

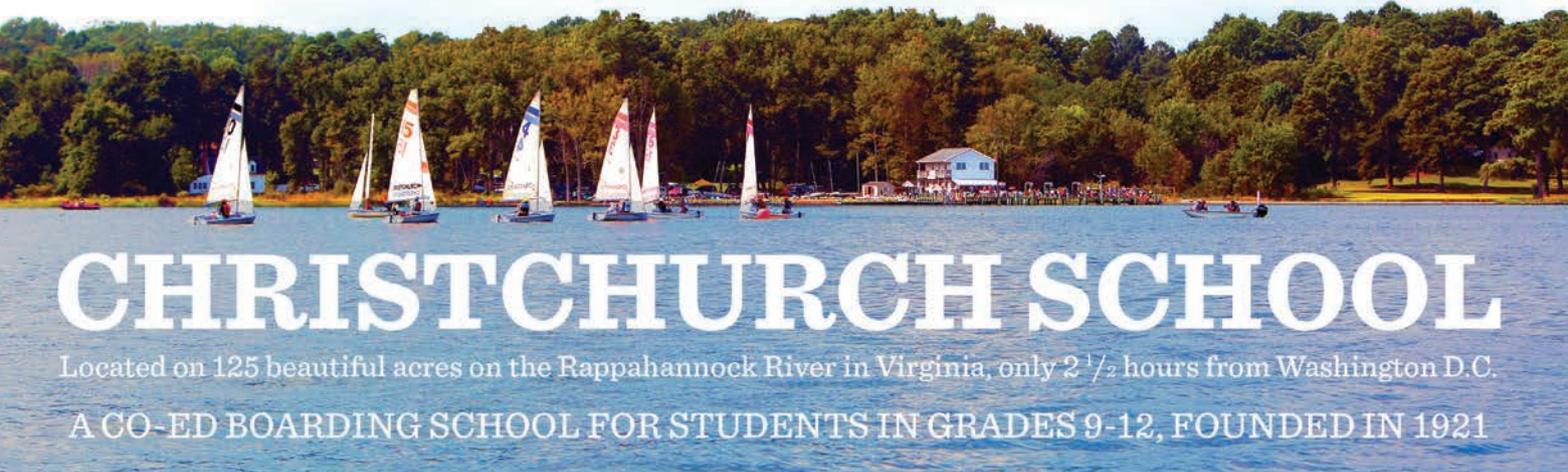
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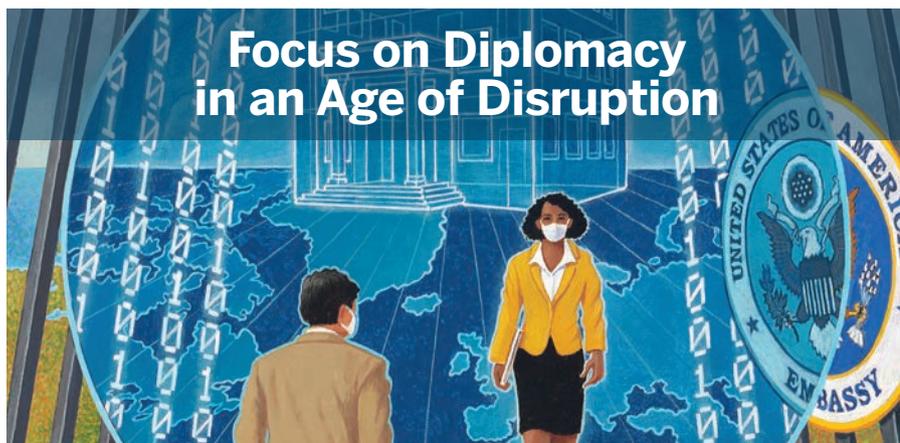
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# THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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On the Cover—Illustration by Connie McLennan.

# Taking Care of Our Colleagues— and Ourselves

BY ERIC RUBIN

Life in the Foreign Service is always challenging. The constant moves, the stresses on spouses and families, the unfamiliar illnesses and the recurring heavy doses of risk can make our profession hard to sustain.

For members who do not look like the white males making up the majority of America's diplomats throughout most of our history, there are additional obstacles and stresses. Add to this the frequent swings of the political pendulum that undermine trust in our nonpartisan Service.

This set of problems was compounded in recent years by a hostile and suspicious attitude toward the Foreign Service from our country's senior leaders, and a lack of respect for experience, expertise and professional knowledge. Some of our most talented senior colleagues were forced out of the Service, and with them went much of our ability to speak truth to power. The events of Jan. 6 deeply affected many members, both for the attack on the core institutions of our country but also the lack of a strong response from agency leaders to the concerns of their career employees.

Yet this difficult period also saw sustained excellence and a renewed commitment to serve our nation. That the Foreign Service helped more than 100,000 Americans get home in the midst of a surg-

ing pandemic is just one example of the bravery and dedication of its members.

Another is the first impeachment process of 2019-2020, which saw more than a dozen of our colleagues compelled to testify or give depositions under oath against the express instructions of the president of the United States. Our colleagues who testified turned what could have been a wrenchingly painful experience into a moment of pride, patriotism and determination.

Career colleagues across the government also demonstrated that loyal public servants will not be hung out to dry when pulled into the Washington political maelstrom, and that their colleagues—and their union—will be there to support them even in the toughest of times. That was not the case during the Red Scares and Lavender Scares of the 1940s and 1950s, when some of our best diplomats found themselves alone and without support in the face of unfair, outrageous and sometimes illegal attacks on their integrity.

The recent annual federal employee surveys show a big drop in career and personal satisfaction in all the foreign affairs agencies. We need to swiftly take action to get back to the kind of broad satisfaction our colleagues reported less than a decade ago.

In conveying our priorities to the new administration and to Congress, AFSA has laid out a vision for achieving a significant increase in our positive contributions to the country's national security, prosperity and global role.

We believe the Foreign Service needs significant growth in both resources and personnel, with a rough ideal target of 1,000 additional Foreign Service positions at State and equivalent proportional increases in the other departments and agencies we represent.

We need a strong and urgent focus on turning around the intolerable decline in diversity in all our agencies. And we need to get the Foreign Service back to the center of the policymaking process on both foreign affairs and foreign assistance.

From President Biden on down, the new administration has sent many positive signals. We welcome the commitment to support and defend our country's career public servants and to ensure they have the resources and backing to get the job done right for the American people.

We especially welcome the announced readiness to work with us and other federal unions as partners, with the shared goal of improving the effectiveness and impact of the U.S. Foreign Service while raising morale and job satisfaction.

We also welcome the renewed focus on work-life balance, quality of life for employees and their family members, and support for locally employed staff who often sacrifice much to make U.S. efforts succeed.

We at AFSA want to seize this hopeful and urgent moment. We need your advice and suggestions on how we can best serve you in helping to build a healthier and happier career Foreign Service. Please write to us at [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■



*Ambassador Eric Rubin is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.*

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# Virtual Diplomacy in an Age of Disruption

BY SHAWN DORMAN

As I write in mid-March, it's been exactly a year since everything started to shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic spreading worldwide. Since then, our FSJ team has been working from Baltimore, Manitowoc, Fort Myers, Bogotá and Washington, D.C. Our Editorial Board meets on Zoom.

We've been lucky: Publications work lends itself to online collaboration and communication. We haven't (yet) missed a magazine deadline or release date.

For Foreign Service life and work, the picture is more complicated and the adjustment to new pandemic realities more challenging. As always, diplomacy and development work has carried on, and with vaccinations moving quickly and a new administration at the helm that values diplomacy, the future begins to look brighter.

We decided it was time to look at what's changed during the pandemic, and at the difficulties and the innovations that have come with the extreme disruption it has caused.

We did not coordinate with authors for a particular bottom-line conclusion from this focus, and yet one did emerge. A distinct thread runs through the articles: While virtual diplomacy and virtual engagement *are* possible and *can*

be successful, and have even produced changes to keep, they are no substitute for being there, in person.



*Shawn Dorman is the editor of The Foreign Service Journal.*

Foreign Service Officers Jessica Huarcayo (writing from Madrid) and Alexis Ludwig (writing from D.C.) start us off with "Can Diplomacy Be Done Virtually?" From observation and personal experience, they illustrate how "building relationships of trust—the coin of the diplomatic realm—depends on actual human contact."

Commercial Officer Aileen Nandi (writing from New Delhi) describes how commercial work has adapted in a difficult business environment worldwide. FCS officers are playing an even more valuable role for the small and medium-sized U.S. companies seeking to do business abroad yet less able to travel.

Turning to "In-Person Exchanges, Interrupted," former FSO and University of Montana Mansfield Center Executive Director Deena Mansour (writing from Missoula) explains that while some new online innovations will be maintained post-pandemic, no matter how sophisticated the platform or carefully crafted the content, electronic engagement cannot replace connecting face-to-face.

Then on to the personal. One common, if obvious, theme from the "life" side of the work-life equation is that transferring and parenting during the pandemic are no picnic. FS family member and FSJ Associate Editor Cameron Woodworth (writing from Bogotá) reports on "Transferring in a Time of Chaos" based on his own recent move and discussions with others.

FS family member and former FSJ Associate Editor Donna Scaramastra Gorman (writing from Moscow) describes the unique complications of "Pandemic

Parenting," particularly for moms.

