

# LETTERS

## The Case for Mid-Level Entry

In my brief (untenured) tenure as an FSO, I have been impressed with AFSA's forthright advocacy on issues pertaining to the independence and well-being of the Foreign Service. However, Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes' reiteration of AFSA's stiff opposition to a mid-level entry program (President's Views, April) strikes me as short-sighted and detrimental to sound recruiting.

I will not deny that my discomfort with this position stems partly from my own experience. While I understood when I entered the Service that I would have to pay my dues as a "junior" officer, it is, of course, somewhat galling to me that my decade of work experience — including six years in the reconstruction field with the United Nations — and my rather expensive master's degree are all but meaningless as I begin my new career as a U.S. diplomat.

Needless to say, I am not alone in harboring a sense of frustration about spending four years or so as a JO (or "entry-level officer," as the career development officer team prefers). For example, the average FSO in my A-100 class has 10 years of work experience. Many of my A-100 peers have impressive experiences under their belts in the military and international organizations, as well as in private-sector settings, where they honed many of the skills necessary for diplomacy.

I believe that many of the "older" entrants to the Foreign Service have no objection to spending a couple of years or so on "probation." Similarly,

many of us are probably more than happy to serve in consular and other sections outside our cone for extended periods of time. But I suspect that the State Department would be better served by introducing a system that permitted experienced professionals to join the Foreign Service at "mid-level" positions.

First, such a shift in policy would provide the department with a wider pool from which to select mid-level officers for important management and operational positions. Second, it would significantly increase the department's ability to attract recruits with 10 or more years of relevant experience. Many talented majors and captains retiring from the Army, for example, are reluctant to consider a career in the Foreign Service because of the requirement to start as a junior officer. Certainly a depressingly large number of the more talented classmates from my master's program were unwilling to consider the Foreign Service because of this requirement.

I applaud AFSA's longstanding efforts to maintain merit-based recruitment processes and to stand guard against any politicization of the Foreign Service. However, I strongly believe that opposition to a properly conceived mid-level entry program is counterproductive and undermines the department's ability to attract experienced professionals, not least those with qualifications in the fields central to "transformational diplomacy."

Ludovic Hood  
FSO  
Arlington, Va.

## Rereading Roman History

I would normally let Ambassador Thomas Boyatt's June letter, responding to *Foreign Service Journal* Editor Steve Honley's March review of the book *Imperium: A Novel of Ancient Rome*, go by without comment. However, I found it not just devoid of substantive merit but gratuitously offensive, as well.

Where to begin? We all know that "European" has been a cuss word ever since Donald Rumsfeld told us so, and that "literati" is even more laughable than "intellectuals." But do we need European literati to bash a president whose support among plain folk back home is plummeting daily?

With respect to ancient history, I do not understand why Romans whose lands had suffered devastation a few generations earlier would for that reason be inured to attacks by Mediterranean pirates. Were Americans less moved by 9/11, or should they have been, because their great-grandfathers had experienced Pearl Harbor?

Such highly dubious and strained propositions make one suspect that the multiple horns currently goring Bush's ox might also have pierced those standing too close by. Leaving history and erudition aside, Boyatt's imperious swipe at the *New York Times* for having published a potentially controversial op-ed piece is silly enough. But he unwittingly pays Mr. Honley a richly deserved compliment by lumping the *Journal* in with the *Times* with regard to journalistic quality and editorial policy — by which I mean management, not viewpoint.

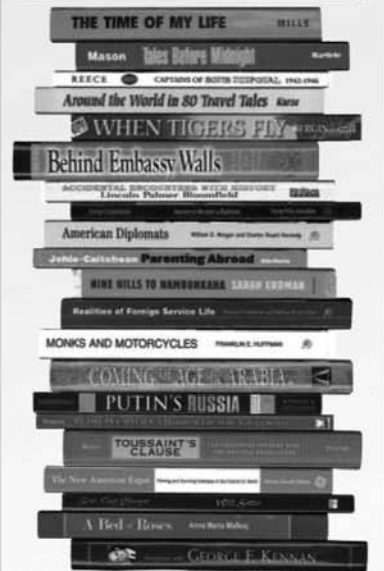
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As for the latter, Honley's words speak for themselves: "Perhaps the parallel Harris proposes here is a fallacy ... only time will tell whether the United States is repeating that fatal error." Would that Boyatt had read them.

