



CYBERNOTES

Cyber Diplomacy

Embassy Colombo recently inaugurated its first Virtual Presence Post for the Republic of Maldives. At a reception in Malé, Ambassador Robert Blake introduced Maldivian dignitaries and press to the VPP Web site (<http://maldives.usvpp.gov/index.html>). There users can find information on how to apply for a U.S. visa, choose an American university, locate a business partner, and access other U.S. programs and activities of special interest.

In the Maldives, where the U.S. has no onsite representative, the VPP serves as a minimal but significant level of diplomatic engagement, offering many of the services available at traditional consulates and promoting interaction between Americans and Maldivians.

This VPP is the latest in what is proving to be a very successful State Department e-initiative, according to State's Fiscal Year 2007 report on implementation of The E-Government Act of 2002, released in late September (www.state.gov/m/irm/rls/92584.htm). The E-Government Act mandates agency-specific e-government initiatives to increase efficiency and lower costs. The VPPs use information technology to extend the reach of diplomatic services and consular information to populations not served by physical embassies or consulates.

The first five VPPs, set up in Russia as a demonstration program under the Office of e-Diplomacy, cost a total of \$10,000 to establish. By comparison, according to the department's Human

Resources Bureau, to maintain a single Foreign Service officer overseas can average \$400,000 per year. There are currently 41 VPPs.

The VPPs are by no means State's only forays into cyberspace. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes has begun to use blogs, chat rooms and discussion forums to extend and deepen America's dialogue with the world.

On Sept. 27, the department's first-ever blog, *Dipnote*, went live (<http://blogs.state.gov>). Launched by Spokesman Sean McCormack, who came up with the idea, *Dipnote* will feature informal posts from key players in Washington and abroad in an effort to make the practice of diplomacy more transparent. Each week a new question will be posed for open discussion, encouraging audience engagement in the issues. Earlier in the year, State's multimedia coordinator, Heath Kern, set up a State Department YouTube channel, where special briefings and interviews with officials on key issues of the day are posted (www.youtube.com/user/statevideo).

In the Bureau of International Information Programs, where many of these initiatives are centered, the Digital Outreach Team — a small unit of analysts, FSOs and Arabic-language specialists — monitors and contributes to high-traffic chat rooms, blogs and discussion forums such as those hosted by the BBC and Arab sites like Al-Jazeera and Elaph.com. The Digital Outreach Team members identify themselves as being from the State Department and offer a casual but

In terms of what's going on in Iraq or Afghanistan today, what the Department of Defense is doing is working. What isn't working is the diplomatic side.

— Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, interviewed in GQ magazine, Oct. 2007, http://men.style.com/gq/features/full?id=content_5896&pageNum=1

credible personal voice in the foreign policy debate in a medium where the U.S. perspective is often unrepresented.

"The competition of ideas is fiercer and more crowded than ever before," says Jeremy F. Curtin, coordinator for the IIP Bureau. "Information outreach, increasingly through the channels of high technology, is a primary instrument of public diplomacy" (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/ips/0207/ijpe/curtin.htm>).

— Marc Nielsen, *Editorial Intern*

Iraqi Refugee Crisis Spotlighted — Again

On Sept. 18, liberal and conservative lawmakers stepped up their campaign to address one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time: the plight of more than four million refugees created by the war in Iraq and, in particular, the circumstances of many thousands of Iraqis marked for execution because of their cooperation with the U.S. there.

In the Senate, a bipartisan group



MARKETPLACE

Click on the
Marketplace tab at
www.fsjournal.org

AFSPA
www.afspa.org

American Military University
www.amuonline.com

BridgeStreet Worldwide
www.bridgestreet.com

CIGNA Dental
www.afspa.org

Clements International
www.clements.com

Cort Furniture
www.cort1.com

Diplomatic Automobile
www.diplosales.com

Georgetown Suites
www.georgetownSuites.com

Hirshorn Company, The
www.hirshorn.com

Jannette Embassy Plan, The
www.jannetteintl.com

Korman Communities
www.kormancommunities.com

Prudential Carruthers
www.prudentialcarruthers.com

Re/Max - JoAnn Piekney
www.movetonorthernvirginia.com

Remington Hotel, The
www.remington-dc.com

**State Department
Federal Credit Union**
www.sdfcu.org

WJD Management
www.wjdpm.com

University of Kentucky
www.pattersonschool.uky.edu

When contacting an advertiser,
kindly mention the FSJ.

led by Sens. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., Gordon Smith, R-Ore., Sam Brownback, R-Kan. and Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., introduced S. 1651, the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, as an amendment to the FY-08 Department of Defense authorization bill. In the House of Representatives, Reps. Earl Blumenauer, R-Ore., and Christopher Shays, D-Conn., introduced similar legislation, H.R. 2265. Both measures have been endorsed by the American Conservative Union.

The legislation would give Iraqis facing potential persecution because of ties to the U.S. the chance to apply directly for admission to America, rather than forcing them to chance a perilous flight to safety through Jordan or Syria. These two countries, already overwhelmed by an estimated 2.2 million refugees, have begun deporting refugees back to Iraq.