After three tours overseas, FSO Kimberly Harmon (writing from Charleston) came "home" to the U.S. during the pandemic. In her inspiring journey, "My Reintroduction to America," she finds meaning and community by helping others locally.

FSO Josh Glazeroff (writing from D.C.) speaks out about the need for "Resilience Leadership" and offers suggestions.

In this month's feature, "Effective Public Diplomacy: Lessons from Tuk-Tam," retired FSO Ken Moskowitz (writing from Tokyo) offers insights from his work with a Bulgarian nongovernmental organization.

FSO alum and former FSJ Editor in Chief Steven Alan Honley did the honors of writing our Appreciation of "A Truly Trustworthy Leader—George P. Shultz: 1920-2020."

In our special Retirement Supplement, former head of the Retirement Office at State and AFSA Retiree VP John Naland flags "Twelve Retirement Pitfalls to Avoid" when planning for your post-FS life.

In the Reflection, "The Case of the Bungled Blacklist," retired Foreign Commercial Service Officer Kevin Chambers submits a great case study on the value of FCS.

Don't miss the AFSA officer columns, starting with Ambassador Eric Rubin's President's Views, "Taking Care of Our Colleagues—and Ourselves."

Next month, look for a primer on Arctic diplomacy, including an interview with the U.S. Arctic coordinator and an op-ed from Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska).

Please keep the letters and submissions coming! Write to us at [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org). ■

## What about the Other Agencies?

I began reading “The Future of the Foreign Service: A Discussion with Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman and Marcie Ries” in the January-February edition with interest, until I realized that a more accurate title would have probably been “The Future of State.”

Although the phrase “Foreign Service” was used generously throughout (I counted at least 20 instances), there was not one mention of or allusion to the other five foreign affairs agencies whose staff also make up the Foreign Service.

While presumably some of the recommendations, such as “#2—Revise the Foreign Service Act,” would have a direct impact on us, it seems that we were not considered or included in the thinking that went into developing the recommendations.

I applaud the efforts of Ambassadors Burns, Grossman and Ries, and agree with many of their concerns and observations. I also feel confident that there are FSOs, like myself, from USAID, FCS, FAS, APHIS and USAGM, who would be more than willing to contribute our suggestions and insights to this effort.

Going forward, I would ask that we be explicitly included in any plan to reform the Foreign Service.

*Brandy Witthoft*

*USAID FSO*

*Democracy, Human Rights  
and Governance Center*

*Washington, D.C.*

## “Up or Out” Should Go

I appreciated the good discussion in “Talking Points” in the January-February *FSJ*. But I wonder why in “The Future of the Foreign Service” we still think the “up or out” system a good one. Yes, it is

an easy way to get rid of dead wood, but that is perhaps the only advantage.

We lose too many good midlevel officers who may not be Senior Foreign Service material (or who are, but for whom there might not be space) but who do excellent work at their level.

More than that, scoring points on an employee evaluation report (EER) carries too much weight if what is at stake is the job, not just the promotion. Disagreement is stifled, conformity to the superior’s biases rewarded.

In the military, youth and physical strength play a huge role, but not in diplomacy where cool heads and experience should rule.

I remember reading about the “new system” shortly after I joined the Foreign Service in 1980, and thinking then that it was more a nod to the idea that we are “officers” than to forming an excellent Service. Although I “made” the SFS cut and retired of my own volition, I still think so.

*Kiki Skagen Munshi*

*FSO, retired*

*Julian, California*

## A Color-Blind FS?

I read with great interest Stacy Williams’ laudatory article on the late Ambassador Edward Perkins in the January-February *Journal*. I had the high honor of serving as public affairs officer for Ambassador Perkins in Australia and serving with another outstanding African American ambassador, Terence Todman, in Spain.

As far as I know, neither of these world-class ambassadors took skin color into account in their management of our embassies abroad. I also served with two other outstanding American ambassadors, Jeff Davidow, in Venezuela, and Viron “Pete” Vaky, in Colombia, both of whom just happened to be white males, as I am.

My point is that skin color has little, if anything, to do with the performance of our diplomats. I think Ambassadors Perkins and Todman would agree that experience and qualifications are far more important than skin color when evaluating American diplomats.

All of us should agree with the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who said people should “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

*Guy W. Farmer*

*USIA FSO, retired*

*Carson City, Nevada*

## The Consul Who Saved My Family

My grandfather and I recently stumbled upon a copy of the entry visa his parents received at U.S. Consulate Stuttgart in January 1938. It was thrilling to see the document that saved their lives.

I decided to see if I could find out any information about the consulate and Vice Consul Francis L. Spalding, who had signed the visa that changed my family’s life forever.

Though the full story cannot be told in a brief note, I hope this letter will give you a taste of the contributions of the small consulate and a young vice consul.



There was no little anxiety when my great-grandparents, Sauli Goldmeier and his wife, Mali, journeyed in the winter from their home in central Germany to Stuttgart to seek an entry visa to the United States and escape the furnaces of Europe as they were beginning to heat. They must have wondered about the official who might issue the desired prize. Would he be sympathetic or obdurate?

They were surely aware of the thousands of legal immigration quota spots from Germany to the United States that were going unfilled every year. What they likely did not know was that this was part of a deliberate strategy by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to suppress immigration to the U.S. by bureaucratic means. Fortunately for them, their visa application landed on the desk of Vice Consul Francis L. Spalding.

Spalding's exact work in this case is something I will always wonder about, but his heroics are documented. We know he worked with the U.S. consulate in Luxemburg to supply Jews with the necessary papers.

Describing the events of Kristallnacht in Stuttgart, for instance, Consul General Samuel Honaker wrote: "For more than five days the office has been inundated with people. Each day a larger and larger crowd has besieged the consulate, filling the rooms and overflowing into the corridors of a building six stories high. ... The entire staff has responded most loyally. ... I wish especially to mention ... Vice Consul Spalding."

In fact, of the 18,000 visas issued worldwide under the German quota in 1938, 10,000 came from the small Stuttgart consulate. Vice Consul Spalding would be named an "Honorable Diplomat" in the files of the Holocaust Museum for the number of visas he issued to Jewish applicants.

Consulate Stuttgart and Vice Consul Spalding merit recognition for making a serious contribution to rescuing Jewish families from the Holocaust.

*Gabriel Faber, Ph.D. candidate  
Bar Ilan University, Center for  
Nanotechnology  
Tel Aviv, Israel*

## How the U.S. Can Compete with China in Africa

In an April 2016 *FSJ* article, "Development Aid to Africa: Time for Plan B?" I proposed building universities in African nations.

Such an initiative is even more timely today, when the scope of Chinese inroads into Africa has begun to be appreciated. The crux of the proposal is as follows.

- U.S. university centers can help Africans build their societies with a foundation in freedom of thinking and free enterprise.
- The hunger of Africans for U.S. education and the low quality of most universities in Africa are additional driving forces. Africans know that the U.S. higher education system is the best in the world.
- University graduates will be the leaders of the African nations—in government as well as the private sector. They will come from the demographic that I propose be targeted: the education-hungry, driven visionaries, brilliant but deficient in academic skills, from poor rural settings with dismal public education systems.
- The programs would be modeled on the U.S. system of accessibility for average

citizens, which for Africa means that the programs need to be nearly free.

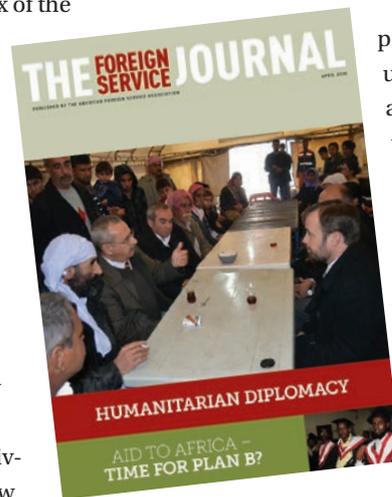
- A tightly controlled student applicant selection process will avoid endemic fraud and bribery and recruit the best and brightest students, albeit with remedial needs because of the poor quality of public schools the majority of them attend.

To make such a U.S. State Department-sponsored effort more cost-effective, I propose constructing one modest, state-of-the-art classroom/lecture/computer lab building on each of several campuses of willing African universities, and staffing these centers with two to five American IT and education professionals.

Online courses and programs from U.S. universities would serve as the program's foundation, provided they are adapted to Africans, who are community-oriented. The small U.S. staff would administer online courses (massive open online courses, or MOOCs, as well as contracted courses).

I did this hybrid type of teaching—a MOOC course from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on genetic engineering in the development of pharmaceuticals—at St. John's University of Tanzania (2011-2016), and it worked well. I streamed the lectures to the students in a lecture hall, helped them understand the content, gave them links to transcripts and carefully proctored the exams.

Staffing would not need to be expensive: The U.S. has a surfeit of talented individuals with doctorates who would



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jump at the chance to spend several years in Africa in a Peace Corps-type situation.

One caveat: The model of private U.S. universities, such as those in the Middle East, would be far too expensive for the average African and would simply perpetuate the current “higher-education-for-the-rich” situation there.

We Americans developed our education system based on free and affordable education. Let’s help Africa do the same. ■

*Don Lotter, Ph.D.*

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California State University, Sacramento  
[facebook.com/don.lotter.1](https://facebook.com/don.lotter.1)*

### CORRECTION

In the March Podcast of the Month, the correct web address for the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy’s podcast Diplomatic Immunity is <https://diplomaticimmunity.libsyn.com/>. We regret the error.