*Alan D. Berlind  
Senior FSO, retired  
Bordeaux, France*

### Getting the Point on Iran

The June focus article by Ambassador John W. Limbert, "The U.S. and Iran: Mything the Point," sends a breath of fresh air and common sense over "a quagmire of myths and festering grievances, real and imagined." It is a valuable contribution to coverage of this important issue, made by a distinguished diplomat who has a unique and deep understanding of what drives both sides, and practical, hands-on experience with the problem.

The Limbert article should be read and discussed by all decision-makers involved in the U.S.-Iran issue, as well as those with responsibility for wider Middle East issues. I suggest that AFSA distribute it to every member of Congress as well as executive branch policymakers, and that AFSA approach its contacts to have the piece read into the Congressional Record. (Don't think it will not be read: staff personnel will recognize its value and flag it for a summary report and possible discussion with their principals.)

Amb. Limbert's article is must-reading for everyone concerned about this issue.

*Francis Xavier Cunningham  
FSO, retired  
Arlington, Va.*

### Researching College Options

To Francesca Kelly's excellent, comprehensive suggestions on how to research college options (June Schools

Supplement), I would add a new online resource, [www.finfo.com](http://www.finfo.com).

This Web site includes an interactive college simulator that not only provides fast, up-to-date information on tuition, room and board, and other expenses for colleges and universities in the United States, but also offers customized reports with graphics that show at a glance the comparative financial advantages or disadvantages of different schools under consideration.

Users can select multiple schools for the simulation and enter information on what they are able to pay through savings and monthly contributions. The simulator then retrieves data to provide an instantaneous personalized report, including projections on the amount of funding that will be needed over two or four years from scholarships, loans and other sources, to cover costs for each college or university. It also factors in variables such as residency or non-residency, local cost of living and future tuition increases due to inflation. And it offers easy access to lenders on a competitive basis.

Anyone doing financial planning for college may want to have a look at this new site. It also has a Foreign Service connection: one of its founders, currently its chief technical officer, is Hal Mecke, who accompanied his father, Frederick Mecke, and me on our State/USIA tandem tours in the former Soviet Union and in Belgium, where he attended St. John's International School.

*Carol Doerflein  
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### Beware of Health Insurance Clocks

Everyone under the Federal Employee Health Benefits program needs to be aware that the clock for submitting a claim starts when

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treatment is performed, not when you receive the bill. My daughter was treated in Vienna, but the bill did not arrive until two years (and two posts) later. I immediately submitted an insurance claim, which was denied for coming in after the deadline.

An appeal to the insurance company was denied, and an appeal to the Office of Personnel Management was denied. Basically, neither of them cared that not receiving the bill for two years was beyond my control, even with a letter from Embassy Vienna verifying that the billing took that long. Everyone, especially those posted in countries with socialized medicine, needs to keep this in mind. ■

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IMO  
Embassy Manila

### CORRECTIONS

We misidentified North Korea's foreign minister in "Turnabout Is Fair Play," by Leon Sigal (July-August). In the third paragraph on p. 30, the passage should read, "... promised a meeting between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and North Korean Foreign Minister Park Ui-chun." Kim Gye-gwan, a DPRK diplomat, is vice foreign minister.

Due to another editing error in the same issue, the leader cited in the opening paragraph of Bob Guldin's article, "Russian Nukes: Situation Terrible, But Much Improved" (p. 36), should have been Boris Yeltsin, not Vladimir Putin.

We regret the errors.

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