



**Higgins with a goatherder clan outside of Rajkot in Gujarat, India.**

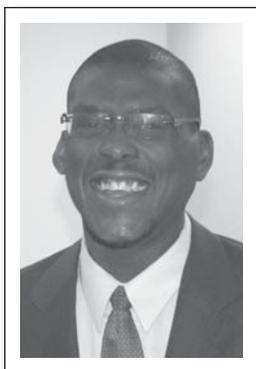
agricultural work in India varies widely, in part depending on the weather. During good years, India is not only self-sufficient in agriculture, but is also a regional breadbasket. But if the rainfall is poor and India's harvests fall behind, then New Delhi has to go to the world market and import food. Higgins' job, in part, is to make sure the United States is viewed as a safe and reliable supplier

of food for India. So she and her colleagues support a growing two-way trade relationship in food and agricultural products. This involves negotiations with government regulatory bodies as well as working with the private sector to bring private-sector trade and investment groups together.

Higgins, 49, started working for FAS in 1983 as a Civil Service employee and entered the Foreign Service in 1990. Her previous postings include Sofia, Bulgaria; Milan, Italy; and Paris, France. Prior to joining USDA, she was a regulatory economist with the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in Chicago. Before that, she worked on Capitol Hill for a member of Congress from Iowa, writing agricultural trade legislation. Holly grew up on a farm in Iowa and graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in economics. She is married with three children.

## POLITICAL OFFICER

**Dereck J. Hogan** ■ Embassy Moscow, Russia



The job of political officers is to analyze a host country's domestic and foreign policies, identify opportunities to advance U.S. interests, and actively promote those interests. Their value added is an understanding of the what and the why of the political situation on the ground, as well as where the United States wants the relationship to go and how to get there.

While reporting is critical and makes up the bread and butter of the political officer's job, it is not enough. "We can't afford that luxury," says Dereck Hogan, a political officer in Moscow from 2007 to

2009. It's not just about taking stock of the situation, he explains; you have to figure out how to work to align your host country's interests with U.S. interests. Good political officers are big-picture thinkers

and see how their issues connect to the larger U.S. strategy. They are also, critically, active listeners.

Hogan, 36, ran the "political external" division of Embassy Moscow's political section, which focuses on Russia's relationship with other countries, during a challenging time in U.S.-Russia relations. When Hogan arrived in 2007, a resurgent Russia was flush with petrodollars. President Vladimir Putin was popular and promoting the image of a strong Russia that wasn't going to be pushed around by the United States. At the same time, Washington was working hard to make sure Moscow saw Afghanistan as an area of mutual interest and was seeking greater collaboration.

Embassy Moscow is one of the five largest U.S. embassies. There are representatives from 29 different government agencies on the country team at post. The political section alone has 17 officers. At such a large post, you could meet someone new at work every single day. As one of two deputies in the political section, Hogan lived on the embassy compound so he could get to the embassy at a moment's notice. He was always in the office by 7 a.m. to check the Russian Foreign

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Ministry Web site to see what Moscow was focused on, who was visiting, and what was on the world stage for Russia.

Hogan met with his staff every morning to go over taskings. He took the management side of his role seriously, checking in regularly with each member of his staff, most of whom were junior officers, to discuss their professional goals. Hogan always encouraged officers to get out of the embassy regularly, and set a goal for himself and his staff to have at least two meetings with Russian contacts each day and produce at least two substantive cables a week, in addition to "spot reports" (quick briefs on breaking news).

An embassy is doing its job when it is staying ahead of Washington, Hogan explains, coming up with recommendations, and leading the way. But it is always a back-and-forth process. Washington has the more global perspective and sees Russia in the context of the president's overall national security policy and domestic interests. Colleagues in Washington also better understand





**Dereck Hogan at the Czar Cannon in Moscow.**

how far Capitol Hill is willing to go on an issue.

Working on high-level visits takes up a lot of time for political officers in Moscow. At least every six weeks, Hogan was directly involved in a visit, either as a control officer (setting up the schedule and managing it), a site officer, or a notetaker, and sometimes all three. While visits eat up a lot of time, they also offer valuable and unusual opportunities. Hogan says he will never forget the time he spent stuck in traffic with Henry Kissinger, discussing how to engage China with the former Secretary of State.

One of the issues in which Hogan became deeply involved was the escalating tension between Russia and Georgia in 2007. Though the United States did not have a direct role in this conflict, U.S. diplomats did try to talk to both sides, perhaps helping delay what evolved into a brief 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. The lesson to take away, Hogan explains, is that “countries will do what they do—and sometimes the best we can do is try to mediate and minimize the conflict.”

Hogan’s evenings were often busy with receptions at other embassies and events at the ambassador’s residence. He usually spent part of Saturday in the office, but kept Sunday free for family activities such as attending a local church, the theater or ballet, or going to the park or circus with his wife and young daughter.

“Russia has to be the most challenging and stimulating assignment you could have,” says Hogan. In a culture that prides itself on intellect, embassy officers deal with a highly educated and sophisticated elite, and “knowledge builds your credibility.” Having a 4/4 level in Russian certainly helped open doors. Hogan explains that while many officials speak English, it is always better to conduct meetings in Russian; it shows respect, and more information will be shared.

Hogan joined the Foreign Service in 1997. He has served on Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Uruzgan and Kunar Provinces, Afghanistan; and in Minsk, Belarus; Managua, Nicaragua; and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. In Washington, D.C., he was a special assistant to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, and a watch officer in the State Department’s Operations Center. He has a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.A. in public affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. He speaks fluent Russian and Spanish. Derek is married to Anny Hogan, and they have a five-year-old daughter.