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# Maximize Our Abilities

BY ELIZABETH POWERS

I was disappointed to read Secretary Antony Blinken’s message on his first day at the State Department: “Let’s get to work.” Respectfully, Sir, we’ve been working our arses off. Your diplomatic corps worked until the last days of the Trump administration to implement its policies. We began implementing President Biden’s policies at noon, Jan. 20, 2021. There is no pause button for our work. We work for the United States of America.

But I was encouraged to see *The Foreign Service Journal’s* “Notes to the New Administration” shortly thereafter, and I would like to add my thoughts and advice to the mix.

The past four years were difficult. Many of us proudly recalled that the Foreign Service officer’s oath is to the Constitution. When we disagreed with the previous administration’s policies, we dissented, and those who could not in good conscience execute the administration’s policies resigned.

Sir, you are inheriting a corps that has been tested but is resilient. We are committed to continuing to serve our country and not the persona of a temporally limited executive branch.

It is up to you to maximize our abilities. Give us a clear strategic vision and your intent on how to implement it—and we’ll execute the mission. Our work is most effective when our political leaders clearly

*Elizabeth Powers is an economic officer in Lima. The views expressed in this article are her own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State or the U.S. government.*

define the problem and the end state they seek, and communicate this message throughout our ranks.

Use this opportunity to set forth in simple terms what our most pressing issue is and unleash our initiative. Like at home, most nations where we serve are consumed with COVID-19. We will have only a moment once sufficient populations are vaccinated to seize the opportunity to lead on the United States’ and earth’s most existential issue—climate change. This is the issue of our lifetime.

In the meantime, if you are looking to improve the morale of your diplomatic corps:

**Vaccinate us.** Our ability to perform to our maximum capacity cannot be achieved until the pandemic is curbed and we are vaccinated—not just back at home, but in the field. Thousands of us are in places with austere medical infrastructure now entering a second wave of infections. Please speed vaccines to the field.

**Diversify us.** Most Foreign Service officers who are persons of color or



women have been the “only” such in the room, surrounded by white, male colleagues. Our regional bureaus’ front offices have been exceptionally male and pale in recent years. The voices of women, people of color and younger generations have been excluded from senior positions either through intent or neglect. Please ensure that senior ranks, from under secretaries down through deputy assistant secretaries, reflect our greatest American strength—our diversity.

**Recognize us.** Whether appointed by a Democratic or Republican president, political ambassadors have often been counterproductive to our bilateral relations with the host country or disastrous to post morale. Diplomats are professionals, trained in doctrine and experienced in tradecraft. Appointing amateurs degrades our professional morale and can undermine policy objectives abroad. Bring us in line with other Western democracies by recommending career diplomats for all ambassadorships. ■

## Three Steps to Boost State Technology

BY MARIYA ILYAS

The March *FSJ*, which contained recommendations for the new administration, inspired me to submit some proposals of my own for needed improvements at the State Department.

In 2001, a decade after the birth of the internet, then Secretary of State Colin Powell ordered 44,000 computers and demanded the department bring internet to desktops. Secretary Powell recognized that for American foreign policy to compete—and triumph—in a world swept by

the technological revolution, his team needed appropriate tools.

When it comes to technological innovation to support modern-day diplomacy, the State Department consistently lags. In a world where *démarches* are delivered on WhatsApp, cyberattacks are common, and mobile technologies are essential for on-the-road diplomats, it behooves the department to stay ahead of the technological curve.

I recommend the Biden administration take the following three steps.

*Establish a Research & Development Office.* The Bureau of Information Resource Management (IRM) is the principal entity charged with supplying and maintaining the State Department's technological needs, from secure networks to department-issued mobile phones. Dr. Glen Johnson, IRM chief technology officer, noted that the department needs to break away from "the need has to arise" mentality. IRM suffers from underfunding, and this prevents it from assuming new initiatives or venturing into new technologies.

Having an office dedicated solely to research and development within IRM will allow the State Department to experiment with cutting-edge technologies. With the establishment of the Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies Bureau, there are opportunities for partnerships to secure cyberspace and critical technologies, as well as reduce the likelihood of cyber conflict.

*Consolidate IT under the department's chief information officer.* State needs a one-stop-shop bureau for all operational IT needs. Indeed, the lack of an information-sharing apparatus is a vulnerability. IT experts are scattered across bureaus, functioning in silos, focused only on applications on which they are trained. Global Talent Manage-

ment, Consular Affairs, Public Diplomacy, and Diplomatic Security all have their own separate IT units. Despite their distinct organizational and leadership structures, however, bureau IT specialists could collaborate and share information. For example, other bureaus can leverage IRM's partnerships with Microsoft, Google, Facebook and Amazon.

*Emphasize greater technological experimentation.* IRM has made great strides in artificial intelligence to speed department operations, reduce operational redundancies through automation, and provide greater remote capabilities through cloud networking. The challenge, however, is convincing early adopters to experiment with these technologies. Also, limited budgets, lack of understanding, and bureaucratic challenges within organizational cultures are often the source of hesitation in adopting new technologies.

There is untapped potential for visualization software, mapping with photos

and pictures, and enhanced team collaboration technologies for international development work, election monitoring, disaster reporting, security and budgeting. Drone technology, for example, could be particularly helpful for the Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau to monitor Syrian refugees on the border, capture aerial images of population density and provide real-time analytics.

Technological preparedness should not be taken lightly. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the telework environment revealed an underequipped workforce. The 90-day Reimagine Task Force was a step in the right direction to increase adaptivity and workforce resilience. The Biden administration has an opportunity to modernize State Department technology. ■

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*Mariya Ilyas joined the U.S. Foreign Service in September 2018 and is currently serving her first tour in the consular section in Amman.*

## For an "Administrative" Dissent Channel

BY BRENDAN M. RIVAGE-SEUL

appreciated all the insightful notes to the new administration in the March *FSJ*, and would like to add one of my own on the subject of constructive dissent.

There is a growing sense among State personnel that the department's Dissent Channel (for policy), established in 1971, was an important, but ultimately incomplete breakthrough in U.S. foreign policy accountability. Still desperately needed, 50 years later, is a parallel structure for our professionals in Washington and

diplomats overseas to convey via front-channel cable why certain administrative policies do not make sense or are not in the department's interest (operationally, financially, culturally or otherwise), and recommend changes.

For those unfamiliar, the Dissent Channel is a tool that empowers State and USAID personnel to confidentially express "dissenting or alternative views on substantive issues of policy" (2 FAM 070). By congressional mandate, department policy dictates that the Office of

Policy Planning (S/P) draft substantive front-channel responses to all Dissent Channel cables received. The most effective dissent cables spark interagency reflection at the highest levels and, in some instances, lead to a shift in policy.

Much like the Dissent Channel for policy, the spirit and objective of a Dissent Channel for administrative issues would ultimately be about strengthening our institution. Such a channel would empower our personnel to address otherwise bureaucratic dead ends and, in the process, increase department accountability, transparency and visibility vis-à-vis a wide range of administrative challenges and concerns facing our people.

It would also be good for State Department morale and retention, spark innovation, and help identify opportunities for cost-savings and more efficient provision and delivery of services.

An “Administrative Dissent Channel” would have the most impact if overseen by the deputy secretary of State for management and resources (D-MR) who, in consultation with the Offices of the Secretary and Under Secretary for Management, would also be responsible for drafting substantive replies to all administrative dissent cables received.

## What Could We Expect?

What could we expect to happen if the department implemented this proposal? A generation of case studies on organizational effectiveness from business and public policy schools have taught us that some of the best ideas for improving administrative and management policies and practices come from entry- and midlevel professionals on the ground who are directly affected by those policies.

They also teach us that the most effective organizational leaders seek

to hear from the rank and file about what is working and not working within their organizations—and, importantly, what ideas their subordinates have for improving conditions and operations.

An Administrative Dissent Channel promises to do all those things by giving our personnel a mechanism to share constructive criticisms and propose possible solutions and innovations.

It would also hold the State Department accountable for responding to and addressing those concerns and proposals—something neither the now-defunct Sounding Board nor the Director General’s Innovation Portal is required to do. The DG Direct Channel, meanwhile, is more geared toward personnel concerns

(often individual) as opposed to departmentwide administrative policies.

Even if the department’s response to most Administrative Dissent Channel cables and proposed solutions is “Sorry, no change in policy, and here is why...,” it would go a long way toward increasing transparency into administrative decisions and allowing those of us in the rank and file to feel engaged in the process.

Such a structure would encourage our people to speak up thoughtfully and creatively (individually and collectively) about how to improve administrative policies that may be missing the mark or leaving people behind. It would also convey that as an institution, we strive to constantly improve. Announcing the

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launch of an Administrative Dissent Channel in 2021—the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Dissent Channel for policy—would be fitting.

## Some Administrative Challenges

Specific administrative challenges—and ideas for solutions or alternatives—one might reasonably expect to see highlighted for department attention in administrative dissent cables are familiar to many of us. They include, among other things:

- Lack of diversity and inclusion in the Foreign Service.
- Insufficient support for “tandem” Foreign Service couples and families with two working spouses.

- The shortcomings of volunteer promotion panels.
- The shortsightedness of not conducting exit interviews or tracking personnel separation data.
- The institutional costs of appointing political-donor ambassadors who lack qualifications.
- Integrity gaps in the department’s evaluation system.
- The inadequacy of embassy medical facilities and staffing.
- Insufficient hardware, software and financial support for teleworking.
- The flaws of the outdated State training model.
- The department’s inability to consistently staff priority service posts with our best people.