Just a day earlier, on Sept. 17, a cable from Ambassador Ryan Crocker denouncing the refugee process and the government's halting response to the crisis was leaked to the press. In it, Crocker said that the admission of Iraqi refugees to the U.S. remains bogged down by "major bottlenecks" resulting from security reviews conducted by the departments of State and Homeland Security. He also made several suggestions for fast-tracking the process.

In February, in response to congressional hearings and pressure from lawmakers and NGOs, the administration had promised to improve the processing of Iraqi refugees, in particular those endangered as a result of collaboration with the U.S., pledging to resettle 7,000 during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. But during the summer that number was scaled back to 2,000, and as of late September, fewer than 850 refugees had been accepted. Since the start of the Iraq War in 2003, only 1,521 refugees have been admitted to the

U.S., a fraction of those eligible.

Meanwhile, a new report by the Iraqi Red Crescent organization documents a surge of internal migration in recent months. Tens of thousands of families have been uprooted and forced to live in shantytowns and makeshift shelters (www.nytimes.com/2007/09/19/world/middleeast/). In Baghdad alone, the report states, nearly 170,000 families, accounting for almost a million people, have fled their homes. U.S. officials say the Iraqi refugee population is increasing by 60,000 a month.

On Sept. 19, the administration announced the appointment of two new senior officials — immigration law expert Lori Scialabba as a senior adviser at the Homeland Security Department and diplomat James Foley as the State Department's senior coordinator for Iraqi refugee issues. At the end of the week, DHS counselor Paul Rozenzweig vowed that 12,000 Iraqi refugees would be settled in the U.S. over the next fiscal year.

Under a 2006 measure passed by Congress, 500 Iraqis who face particular risk for having served in jobs such as translators for U.S. authorities can settle in the U.S. with their families each year. But of that vulnerable group, only 384 have been admitted so far, with 54 more expected by the end of September. In contrast, since 2003 more than 250 Iraqi translators have been killed.

According to a Human Rights Watch estimate, there are presently nearly 150,000 Iraqis in this exposed position. About 65,000 Iraqis work for the Pentagon under contract or subcontract, and another 81,000 work for U.S. reconstruction projects.

On Sept. 21, the U.N. said that Iraqi asylum applications had soared to record levels, with twice as many as last year (www.unhcr.org/iraq.html). In the first six months of this year,



19,800 Iraqis asked to be resettled in 36 Western countries. Almost half requested entry to Sweden, which has been taking about 1,000 refugees per month but is now experiencing a popular backlash.

The U.S. pledge to increase refugee resettlement to 12,000 in the coming year was met with skepticism by human rights activists. "Given the size of this refugee crisis — and the thousands and thousands of Iraqis who are at risk because of their work for the United States itself — it is both disappointing and shocking that the U.S. is not willing to bring more Iraqis to safety in this country next year," Eleanor Acer, spokeswoman for the nonprofit group Human Rights First (www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/lifeline/index.asp), told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Acer noted that when the political will exists, the U.S. has historically taken in far greater numbers of refugees. Between 1948 and 1952, some 250,000 Europeans displaced by World War II came to the U.S., and in 1975 America absorbed 131,000 Vietnamese refugees within a period of seven months.

— Susan Brady Maitra,
Senior Editor

Diversity Visa Program Under Attack

The Diversity Visa Program, established by the Immigration Act of 1990, differs from other visa programs in that it places no emphasis on employer or family sponsorship from within the U.S. but uses a lottery system to allocate visas.

In a report on the program released Sept. 21, the Government Accountability Office found that although it has been effective in diversifying immigrants, the DVP is vulnerable to fraud and could constitute a security risk as currently implemented (www.gao.gov).

Since 1995, more than 500,000 aliens from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S. have become legal permanent residents. But, says the GAO, the program is also vulnerable to fraud committed both by and against DV applicants. In addition, the State Department has neither compiled comprehensive data on detected and suspected fraud, nor developed a strategy to address the problem.

The GAO surveyed DVP operations at 11 overseas posts. At more than half of the posts, consular officers said that visa agents and their widespread use of fake documents distort the process and make verification of applicants difficult. Nearly 9,800 persons from countries designated by the U.S. as state sponsors of terrorism have obtained permanent residency in the U.S. through the program. Although GAO found no evidence that DV immigrants from these or any other countries posed a terrorist or other threat to the U.S., the prospect is not out of the question. "This places a premium on mitigating fraud risks," the report concludes.

The State Department did not concur with GAO recommendations to compile better data and develop a strategy to combat fraud, claiming it already has a robust screening program for DV applicants. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., chairman of the House Homeland Security Com-

mittee that requested the investigation as part of its review of the immigrant visa process, has called for shutting down the DV lottery program immediately.

