



LETTERS

PTSD and the FS

Well, Steve Kashkett was spot on again in his VP Voice column in the July/August *AFSA News*, "PTSD and the Foreign Service." Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a physical ramification of the personal and professional pressures Foreign Service employees experience daily, and not just in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How about the stress caused by terrorist attacks and car bombs in Syria and Saudi Arabia? And let us not forget the two embassies destroyed in Africa in 1998.

I was assigned to Embassy Tel Aviv from late 1999 through late 2002. During that period we experienced the intifada uprising by the Palestinian people and violent attacks from Hamas and Hezbollah against the government of Israel.

Suicide bombings were a weekly if not a daily occurrence for two years of my three-year assignment. Here are a few examples:

- I was walking home from dinner on the promenade 300 meters south of the embassy when a suicide bomber blew up a teen/young adult disco, killing 21.

- A suicide bomber targeted Mike's Hamburger Joint, immediately behind the embassy, killing well-known and well-liked employees and customers.

- Two blocks away from the embassy, on Ben Yehuda Street, a bus driver sat in his seat, apparently asleep. In reality, he was dead, killed when a suicide bomber blew up the bus, peeling its roof back like the

proverbial sardine can.

- At the Carmel Market, fruits and vegetables were splattered among the carnage after a suicide bomber blew it up, killing numerous people.

- The Park Hotel was destroyed during a passover seder when a suicide bomber struck, killing 27 people who were only celebrating their faith.

Throughout that period, those of us posted in Israel received no danger pay. No differential. No cost-of-living allowance. At the time, it was politically incorrect to say it was dangerous to live and work there. The attitude of the department and embassy seemed to be that because the suicide bombers' attacks were not directly aimed at Americans, there was no problem.

Instead we got restrictions from the regional security officer on: riding public transportation, grocery-shopping before or after Shabbat, grocery-shopping before or after any holiday, going to the mall, going to movie theaters and patronizing restaurants. We could not be out after 8 p.m., go to Israeli homes, hold a Marine Ball, or travel to Jerusalem (off-limits for almost seven months).

What else did I get out of these two years? Sleeplessness (my own); physical ramifications of stress (my own); anger (everyone in the embassy); depression (everyone in the embassy); irritability (everyone in the embassy); frustration (everyone in the embassy).

The only bright star in this morass of chaos was the strong shoulder and sympathetic ear of a British registered nurse (whose husband was with the

British Embassy). Jean Bowskill, wherever you are, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Lee Ackermann

Information Programs

Officer

Embassy Damascus

Iraq Service Reward?

The State Department has a special obligation to Foreign Service members who have volunteered to serve at our most dangerous outposts in Iraq. Here is my reward for service in Iraq.

In October 2005, while serving as a provincial action officer in Basrah, I received a handshake on an onward assignment as a public diplomacy officer at USNATO Brussels. But, in January 2006, this and 27 other positions were eliminated as part of global repositioning.

I accepted the decision without question. After all, we needed everyone we could get to serve in Iraq. If sacrificing my onward assignment would help, I was not going to complain.

Still, finding another assignment outside of the regular bidding cycle was a challenge, especially for those of us in Iraq outside of Baghdad. The DC's commitment to ensure one of our top five choices for onward assignments came into effect in May 2006, so it did not apply to us. In any case, this commitment holds limited value when onward assignments can be eliminated at any stage of the process, including after paneling.

A list of new global repositioning



positions reached us in February 2006, and included two public diplomacy positions in Brussels identified as “on hold.” We were informed we could not bid on them. The two positions became the Media Hub Director (assigned to a Civil Service excursionist and contested by AFSA) and an FS-2 position at the hub that was filled in the summer of 2007.

One Brussels PD position was eliminated — the one for which I had a handshake — and one was created — the hub director. Yet my CDO told me there was no “one-for-one swap” between the two.

PD budgets and personnel are managed separately from the rest of State, and rank does not factor into overseas headcount costs. Would it have been possible to create the media hub position in Brussels without eliminating another PD position there?

The Civil Service employee previously held a position in the USNATO Information Office. Has any explanation been provided for why the hub needed to be in Belgium, a country with a Muslim population of about 400,000?

I recently learned that “my” USNATO position, eliminated in January 2006, was recreated and re-advertised only six months later. The USNATO deputy PAO position was eliminated instead.