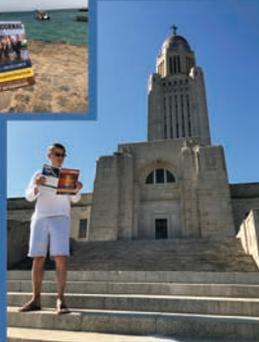
In the final analysis, it is incumbent on any new Secretary who hopes to succeed as America’s top diplomat to get to know the department as an institution and its people. What are their frustrations and aspirations?

Collective hopes for our new Secretary are justifiably high. We all eagerly await an announcement of the steps he will take to strengthen our institution and position us for success. The launch of an Administrative Dissent Channel would be a good place to start. ■

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*Brendan Rivage-Seul, an 11-year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, has served in Mexico, Afghanistan, Pakistan, France and the Operations Center in Washington, D.C.*

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

President Joe Biden delivers remarks to State Department employees on Feb. 4 at the Truman building in Washington, D.C.

## President Biden to FS: I Trust You

**O**n Feb. 4, just two weeks after taking office, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris visited the State Department, welcomed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

In a speech broadcast to embassies and consulates around the world, President Biden lauded Foreign Service and Civil Service employees and told them, “I’m going to have your back.” It was a significant shift in tone from the past four years, during which the Foreign Service sometimes felt under attack by the previous administration.

Following is an abridged version of the president’s remarks:

“Thank you for welcoming the vice president and me back to the State Department. It’s true, the Secretary and I have worked together a long time. And I know that he has the background and the capacity needed to lead the State Department at a critical moment.

“Those of you who work here, including the new class of diplomats that are on

the screen behind me: You’re among the brightest, most involved, best educated group of people America has to offer. I come today to talk to everyone at Main State watching remotely and those who will not be able to see this but will hear about it. ...

“I’ve been with some of you when we’ve been shot at. I’ve been with some of you when we’ve been in places that you would have any idea you’d want to be when you were going to school of foreign policy and foreign service. They never told you that was going to happen. But you’re an incredible group of individuals.

“We don’t thank your families [enough] for the sacrifices they make. Your spouses, they give up their careers to follow you. Many times, their careers are as consequential or more consequential than yours; but they do it for the country. And they’re to be thanked.

“But the main message that I want to communicate to you all is that you’re vital, and the success and strength of our nation depends in no small part on you.

“You are the center of all that I intend

to do. You are the heart of it. We’re going to rebuild our alliances. We’re going to reengage the world and take on the enormous challenge we face dealing with a pandemic, dealing with global warming, and again, standing up for democracy and human rights around the world.

“You’re the face of America abroad. And in our administration, you’re going to be trusted, and you’re going to be empowered—to do your job.

“But I ask each of you to abide by a few core tenets: Integrity in all you do. Transparency and accountability to rebuild trust in America and around the world. Working in the service of American people, not self-interest. And promoting diversity, equity, inclusion—accessibility across the board—because our diplomats, at all levels, should reflect the full diversity of this great country.

“I also know that you’ve never let us down. I believe in you. We need you badly. I trust you. And I’m going to have your back—that I promise you—just like you’re going to have the backs of the American people.

“When I was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I’d make sure that my committee staff came to my home state and worked on constituent services, which many of them thought was sort of beneath them: ‘I’m a foreign policy specialist.’ But it’s all about who you work for—who I work for, who we work for. Foreign policy is about promoting the interests of the people of the United States.

“Now, I’ve got a lot of work to do and a lot of catching up to do, a lot of rebuilding to do. And I can’t think of any group of people better capable of doing it, more ready, than all of you.

“So, thank you all very much, and may God bless you, and may God keep you all safe when you’re abroad.”

## Contemporary Quote

So here's our plan. First, we will stop COVID-19 and strengthen global health security. Second, we will turn around the economic crisis and build a more stable, inclusive global economy. Third, we will renew democracy, because it's under threat. Fourth, we will work to create a humane and effective immigration system. Fifth, we will revitalize our ties with our allies and partners. Sixth, we will tackle the climate crisis and drive a green energy revolution. Seventh, we will secure our leadership in technology. And eighth, we will manage the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century: our relationship with China.

—Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his March 3 speech,  
“A Foreign Policy for the American People.”

## Biden, Blinken Signal Foreign Policy Changes

President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have signaled sweeping foreign policy changes.

“The message I want the world to hear today: America is back. America is back. Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy,” Biden said during Feb. 4 remarks at the State Department.

The president said that America's leadership must meet the challenges of “advancing authoritarianism” in the world, “including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy.”

In hot spots around the globe, the new administration is pointing to new approaches and moving away from some Trump administration policies.

In his speech at the State Department, President Biden announced that the United States and Russia have agreed to extend the New START arms treaty for five years, “preserving the only remaining treaty between our countries safeguarding nuclear stability.”

Biden declared that the United States was ending support for Saudi-led offensive operations in the war in Yemen,

including arms sales. On Feb. 5, State announced that Secretary Blinken was lifting the foreign terrorist designation former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had placed on Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis rebels. Blinken appointed FSO Tim Lenderking as special envoy for Yemen.

In a Feb. 16 interview on NPR, Blinken explained: “We are now doubling down on diplomacy to try to end that horrific war in Yemen that's helped produce what is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.”

On Jan. 26, the Biden administration announced it would restore U.S. relations with the Palestinians, which had been cut off during the Trump administration. Richard Mills, then acting U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, reaffirmed U.S. support for the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Mills added that the United States would renew economic and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and reopen diplomatic missions shut down by the Trump administration, such as the Palestine Liberation Office in Washington, D.C., and the consulate general in Jerusalem, which dealt with Palestinian affairs.

Signaling renewed attention to climate change issues, President Biden named former Secretary of State John Kerry as

his climate envoy, and on Feb. 19 the U.S. officially rejoined the Paris Agreement.

On Feb. 22, Secretary Blinken said the United States will try to strengthen the agreement between world powers and Iran aimed at curbing its nuclear program, CNBC reported. Blinken said that if Iran comes back into “strict compliance” with the 2015 pact, the Biden administration will do the same. The Trump administration had pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018.

“The United States remains committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon,” Blinken told the U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. “Diplomacy is the best path to achieve that goal.”

## State Adds Chief Diversity Officer

The State Department will create a new chief diversity and inclusion (D&I) officer position, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced in a statement on Feb. 24. This officer—not named in the statement—will report directly to the Secretary.

“Our goal is to incorporate diversity and inclusion into the department's work at every level,” Blinken said. He directed all State Department bureaus to designate an existing deputy assistant secretary to support that bureau's diversity and inclusion efforts, and to serve on a new D&I Leadership Council bringing senior leaders together to push for the goals outlined in a new, updated Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan that will be released soon.

“Diversity and inclusion make us stronger, smarter, more creative, and more innovative,” Blinken said. “And our diversity gives us a significant competitive advantage on the world stage. This is something that the president, the vice president and I firmly believe.”



U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Daniel Kritenbrink performs in a rap song recorded to celebrate Vietnam's Lunar New Year.

## Ambassador Dan's Rap Video Goes Viral

**T**ime for introductions are at hand. Hi, my name is Dan. I'm from Nebraska. I'm not a big city boy. Then three years ago, I moved to Hanoi."

So begins a rap song by career FSO Ambassador to Vietnam Daniel Kritenbrink released on Feb. 8. The ambassador recorded the music video to send best wishes for the Lunar New Year—or as it is known in Vietnam, Tet—the most important celebration of the year.

Produced by a Ho Chi Minh City media company, Vietcetera, the video starts with Kritenbrink expressing interest in competing in "Rap Viet," a Vietnamese TV talent show. He works with Vietnamese rapper Wowy to create a song and rap.

He raps about Tet traditions such as buying cherry blossoms and cleaning the house, concluding with some lines about improving the U.S.-Vietnam relationship: "From my shores to your shores, our friendship endures. U.S. and Vietnam, from now to forever, we're trusted partners prospering together."

First shared on Embassy Hanoi's Facebook page, the video went viral. By late February it had been viewed more than 60,000 times on Facebook, generating thousands of comments and re-shares.

Some of the comments on YouTube (where it was also shared) below remind us that it's nice to see something positive and fun for a change, although no one recommended Ambassador Dan give up his day job.

- Who cares if it's kinda cringey. He clearly loves Vietnam and is just trying to have some fun. Seems like a genuinely nice guy and a fantastic ambassador.

- This is the most ... BEAUTIFUL THING I'VE EVER SEEN.

- Breaking down barriers through respect and appreciation ... I love it!

- No ... no. Nope, nooo, No. ...

- Okay wait I love this.

Media in Vietnam, the U.S. and elsewhere picked up the rap story, and the video has been shown on NBC News and CNN. Stories have run on PRI's *The World*, in *The Washington Post* and elsewhere.

## Congressional Report Highlights Diversity Issues

**T**he workforce at U.S. foreign policy agencies "is less racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. population as a whole," especially at senior pay grades, according to a Jan. 21 report by the Congressional Research Service.

