



LETTERS

Another Insulting Homecoming

I was part of the first team of DS agents to volunteer for a one-year assignment in Iraq to assist with the transition from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the U.S. embassy. We served from 2004 to 2005.

In November 2006, I retired as a special agent with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. Since then, I have been reading with a great deal of interest newspaper articles and State Department notices regarding the special incentives that are being offered to encourage Foreign Service employees to volunteer for high-threat posts such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

I wish to applaud the department and AFSA for their efforts on behalf of employees/members and their willingness to initiate innovative programs that range from modified salary caps to counseling services to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Compared to the package currently being offered to department employees who volunteer for service in Iraq, the original Iraq Recognition Package was rather meager. However, I should note that those of us who stepped forward did so out of professionalism and duty, and not for monetary gain, promotion or onward assignments.

Unfortunately, our return to the U.S. was reminiscent of the welcome I received when I returned from

Vietnam. The only recognition of our sacrifice was a notice from the State Department that they had overpaid us and wanted their money back. To emphasize their point, we were also advised that should we contest this matter, we could face criminal prosecution.

I know this issue is old news, but what is unconscionable is the fact that even after State admitted that the mistake was its own, it still demands repayment. The department maintains that even though the new salary cap was implemented during the time we were in Iraq, it did not apply to us because we did not get paid for those hours until 2005.

Other DS agents and I have been contesting this action since April 2005. AFSA represented us at the initial hearing, and the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association has now taken over the case. In the event that the ruling should go against us, we have secured legal representation and are prepared to take the matter to federal court.

I find it perplexing that the department initiates new programs for those willing to serve in high-threat posts, while at the same time continuing to treat those of us who responded to the initial desperate call for volunteers with disdain, bureaucratic stonewalling and contempt.

It is my ardent hope that those dedicated State Department employees who volunteer to put their lives on

the line do not have to face the same homecoming that we did.

*Richard E. Lubow
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Special Agent, retired
Herndon, Va.*

Historical Ironies: Tehran & Peking

Ex-hostage Moorhead Kennedy's "The Boxer Siege: A Precedent for the Iranian Hostage Crisis" (*FSJ*, September) is a welcome piece of historical writing. The parallel between his detention by the Iranian students together with 51 embassy colleagues and the 1900 legation siege in Peking (now Beijing) is replete with ironies. For instance, Kennedy notes that it was the 1980 invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein that paved the way for the release of our colleagues in Tehran the following year.

However, Kennedy overlooked some tragicomic ironies related to Peking. In 1900, the U.S. was an unabashed imperialist power with a garrison of 150,000 men who fought local "insurrectos" (freedom fighters) in the newly occupied Philippines. From there, a regiment was deployed to Peking under a German commander in chief of the allied forces.

After the legation siege was lifted, U.S. troops went on a search-and-destroy mission. They were about to blast with artillery the Wu Men (South Gate) of the Forbidden City in order to engage Chinese defenders,

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who, it was later discovered, had already fled to safety. Unbeknownst to the Americans, Vietnamese colonial troops manning French batteries mistook U.S. troops for Chinese soldiers and shelled them, killing six and wounding 17. Ironically, French friendly fire saved the U.S. from the ignominy of invading and then destroying the highly combustible sacred buildings of the Forbidden City. Nobody was home at the time except an unlikely enemy: scores of eunuch caretakers.

Jose Armilla
FSO, retired
Vienna, Va.

Getting to Cuba

Even here in Nantucket, I am often able to lay my hands on a copy

of the *Foreign Service Journal*, which I read with great interest and pass along to others who think about our many international problems.

For almost two years, I have been trying to get a visa to go to Cuba in a lawful way. I have written directly to the U.S. Treasury Department's Foreign Assets Control Board. I've also tried through the U.S. embassy in Athens while in Greece and through a congressional office.

Of course, I could go to Cuba without a visa, as many have done. But that would do little to facilitate my goal of obtaining payment on my Republic of Cuba Bonds, which were issued in 1937 and defaulted in the early 1960s.

The responsibility for authorizing travel to Cuba should be returned to

the State Department. Long ago, before she came to State, I sent Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a book about Charles III and the Spanish Armada. I guess the old saying that those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it holds as true today as when it was coined. Are we still overwhelmed by the legacy of the Cuban fiasco of the 1960s? Will we be in the same boat with Iraq in 2050? ■

William Kuntz III
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