— Susan Brady Maitra,
Senior Editor

Waiting on Diplomacy: Kosovo's Uncertain Status

By Dec. 10, the six-nation Contact Group (France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.), which has been guiding the Pristina-Belgrade talks on the future of Kosovo, will deliver its report to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the final status of the troubled province.

After eight years of uncertainty, the prolonged debate over Kosovo has reached a crucial point. Declaring the status quo unsustainable, the U.N. secretary-general has urged the Contact Group to produce an agreement that clarifies Kosovo's status and addresses the key concerns of all communities in the former Serbian province.

With Russia supporting Serbian claims to the region and the U.S. in favor of supervised independence, it falls to the European Union and its Common Foreign and Security Policy to resolve the current gridlock. But achieving consensus among all 27 members may prove difficult.

On Sept. 19, at a seminar hosted by the Woodrow Wilson International

50 Years Ago...

The idea of a union for the Foreign Service may quite properly seem inappropriate to a majority of association members, but this does not mean that they would not welcome an occasional measure of militancy on the part of the association's board in championing their interests.

— From "Our Association: What Should We Do? What Can We Do?"
FSJ, November 1957





Center for Scholars, “Kosovo in the Balance: A Trial for Diplomacy” (www.wilsoncenter.org), participants discussed the challenge of reaching consensus on the E.U.’s Kosovo policy. In addition to the fact that the E.U. once again finds itself caught between Moscow and Washington, several member nations have expressed their opposition to recognizing Kosovo’s independence. Yet resolution of its status is urgent. The prospect of still another conflict in the Balkans has stalled European integration efforts.

In a press release issued Sept. 20, the U.S. Helsinki Commission (<http://www.csce.gov/>) notes that although the final status of Kosovo is primarily a European problem, “The U.S. needs to be involved in the process to help bring about an expeditious, yet stable and just result.”

Officially part of Serbia, the province has been administered by the U.N. Interim Administration Mission on Kosovo since the end of the NATO-led war in 1999. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244 gave UNMIK a mandate to create substantial autonomy for Kosovo and eventually facilitate a political process to determine its future.

Under increasing pressure from within Kosovo for independence, UNMIK pursued a policy that required local institutions to meet benchmarks of good governance and inter-ethnic accommodation. Meanwhile, Serbia, supported by Russia, resisted any proposed compromise on its sovereignty. This standoff caused greater frustration, and in March 2004 tensions spilled onto the streets with anti-Serb and anti-U.N. rioting.

In October 2005, U.N. Special Envoy Kai Eide concluded that nothing would be gained from postponing a decision over Kosovo’s status, and negotiations were finally initiated. Secretary-General Kofi

Site of the Month: www.librarything.com

Part cataloging system and part online community, *LibraryThing* lets users catalogue and share their libraries and book lists. After starting an account (requiring only a user name and password), users can create lists and catalogues using a book’s ISBN number or words from the title or the author’s name.

A free account allows you to catalog up to 200 books. A paid account allows you to catalog an unlimited number of books. Paid personal accounts cost \$10 for a year or \$25 for a lifetime.

LibraryThing does not use any special software and draws information from the Library of Congress and Amazon.com databases, among others. Users can edit, sort, search and tag their titles to their liking. They can also view other members’ collections, reviews and recommendations, a feature that has led to the site being described as “Facebook for books.”

In addition, *LibraryThing* has an active message board that includes a book swapping section. Some publishers, including Random House, provide the site with advance copies of titles that members can request.

LibraryThing was created by Tim Spalding in 2005 in Portland, Maine, as a pet project, to catalog his own library and for academic and bibliophile friends. Before that, Spalding was a graduate student in Greek and Latin at the University of Michigan, and worked for Houghton Mifflin in Boston and as a freelance Web developer and Web publisher.

Spalding had no idea *LibraryThing* would explode as it did. Over 270,000 users have signed up, more than 18 million books have been cataloged, and users have applied over 23 million tags to their books. The site became a business in 2006.

— Anna Wong Gleysteen, Editorial Intern

Annan appointed Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland, as special envoy for Kosovo to lead the settlement effort. Throughout 2006, the special envoy held more than 15 rounds of direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina.

On March 14, Ahtisaari presented a final, comprehensive proposal for a settlement (www.unosek.org/unosek/en/statusproposal.html). The plan calls for supervised independence for Kosovo and multiple safeguards to protect the rights of Serbian minorities. It includes the creation of additional and expanded Serb-majority municipalities, special protection and prerogatives for the Serbian Orthodox Church, and additional parliamentary seats and double-majority rules to ensure that Serbs are not

outvoted on questions of vital interest.

Though the proposal was supported by the secretary-general and the State Department, the Security Council was unable to reach a consensus once Moscow announced its intention to veto. With a settlement at the U.N. unlikely, the U.S. and other Western powers decided negotiations should be continued under the auspices of the informal Contact Group.

For additional reports and background, the International Crisis Group has a useful overview, “Kosovo’s Final Status,” which includes policy recommendations. Monthly updates are also available on its CrisisWatch database (www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm). ■

— Marc Nielsen, Editorial Intern