that the restructured catalog has in some cases made it harder to find our programs. For example, while the listings under Arizona used to begin with "American Foreign Service Association Tucson," our annual February program there is now found in the final third of Arizona's three geographic divisions, alphabetically under Tucson. It is usually easier to find our programs in the online catalog at www.elderhostel.org by searching for variations of "American Foreign Service" or "diplomacy" and then looking for the American Foreign Service Association.) Here are the December-April programs and the page numbers of the printed catalog where they appear:

<u>Program #12031</u>	U.S. Diplomacy in a New World: The Middle East;	Dec. 12 & Aril 24	Tiburon CA	p. 43
<u>Program #8164</u>	The U.S. Foreign Service: Representing America Abroad	Jan. 30 & Feb. 27	St. Petersburg FL	p. 58
<u>Program #8198</u>	U.S. Foreign Policy: The United States and Mexico	Feb. 13	Tucson AZ	p. 38
<u>Program #2895</u>	The United States and the Middle East	March 13	Washington DC	p. 52
<u>Program #12151</u>	The United States and the New Europe	March 20	Washington DC	p. 52
<u>Program #7288</u>	Diplomacy in a Changing World: Rising to the Challenge	March 20	Seattle WA	p. 99
<u>Program #10948</u>	U.S. Diplomacy: Over-Rated or Under Appreciated?	April 3	Washington DC	p. 52
<u>Program #7470</u>	Challenges and Opportunities as the US Enters A New Age and Time	April 3	Atlanta GA	p. 62

Later in 2005:

More programs will be listed in upcoming catalogs. These will include Foreign Service programs at Colorado Springs CO (May), Chautauqua NY (June and October), Portsmouth NH (October) and other sites. In Washington DC, we will repeat program #2895 on the Middle East twice in September. These future programs will also be listed on the AFSA website, www.afsa.org



Foreign Service News Briefs

Travels of the Secretary of State – In response to critics of Secretary of State Powell, who noted in July that he had traveled far less than some of his predecessors, the Secretary told an audience at the US Institute of Peace that he did not mind breaking recent tradition. He said his trips were shorter because among other things he did not shop, sightsee, or hunt animals – veiled references to the habits of his predecessors. The Secretary might have added that staying home shows trust in his Foreign Service representatives in the field, who are most effective in negotiations as “plenipotentiaries” (i.e., not when their boss might show up tomorrow to make the decisions). For the record, it’s worth noting that no US Secretary of State even set foot outside the US for the 40 years between 1866 and 1905.

Nominations on hold – Receiving a nomination for a job as chief of mission abroad was particularly hazardous in the 1990’s era of Chairman Jesse Helms, whose Foreign Relations Committee had to approve nominations before the full Senate acted. Senator Helms personally held up the nominations of dozens of career nominees for months, even years in some cases, most often because the nominees seemed too liberal for his taste. Some of them eventually asked that their names be withdrawn. Although Helms is gone today, his spirit is alive and well. Senator Jon Kyl has donned the mantle, putting a hold on the nomination to head the US Mission to the UN office in Vienna of career Foreign Service Officer James Cunningham, who had been serving as John Negroponte’s deputy at the UN in New York. Although the White House had endorsed Cunningham’s nomination, Kyl’s action reflected grumbling in Defense and elsewhere that he had not been sufficiently persuasive on key issues with other UN members in New York.

New York Times Vindicates State Department Intelligence – As noted in our March Bulletin article by retired Foreign Service Officer Greg Thielmann, it was the State Department’s intelligence office that “got it least wrong” in late 2002 when the intelligence community was assessing the nuclear threat from Iraq. In an article on July 19, the New York Times reported having discovered that the State office, manned largely with Foreign Service veterans with area expertise, challenged as unsubstantiated the view of other agencies that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. More recently the Times and the Washington Post have admitted to similar skepticism at the time on the part of some of their own reporters, whose stories were generally relegated to the back pages

Book Corner

Foreign Service people are probably as prolific as any group in the country in recording their own memoirs. Many are assisted by the oral history program of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), which has completed and sent to the Library of Congress over 1400 oral histories of prominent retirees. However, few Foreign Service autobiographies are as current and provocative as Jeffrey Davidow’s *The Bear and the Porcupine*. Davidow, who retired in 2003, covers his service as American ambassador in Mexico from 1998 to 2002 in rich detail, including the efforts of Presidents Bush and Fox to forge new understandings between the US and Mexico, and how they came apart after September 11.