The 41-page report, "Faces and Voices of the United States Abroad: Diversity at U.S. Foreign Affairs Agencies," finds that the Civil Service workforce at State and USAID have more racial and minority employees proportionately than the American workforce as a whole; but the Foreign Service at these agencies has fewer racial and ethnic minorities, as well as women, compared to the general workforce. Moreover, the portion of women and racial and ethnic minorities declines at the higher levels.

Among the foreign affairs agencies, the U.S. Agency for Global Media is the most racially and ethnically diverse, CRS found.

## Vaccines Slow in Getting Out to Posts

**I**n late 2020 the Foreign Service community expected that vaccines would be distributed quickly to overseas posts. In December, however, the State Department received only about 5 percent of its requested allocation. And as of mid-February, the agency had received only 23 percent of the 315,000 doses it requested to vaccinate its entire workforce, including family members, NBC News reported.

A cable from the U.S. ambassador to Kosovo was leaked and then cited on Feb. 15 by NBC News. It gave "a snapshot into the mounting mental health crisis faced by U.S. diplomats" waiting to receive the vaccine after 11 months of sheltering during the pandemic in one of Europe's poorest countries.

On social media, members of the Foreign Service community have been discussing the challenges of waiting for vaccines, especially at hardship posts, and the isolation they feel in dealing with local quarantines and travel restrictions.

At least 13 foreign governments have offered to vaccinate U.S. diplomats with their own allotment of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, *The Washington Post* reported on Feb. 17. The State Department has accepted these proposals, the *Post* said, with offers from at least eight more pending.

Some U.S. diplomats in Russia have asked Moscow for doses of its Sputnik V vaccine, according to the *Post*, which added that State does not recommend that vaccine but is allowing employees to make their own decisions.

“The health and safety of our people is

a top priority for the department, and we are committed to providing our workforce timely, accurate information about vaccine distribution,” Acting Under Secretary for Management Carol Perez told *The Washington Post*. “This is a very fluid situation, and we understand employees are eager for information.”

In January, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told staff that five American diplomats and 42 locally employed staff serving overseas had died from COVID-19 to date.

## ARB: State’s Response to “Havana Syndrome” Illnesses Faulted

A recently declassified State Department Accountability Review Board report from June 2018 says the department mishandled the mysterious

neurological symptoms suffered by U.S. diplomats in Cuba in late 2016 and 2017.

Posted Feb. 10 by the National Security Archive, the report says the department’s response “was characterized by a lack of senior leadership, ineffective communications, and systemic disorganization.”

As of May 2018, two dozen Embassy Havana community members had been “medically confirmed to have sustained brain injuries” while serving in Cuba, with some injuries so severe that those afflicted might never be able to return to work, the report says. Some diplomats have also been affected by similar mysterious illnesses in China.

“To this day, no senior official at the State Department has been assigned responsibility for leading and coordinating efforts to assess past incidents and prevent/mitigate future events,” the report states.

According to the report, State commissioned the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch an investigation into the Cuba illnesses at the end of 2017, but blocked sharing of medical data the CDC needed for the study to go forward for nearly a year.

The State Department announced it was appointing an adviser to manage future incidents, CNBC reported on Feb. 11. Meanwhile, the National Academy of Sciences, in a report released on Dec. 5, determined that directed microwave radiation is the likely cause of illness among diplomats in Cuba and China. The report had been commissioned by the State Department.

“The health effects from these mysterious injuries have tormented those afflicted. Their illnesses and suffering are real and demand a response from Congress,” Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement.

### Podcast of the Month: *Moments in History: Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training* <https://adst.org/moments>

The Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training is known for its collection of more than 2,500 oral histories from U.S. diplomats. ADST’s special web series, based on excerpts from the oral histories, of more than 800 “Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History” captures historical events as well as humorous aspects of diplomatic life, as seen through the eyes of those who were there.

Moments include such topics as “Trust in Diplomacy: Secretary of State George Shultz,” “The Consequences of Serendipity: From Peace Corps to USAID,” “Life as a New Foreign Service Spouse” and “The State Department Under the Red Scare: McCarthy’s Campaign.”

Topics feature short write-ups, as well as links to the related oral histories and other educational resources.

ADST’s mission is to capture, preserve and share the experiences of the country’s diplomats with the American public.



## The Iran Hostages Congressional Gold Medal Act

Two members of Congress have introduced bipartisan legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to U.S. Embassy Tehran workers who were taken hostage by Iran in 1979. Under the legislation, introduced on Feb. 18, a silver duplicate of the medal would be awarded to the 52 people taken hostage, or their next of kin.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Don Bacon (R-Neb.). This year marked the 40th anniversary of the release of the hostages who had been held for 444 days.

“The bravery and sacrifice made by U.S. embassy workers who were held against their will must be honored,” said Rep. Suozzi. “We can never forget their sacrifice and their never-ending will to uphold the values our country holds so dear.”



Newly freed American hostages arrive by bus at the U.S. Air Force Hospital in Wiesbaden, Germany, in January 1981.

“America will always stand for freedom, individual liberty and basic human rights,” said Rep. Bacon. “For 444 days, these Americans had to endure unbearable physical and psychological torture by Iranian militants that do not share the same values as our great nation. In the face of evil, they stood tall, and we must honor their courage and sacrifice.”

## Special Visas for Allied Interpreters

President Joe Biden issued an executive order on Feb. 4 for a review of the U.S. Special Immigration Visa program for Iraqi and Afghan allies who have helped the U.S. military.

Nearly 120,000 foreign translators who assisted U.S. forces, mostly from in or around Iraq, have applied for special visas to settle in the United States, according to the *Military Times*. In Afghanistan, Fox News reports, 17,000 interpreters who have helped the U.S. military are awaiting a decision on an SIV application.

“The executive order will review practices to ensure the U.S. is honoring its commitment to helpful allies in war-torn countries, to expand the program and enhance access for those vulnerable to persecution, including women, children and those who could be discriminated against for gender or sexual orientation,” according to a White House press release.

## Honoring George P. Shultz

Statesmanship and service above self consistently characterized the remarkable life of George P. Shultz. Throughout his distinguished career, Secretary Shultz championed American diplomacy and strengthened its home institution—the Department of State—all in pursuit of a more peaceful, prosperous, and cooperative world order. Secretary Shultz’s example as a patriot and public servant will undoubtedly serve to inspire and guide future generation of American leaders.

We mourn the loss of Secretary Shultz and extend our deepest condolences and sympathy to his family

Resolved, That the Senate—

- Honors the life, achievements, and legacy of the Honorable George Pratt Shultz;
- Celebrates the statesmanship that consistently characterized Shultz’s life;



- Acknowledges Shultz’s published concern for and strengthening American diplomacy and its home institution, the Department of State by creating a School of Diplomacy at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center;
- Commends to future generations Shultz’s example as a patriot and public servant both in war and in the pursuit of a more peaceful, prosperous, and cooperative world order;
- Extends its deepest condolences and sympathy to the family of the Honorable George Pratt

Shultz; and

- Respectfully requests that the Secretary of the Senate transmit an enrolled copy of this resolution to the family of the Honorable George Pratt Shultz.

—U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), co-chairs of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus, introducing a resolution honoring the life, achievements and legacy of the late George P. Shultz on Feb. 10.

## 50 Years Ago

### Education in Diplomacy

**D**iplomacy is the advocacy of interests and the process, often highly political, which aims at the elimination, reduction or postponement of international conflicts of interests. It involves the protection and promotion of special interests, influencing the decisions of foreign nationals, and reconciling opposing interests through agreement or *modus vivendi*. Diplomacy deals in its essence with the realities of international conflicts of interest and aims at their minimization.

Just as perfect security is not possible, neither is perfect diplomacy possible. The risk of failure is high; successes are almost always hard won. It is essential that both the diplomat and his boss know that batting averages are notably low, home runs infrequent and sacrifice hits often required. This does not mean that the diplomat should be excused from calculating and controlling the risks of failure; on the contrary, that is one of his foremost responsibilities. It means that the objectives of diplomacy should be cast in terms of "obtaining the best results that can be obtained under the circumstances," rather than in terms of absolutes or of bringing home the coonskins.

The adverse conditions in which diplomacy is normally conducted need to be emphasized and appreciated. Normally they are conditions of great uncertainty, of lack of time and of incomplete information. The diplomat deals with "events which are not reiterative." Each situation is unique and carries with it unpredictable consequences.

Diplomacy depends for success on the possession of skills which are the surface manifestation of deep accomplishments. Skills normally thought to be illustrative of the diplomatic craft (for example, force and clarity of verbal and written expression, tact and timing of argumentation and representation, persuasiveness and ability to win confidence) are not really skills but rather the cutting edges of accomplishments acquired through education and cultivated and confirmed through experience.

—Peter Krogh, former dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, excerpted from an article with the same title in the April 1971 FSJ.

The average wait time for an SIV visa is about three years. In December more than 1,000 Iraqi and Afghan interpreters petitioned Biden to make the process easier, according to Fox News.

"It just sends such an important signal [that] if you stand with us and you stand against extremism, we'll be there for you. We will honor that commitment," Rep.

Mike Waltz (R-Fla.), a former combat veteran who supports the order, told Fox News. "I am, as are many conservatives, in favor of merit-based immigration, and I can't think of anyone more meritorious than those who have stood and fought with us rather than random lottery systems."

No One Left Behind, a nonprofit char-



ity group dedicated to helping resettle the interpreters, said at least 300 translators and family members have been killed because they helped the United States, and that it expects 4,000 new SIV families to settle in the United States this year.