This kind of smoke and mirrors brought benefits for a handful of personnel with good connections, leaving those of us serving in Iraq out in the cold.

For me, the true unfairness was that my sacrifice for the good of global repositioning was an illusion. My greatest reward from serving in Iraq has always been the service itself.

Rachel Schneller
FSO
Washington, D.C.

Nonproliferation Road Map

Most readers probably agree with Jim Goodby’s desire for a world eventually freed from the risks of nuclear terrorism if not annihilation, and he provides a valuable road map for at least part of the way there (July-August *Journal*). Christopher Ford argues effectively in the same issue that unilateral and multilateral efforts by the Bush administration have moved in the same direction, though he overlooks Goodby’s warning that short-term fixes of this sort can work against the long-term progress that most relevant NGOs also demand, as Mark Fitzpatrick notes in his article. It is obvious, however, as the two other articles on North Korea and Russia indicate, that regional politics are crucial in determining progress on this issue.

A key fly in the ointment of Goodby’s plea for a change in U.S. policy has to be Israel’s determination to keep a nuclear deterrent in a regional context where it can be outnumbered and conceivably overwhelmed by a potential combination of regional enemies. Israel’s security has become a bedrock of U.S. policy.

Objectively, Iran has no security interest in attacking Israel. The anti-Israel ravings of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are intended to overcome the historic Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shia divides and gain legitimacy and support from strong regional groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. Thus, the maintenance of nonproliferation becomes one more hostage to the Arab-Israeli confrontation both in Palestine and more broadly. Only an eventual agreement, and years of proven security following it, are likely to persuade Israel to drop its ultimate deterrent.

The Libyan example might provide an opening for nonproliferation

in the Middle East. Like Libya, Iran is not directly involved in the territorial and other conflicts surrounding Israel. Several of Israel’s Arab (Sunni) neighbors have signed peace treaties with her, and none has actively contemplated obtaining nuclear arms as a reaction to Israel’s. This de facto equilibrium risks being upset if Iran continues to seek its own deterrent against threats it perceives as coming primarily from the U.S. A solution to the nonproliferation problem in that region, and more broadly, is therefore within U.S. reach, if Washington chooses to make it the priority it deserves to be.

It would be nice to see some indication that policymakers within the State Department, the NSC and elsewhere read (or at least are briefed on) such excellent *Foreign Service Journal* material more regularly. Perhaps the AFSA Governing Board can summarize and submit such pointed briefings to policymakers on a regular basis.

George B. Lambrakis
FSO, retired
London, England

Honoring Excellence

Recently, while exiting the Main State cafeteria (on the escalator side), I noticed two small wooden plaques with brass name plates. The plaques honor annual winners of “The Secretary of the Year Award” and the “Director General’s Award for Reporting.” Unfortunately, the nameplates ended with the honorees for 1999.

After checking with AFSA, I was informed that these plaques were the responsibility of the director general and that AFSA had brought their outdated nature to the DG’s attention, to no avail.

It would surely be appropriate for the incoming director general to commission new, updated plaques

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and perhaps move them to a more prominent location — for example, in the Employee Services Center (formerly known as the Foreign Service Lounge). Giving appropriate recognition to deserving individuals sustains morale — particularly when the Service itself is under stress.

David Jones
FSO, retired
Arlington, Va.

Pomp and Circumstance

Our military colleagues aren't the only ones confused by diplomatic and consular ranks and titles. Fred Donner's amusing and informative article, "How Many Guns Does a Vice Consul Rate?" (July-August *Journal*) brought to mind a long-ago event that illustrated more general bafflement.

It was back in the days before jet travel, when we still had a consulate general in Yokohama. To get us there, the department booked the customary "minimum first-class" accommodations aboard the S.S. *President Cleveland*. About midway through the 13 days across the Pacific, an elderly lady invited my wife and me and a few others for a pleasant pre-dinner cocktail hour. We hadn't yet met, and our guess was that she was just picking us at random from the first-class passenger list.

Asked by our hostess how far we were going and why, I replied that I would be a new vice consul in Yokohama. "How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "And you're so young!" Maybe I looked puzzled, but in any case she elaborated, "Why, I have a

friend who's a vice admiral — but he's over 40." We smiled appreciatively. When we disembarked in Yokohama a few mornings later, there were — sad to say — no guns and no ruffles, let alone a flourish. ■

Bob German
FSO, retired
Austin, Texas

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