### Resetting CSET

**A** bipartisan congressional group, headed by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Gregory W. Meeks (D-N.Y.) and the committee's top Republican, Rep. Michael McFaul (R-Texas), has introduced the Cyber Diplomacy Act of 2021, which would establish an international cyberspace policy bureau in the State Department.

The Trump administration had notified Congress of its intent to establish a new Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies in 2019, but the effort stalled in the face of disagreements over the scope of the new entity. Days before leaving office former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed off on its creation.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken supports the creation of the CSET Bureau, according to a State Department spokesperson, but "will take a close look at where this bureau should be placed within the department and what its mission and scope of responsibility will be." At press time, the department had not commented on the congressional initiative.

Meanwhile, on Jan. 28, the Government Accountability Office released a report critical of the new bureau, "Cyber Diplomacy: State Should Use Data and Evidence to Justify Its Proposal for a New Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies." ■

*This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Cameron Woodworth, Steve Honley and Shawn Dorman.*

# Resilience Leadership

BY JOSH GLAZEROFF

**T**he year 2020 was one awful thing after another; 2021 is, well, it's hard to say yet—more of the same? Getting better? 2022 is still too far away to be certain. What does that mean for us and our teams?

When it comes to *resilience*—defined by retired FSO and resilience expert Beth Payne as “the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity and to bounce back, or forward, from setbacks, trauma and high stress”—doing more now for ourselves and our teammates will help us far into the future.

Many of you are familiar with the State Department's Center of Excellence in Foreign Affairs Resilience (known by its acronym, CEFAR), a tremendous resource for all personnel that is based at the Foreign Service Institute. Some of you are already practitioners and proponents of meditation, jigsaw puzzles in the office, walks and virtual coffees. These tools are not new, but focusing a discussion of resilience on our roles as leaders is. Why should leaders focus on resilience? Why should you care about resilience?

Are you or your teammates dealing poorly with stress and anxiety? Are you or your teammates having mood swings often? Out sick a lot? These are



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Talking about resilience with the other members of your team can be a force multiplier for the entire organization.

all signs that you or your staff members are not resilient. When we take care of ourselves and set boundaries on what we are going to take on at work, we are more adaptable and collaborate more effectively. When we have a strong social network, focus on the positive, and reflect on meaning and purpose in life and at work, we are better employees.

Taking the time to assess our standing in these areas and address our weak points will pay off this year and in the years to come. Talking about resilience with the other members of your team can be a force multiplier for the entire organization. Beyond the actual human understanding of those with whom you work, you will end up with a more effective team. A resilient team is one that is creative, adaptive and ready for all of our multitudinous challenges. Such a team is more likely to be successful and meet those goals you set for it.

## The 7 Cs

So what can we do about it? What should we aim for? Borrowing an approach from Beth Payne, I will frame the discussion in terms of the “7 Cs of Team Resilience”—culture, communication, competence, connections, commitment, coordination and consideration.

For each of these, the challenge is to take immediate steps that build

resilience and make us stronger as an organization going forward. For each, I am thinking of what practical actions I can take as a leader to improve.

Do you work in an office where everyone is comfortable sharing their experiences and stories? Do you have shared values, identity, history and purpose? **Culture** in an organization is a foundation for resilience. Those who feel grounded in their teams are more willing to share what is happening for them, address difficult situations and find solutions to problems, both personal and professional.

How do you get people to share more? One idea is to hold small gatherings with some frequency. Whether it is an informal coffee or a book club, you can give your team a chance to interact and build a basis for future discussion. A particular annual party or a well-known weekly event make the calendar a culture-builder. In our office we celebrate one of the lesser holidays each year by having a team member dress in an animal costume and serve a pancake breakfast (yes, it's true!). What is *your* team's culture like?

I freely admit that **communication** is not my strength. However, there is no way to get around it. If you want team members to be well informed; if you want them to share their views and

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Figure out how to do those holiday parties. Make one more call to someone you haven't seen. Find out how everyone's family members are doing.

engage in dialogue; if you want them to question old ways of doing business, then communication is essential. We need to vary our methods and make the effort.

In the days of 100 percent virtual work, that takes even more dedication. Online coffees aren't great, but they can mean a lot. Figure out how to do those holiday parties. Make one more call to someone you haven't seen. Find out how everyone's family members are doing. In our office this past year, we have had a series of teleconferences discussing different elements of diversity and leadership. Discussions were personal at times, but everyone had an opportunity to share. As you'll see below, we really must connect to keep our teams resilient.

How highly do you rate your team's **competence**? Do team members have the capacity and skills they need to meet demands, particularly during times of crisis and high stress? Think now about how to build these skills. Training is essential; taking the time for it is a difficult choice, but one that pays off over the longer term. Beth Payne reminds us to take time to "sharpen the saw." If we don't do that, we will hamper productivity in the longer term.

Identify what skills your team members lack. If they are teleworking—and, thus, saving commuting hours—it may be the perfect time for them to work on those areas. I am fortunate to oversee my bureau's learning and development

group. That team fosters participation in governmentwide programs, State Department exchanges and detail opportunities, and also hosts periodic webinars on topics including "executive readiness"—all with an eye to building skills for the future.

There is no doubt: We are in the business of making **connections**. I remind myself of that as often as I can, especially when it comes to my own team. Again, it is important to make time for those virtual coffees now and get to know everyone, particularly those who have joined since the pandemic and you haven't met in person.

Check in on Microsoft Teams with people after a weekend. Share fun pet photos; take an extra moment to tell a story with a colleague and figure out now what you have in common. At the beginning of the COVID-induced shift to maximum telework, our office shared favorite recipes, sent lighthearted memes and celebrated future dream vacations we could all connect with.

The members of an office with true **commitment** to each other and to a shared mission will keep their promises and protect teammates from harm, even when it is hard to do so. One of those areas we often associate with successful sports teams; this is no less relevant to our work teams. There are myriad ways to support one another with time, money or effort. Respect and loyalty should be there for all. Team members look out for each other, "have their

backs,” and, if needed, step in to take on their tasks.

Commitment also extends to the organization’s mission. Think about identifying an area your team can commit to, and then reinforce its importance often. In the Consular Affairs Bureau, we talk often about our global impact. We are truly changing Americans’ lives, with an especially huge role in bringing 100,000 fellow citizens home during the worst of the COVID-19 outbreak. We also emphasize taking care of everyone on our team, particularly if they are facing a difficult personal situation.

Are your team’s goals **coordinated**? This is one area my team knows I love to focus on. By writing good goals with measurable indicators, I find it easier to know if we are successful and to tie each day’s efforts to longer-term objectives. To maximize coordination, we generate a poster with the goals for our office each year and share it widely. There are lots of resources in this area, and goals are part of all bureaus’ strategic planning. Do you communicate (see above) the importance of these goals enough? In enough ways? Something to consider for the 12 months ahead.

Last on the list, but by no means least, is our **consideration** of team members and how we support their personal needs, as well as professional goals. This has been the hardest for the State Department in recent months; our personnel simply have not been supported by leadership.

Now is the time to regain trust and return the focus to the strengths of our career staff. You, too, play a role in that every day. Although sorely tempted to jump right into work matters, I try to begin every call with a colleague with a real question about their non-work life. I want them to feel safe talking to me

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and sharing those problems that affect their lives.

## Leadership Goals

What should be our overall goal for resilience leadership? Can you see yourself with a resilient team? I can, but getting there post-COVID is a lot harder than it was in years past. It is going to take time and effort to build capacity in my group and to meet all the elements of the “7 Cs.”

I have planned some virtual discussions, and I aim to see all of those who may be in the office in person when I am there. I try to ask about family and health and well-being before jumping right into work topics, and I often just say “thank you.”

I would like the 100 people in my office to feel comfortable dealing with challenges and to work as effectively together as possible. Do I wish the same for the department as a whole? Of course I do, but it depends on each one of us to make this a reality.

Think about the steps you can take. Do some reading on this topic. Make a connection with someone who is also working to improve resilience. Reach out to CEFAR for the latest materials. Be a leader in resilience for your team and for the rest of the organization.

By investing now in our human resources, we will see results for years ahead. ■



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PROTECTION  
COVERED ME.  
I'M STICKING  
WITH THEM.”

-FORMER  
AMBASSADOR  
BILL TAYLOR

From Benghazi to  
Impeachment, we  
provided coverage  
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# CAN DIPLOMACY BE

**Two Foreign Service officers explore the question through the lens of personal experience. Their answer: in some ways yes, but mostly no.**

BY JESSICA HUARACAYO AND ALEXIS LUDWIG

If you reacted like most of us, the news early last year of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China, sounded a bit like another SARS or bird flu event at first—a problem far away that would probably be successfully contained or else fizzle out before threatening us all in earnest. Then came Italy, Spain, Iran, the cruise ship crisis, the Seattle nursing home and all the rest. Whether COVID-19 was more gray swan than black, an event that public health experts knew could come and that we should have been better prepared to confront when it did, we soon found ourselves enmeshed in a new and unexpected reality: obliged to observe social distancing; unable to go to the office or almost anywhere else; required to work from home.

By late March 2020, the State Department, like the rest of

the federal government and most missions abroad, had gone to mandatory telework for the majority of employees. By the time you read this, many colleagues will have reached the one-year mark of partial or continuous telework, and there's no clear end in sight. Given that there has not been a wholesale collapse of diplomacy, some are entertaining the idea that perhaps this is the new normal, that we don't need to send diplomats and their families all over the world, that we don't need to maintain diplomatic facilities in almost every country—that diplomacy can and should be done online.

In the following, we take a hard look at that proposition through the lens of our own experience. Although some diplomatic work can certainly be conducted virtually, we find that the core elements of diplomacy absolutely require in-person engagement, and that whatever our current technological capabilities or future advances, we'll never really be able to rely on long-distance or virtual diplomacy. Building relationships of trust—the coin of the diplomatic realm—depends on actual human contact.

## Getting Things Done

Are we able to get our diplomatic work done in the midst of a pandemic that has radically altered the conduct of daily life? At an initial level of analysis, the answer must be: "Yes, we are." Following the move to virtual work, internal bureau and office meetings in the State Department were conducted on the Cisco Webex or the Microsoft Teams platforms. The transition was not quite seamless, but almost. Those colleagues who had



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*The views in this article are the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of State or U.S. government.*

# DONE VIRTUALLY?



CONNIE MCLENNAN

to go into the office in person to access the classified systems, attend a meeting or for whatever other essential reason, have mostly done so on a case-by-case basis, as needed. A scattered few have come to the office by choice, finding it easier to focus on their work in a physical space and location that does not double as home.

Broadly speaking, our internal work has continued apace, though with the added and now familiar challenges of managing from afar, juggling telework with unexpected parenting tasks and maintaining team cohesion. Certain advantages of working virtually, like the time saved by no longer having to commute to and from Washington, D.C., or the embassy or consulate every day, are hard to deny. Without a doubt, effective new technology platforms that enable virtual meetings and engagements have helped keep our diplomatic activities going, preventing the kind of collapse into paralysis that might have occurred had we confronted a similar challenge even a decade ago.

Our outward-facing work has continued, too, at least those aspects that were already well established with a defined structure and schedule. At the U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, we used WhatsApp, Zoom and Webex for most informal coordination with other member-state missions and OAS entities, and found we were able to get a lot done in that way. Even Kudo, the somewhat unwieldy virtual platform that the OAS itself used for official engagements requiring simultaneous interpretation in more than one language, seemed to work well after the early kinks were ironed out.

Importantly, however, most of us had interacted together in countless in-person discussions and meetings prior to the onset of the pandemic, and so we knew one another well. Because we had that built-in familiarity and trust, the transition to virtual coordination took place relatively smoothly and, in fact, with almost surprising ease.

### **Getting Off the Ground ... and Across the Finish Line**

That fact turns out to be one of the rubs of virtual diplomacy: Drawing from previously established personal networks is much easier than trying to start from scratch. One foreign diplomat in Washington says he feels lucky to have arrived more than a year before the pandemic started because he was able to use the network of personal contacts and relationships he had built up before the curtain fell on in-person diplomacy; as a result, he says, he has taken the crisis in stride and gotten some good work done.

Another D.C.-based diplomat (an equally engaging and personable chap, we must add) has a different story that makes

the same point. Because he arrived with his family in Washington just before the pandemic broke, he has had a hard time simply getting off the blocks. Ten months later, frustrated by having to be at home, unable to pound the pavement to build his personal and professional network, mostly doing meetings by Zoom, he acknowledges: "I know 'so and so' at that agency, embassy or institution, but not much more. I may have some contacts, but I have no real relationships and certainly no new friendships."

Breaking through an impasse or bringing an issue to closure is equally difficult to do from a distance. At the OAS, the previously scheduled March 20, 2020, Special General Assembly to elect the next secretary general is a case in point. There was no pre-certified mechanism to conduct such a formal vote by virtual means, so we knew it needed to be done in person before it was too late. To preempt a move by several member states to use the pandemic as a pretext to paralyze the OAS by blocking the vote, the United States worked with key partners to push through the pockets of resistance to carry out this one final "in-person" meeting in accordance with health and safety standards then in place.

Importantly, that "in-person" General Assembly ensured the organization's ability to continue its work by virtual means ever since. Indeed, it helped kick off a series of intensive coordination meetings, all conducted virtually, that ultimately led to a consensus agreement to hold official OAS meetings and even the next annual General Assembly in a virtual setting. Not coincidentally, most of these meetings focused on the priority importance of forging a regionwide response to the pandemic. In the absence of that decisive in-person assembly, however, the organization and its member states might well have languished in pandemic paralysis for a good while.

### **Challenges and Adjustments Overseas**

Overseas challenges have differed significantly according to position and role. Consular officers' visa adjudications and routine U.S. citizen services requiring in-person engagement largely halted. This activity was supplanted, during those dramatic early weeks, by the extraordinary emergency effort to repatriate tens of thousands of U.S. citizens and issue emergency visas to travelers with humanitarian needs or to those assisting the U.S. fight against COVID-19. Management officers and specialists acquired new expertise in local labor laws, supply chain logistics and COVID-19 testing protocols.

Office managers and IT professionals masterfully shepherded the transition to new online platforms for entire sections. Public

diplomacy officers moved almost exclusively online, sparking remarkable innovation but losing the irreplaceable power and impact of in-person exchange programs, classroom engagements and public events. Regional security officers identified risks specific to posts under lockdown, established new protocols and found innovative ways to compensate for crisis management exercises with host-nation counterparts canceled due to the pandemic. But no matter what our cone, functional specialization or agency, COVID-19 and virtual work pose the same challenge to that most basic diplomatic task: maintaining and deepening relationships with trusted contacts.

Our Foreign Service colleagues abroad are generally in the same boat as foreign diplomats in Washington, D.C. Those of us who were already in place when the pandemic hit have had an easier adjustment, transitioning from in-person coffees and lunches with established contacts to informal WhatsApp exchanges or phone calls. Depending on the country, we have been able to resume one-on-one coffee meetings, outdoors and with appropriate precautions. Even so, some colleagues find that communicating in a second language through a mask can be frustrating—reading the expressions of covered faces is next to impossible, it turns out—and prefer to meet with contacts over videoconference, despite the stilted feeling of such meetings and the onset of Zoom fatigue.

At the same time, those colleagues who arrived overseas during the pandemic are at an immense disadvantage for building the critical relationships that inform all good diplomacy. For them, the already steep learning curve for newly arrived personnel became even steeper. One new officer struggled for several weeks before she was finally able to engage with any external contacts. Not surprisingly, she found that actual, in-person meetings were the best way—and sometimes the only way—to get things started and ensure that she subsequently received replies from interlocutors to her email inquiries.

### **Déjà Vu All Over Again?**

Many of the questions about virtual diplomacy today feel familiar because they are familiar. They're a variation on the same theme that crops up each time a newfangled technology arises and threatens, or promises, to eliminate the need for real live diplomats to do the work of diplomacy. Whether it be due to WorldNet, the fax machine, email, social media or now Zoom and Microsoft Teams, diplomats always seem to be on the brink of being declared obsolete. Who needs 'em when you've got X, Y or Z capability? Well, not so fast.

Technological advances are often useful and mostly good;

they can play a valuable supporting role. But no technology platform or other mere mediating mechanism is a substitute for actual physical presence for in-person, face-to-face, human-to-human engagement. Critically, getting things, first, off the ground and, second, across the finish line are impossible in the absence of in-person engagement. To paraphrase Edward R. Murrow, only actual human beings can bridge those “final three feet.”

Examples illustrating the benefits of in-person contact abound. The same D.C.-based foreign diplomat who said things were going fine for him virtually, for example, acknowledges that his government would never have been invited to participate in an important weekly phone call with other key countries had he not been there *in person* at a pre-pandemic meeting and hit it off with the American organizer.

For a U.S. political or economic officer abroad, the humble *démarche*—at once the most routine and potentially consequential of our activities—offers a case in point. In Spain, COVID-19 restrictions were so severe that for months we delivered *démarches* exclusively by phone or email. The Spanish ministry of foreign affairs' response was invariably a noncommittal: “Thank you, duly noted.” On the rare occasions when our instructions mandated in-person delivery, our counterparts obliged. We relished the opportunity to meet in person, be masked and socially distanced, to catch up, exchange insights, and reconnect as fellow humans experiencing this odd new reality together.

It was during those in-person conversations that we received information of real diplomatic value. Only in face-to-face (or mask-to-mask) situations would our contacts feel comfortable conveying their more nuanced assessments of, say, the barriers to signing onto our initiative, or explaining the ways in which they were quietly pushing forward our common agenda, or asking us to provide some additional context after a worrisome tweet.

### **No Substitute for Being There**

One crucial element of person-to-person engagement simply cannot be replicated in the virtual environment. Though that sounds self-evident, it is difficult to articulate what this element is. Much of this goes back to the core of diplomacy being about cultivating relationships of trust; as former Secretary of State George Shultz suggested in the pages of the November *FSJ*, trust underlies and informs everything of value that we do. It is difficult if not impossible to “tend the garden” and concoct such an intangible substance as trust from afar.

It has something to do with what psychologists call *collision*: the spontaneous, unpredictable and often creative chemical combustion that occurs when people gather together for some

shared purpose. We really cannot know what we are missing by *not* “being there” in person: the chance encounters and unscripted opportunities that bring new information or insight; the conversations over coffee that take an unexpectedly productive turn; the relationships or even friendships that might be born, developed and deepened.

The more narrowly intentional virtual realm effectively forecloses such ad hoc, random or unplanned opportunities. It is impossible to “run into” someone else on Zoom or MS Teams; and even informal Zoom conversations suffer from the formality of scheduling them, their “planned spontaneity” often collapsing of its own contradictory weight. The longer-term cumulative consequences of these countless unknown missed opportunities—including, for another type of example, in the case of International Visitor Leadership Program participants who never made the trip to the United States—are essentially incalculable.

Virtual diplomacy is also fraught. Imagine daring to share a “candid” professional confidence in the perpetually monitored panopticon of your typical virtual platform. Think Wikileaks

without the need for leaks. Speaking of Wikileaks, the absence of “in-person” engagement poses a weirdly parallel challenge to the foundation of trust on which diplomats rely, even if it’s more passive neglect than explicit breach in nature.

In the end, reliance on virtual diplomacy will lead to the dilution and erosion of the benefits of diplomacy altogether. Unable to “tend the garden” in person, the quality of our relationships suffers. As our relationships suffer, so does the quality of our understanding, information and appreciation of the complicated context, the subterranean dynamic or the thorny issue. Our value-added for Washington policymakers follows suit.

The question facing us here is clearly part of a broader dynamic, a piece of the pandemic’s larger puzzle. Maybe that’s because diplomacy is a bit like life itself or sports or even love: You can maintain the momentum virtually for a time, but you can’t really make it happen. And however much it might seem to be working, you just can’t imagine it remaining this way—not quite real, not quite complete and not quite fully human—forever. ■



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# COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY STRONG RAISING THE BAR IN THE VIRTUAL ERA

**In 2020 U.S. companies were forced into a new world of lockdowns and virtual relations, where work norms had to be refashioned. A commercial officer looks at the way ahead.**

BY AILEEN NANDI



*Aileen Nandi is minister counselor for commercial affairs in New Delhi. She has served several tours each in India and Latin America, regions where personal relationships often define business connections. These views are her own and do not necessarily reflect official policy from the U.S. Department of Commerce.*

**T**he year 2020 redefined many jobs and businesses. Contending with the pandemic, plummeting international trade and investment flows, and crippled international travel routes, many U.S. exporters found their business and work situations dramatically altered. To help our American clients, diplomats of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service, along with interagency colleagues, quickly pivoted multiple times to assist with lockdown emergencies, supply chain resilience issues and payment concerns, and to identify or vet foreign sources of supply of pharmaceutical and medical products, and much more. In addition to coping with these evolving needs, most of us commercial officers found ourselves working longer hours virtually, on our personal computers.

As the months passed, we watched many countries' economies enter the doldrums. Some governments responded by enacting inward-looking policies to focus on domestic production and erecting protectionist market barriers, which make it harder for U.S. companies to compete fairly. These changes propelled us into a new world. For many of us—and our clients—it was like entering into an entirely different environment where we had to relearn or refashion work norms.

At this point, we all want “our real lives” back. But a dose of pragmatism is in order. Given that the International Civil

## Virtual meetings are a stopgap measure in this interim period to keep businesses talking or afloat until conditions allow them to travel to meet with potential partners.

Aviation Organization estimates that international travel won't rebound to 2019 levels until 2024, it behooves us to find ways to help U.S. companies succeed and thrive amid these unprecedented difficulties for the foreseeable future.

What are the lessons learned and proposed ways forward to help U.S. companies succeed in this era of disruption?

### Challenge Begets Opportunity

*U.S. and foreign companies are keen to connect virtually.* We are witnessing unprecedented demand for our services, largely as a result of a fee-waiver granted by the Office of Management and Budget for part of Fiscal Year 2020. Initially, this was a surprise for us in India, which is still a face-to-face market where personal relationships matter. U.S. companies normally have to travel to India (or host their prospective partners in the United States) to cultivate the relationship. Indian companies can take longer to finalize a business deal because they work on the basis of trust, which takes time to develop. We were delighted to find that Indian partners have been very responsive to connecting with U.S. companies virtually.

Though Facebook made an exception—and waves—when it invested \$5.76 billion in Reliance Jio in April 2020 after several months of virtual negotiations, these are large, well-known companies that can afford top-notch Wall Street investment and advisory services. Regular U.S. small and medium-sized enterprises will want to know that the foreign buyer will pay them, comply with all contractual terms and represent their product or brand well. In turn, the foreign buyer will want certainty that the U.S. company can commit to after-sales service and a long-term effort to make the partnership a success. These factors are much harder to assess and commit to in the virtual world.

*Virtual efforts can provide broader reach more quickly.* In one notable example, we worked with a U.S. company to host almost 400 potential Indian partners from across the subcontinent for a virtual promotion event. That company would otherwise need at least a week in the country to do multiple promotional events

in different cities to reach a fraction of that audience. Indeed, because American small and medium-sized companies now don't need to factor in travel time or costs, they have more bandwidth to connect with many more potential customers. Savvy, export-focused companies can create multifold new business leads without leaving their laptops. However, these leads will still need vetting and the U.S. business will have to devote time to pursue the partnership.

### Does Virtual Work Work?

*Will this virtual world yield successes?* We hope so. In many cases, virtual meetings are a way to keep the discussion alive until people can meet in person again. From my perspective, virtual meetings are much more beneficial for an existing relationship than for a U.S. company reaching out to foreign partners for the first time. Some consumer and software products can be sold internationally without human interactions on platforms such as Amazon or eBay or downloaded from the cloud.

But for the vast majority of American companies, especially those dealing in specialized or customized equipment, products or services, an in-person visit or meeting is often required to finalize the specifications or negotiations. In short, virtual meetings are a stopgap measure in this interim period to keep businesses talking or afloat until conditions allow them to travel to meet with potential partners.

During a previous tour in India, in 2008, I worked with colleagues to coordinate virtual introductions and meetings after the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. I did the same in Central America from 2014 to 2017 when dangerous conditions hindered many U.S. companies from routine business development trips. In these instances, we brought U.S. and foreign companies together easily, but we did not see many results and experienced higher-than-usual no-show rates. Though companies are more and more familiar with and capable in virtual environments now, I predict that many will revert to most pre-pandemic norms once conditions warrant. If you're in a competitive situation, you can't resort to negotiating with a partner on a screen when others are making the effort to woo the potential client in person.

*The quality of the virtual platform matters.* We've deployed a lot of virtual platforms, ranging from WebEx, Microsoft Teams and Zoom to BlueJeans, Remo and more, depending on the nature of the virtual interaction and our clients' preferences. Some virtual platforms have worked through well-documented security issues and require authorization to use. In addition, the old adage "you get what you pay for" applies, and spotty internet

connections, background noise, home commitments and other factors can all make virtual interactions more challenging than a focused meeting in a board room.

Numerous memes have popped up spoofing real-life examples of virtual meetings gone awry, and there's much more room for error when incorporating different time zones, language barriers, translation difficulties, technological failure and, well, life. It's easier to explain these mishaps to a known partner than during an introductory phase.

### **A Cautionary Tale**

Under these unusual circumstances, many people feel they're working harder than ever before, which can lead to employee burnout. This is especially true in countries that have a significant time difference with the United States. For example, India is 10.5 hours ahead of EST, which requires colleagues here to do the virtual matchmaking in the evening hours. Even when allowing colleagues to shift their work hours to accommodate this new schedule, they are still routinely missing family and other home duties and events. Previously they would do this work for visiting U.S. companies during the workday in most instances. Paying attention to colleagues' emotional health in these challenging virtual environments remains of critical importance.

Though it is popular in some quarters to envision the widespread adoption of "virtual work" on a permanent basis, there is little chance that we will lose our jobs to virtual reality in the foreseeable future. Commercial diplomatic work is as important as ever; since American companies cannot travel, we are their eyes and ears on the ground. U.S. small and medium-sized companies tell us they need actionable market intelligence. Our insights can inform them whether a potential foreign company is a trustworthy partner. Our counseling can help shape their strategies in approaching government officials and formulating sales plans in our respective countries.

And while our locally employed (LE) staff is instrumental in helping us win every success, U.S. direct hires remain essential for delicate commercial diplomacy engagements with host-country government officials. When dealing with government counterparts on thorny issues like market access barriers or complicated advocacy interactions for U.S. companies' international procurement bids, a U.S. direct hire can have a significant impact. In some countries, LE staff colleagues may have legitimate security concerns if they directly advocate for U.S. government policies or companies.

With the rise of protectionist measures worldwide, our in-person interactions to advocate on behalf of U.S. commercial

## **With the rise of protectionist measures worldwide, our in-person interactions to advocate on behalf of U.S. commercial interests will remain an essential function.**

interests will remain an essential function. To be successful in commercial diplomacy and advocacy, one must know their government counterparts and understand their language, way of thinking, negotiation tactics and culture. This requires building interpersonal relationships, just as leading U.S. companies do with their partners.

### **The Way Ahead**

The year 2020 tested everyone's resilience. Ideally, it has forced us all to grow stronger. Companies are also adapting, transforming and realigning themselves to meet their clients' needs. As we work virtually to help U.S. companies remain competitive overseas, we're shifting our work approaches and services to meet our clients' ever-changing expectations. When the pandemic eventually subsides, as it will, we will see whether virtual work has a lingering influence.

I predict that while virtual meetings and telework will find increased acceptance compared to pre-pandemic days, human interactions will remain paramount. Even the best technology cannot substitute for personal connections. Having the opportunity to really know your partner, share meals and engage in discussions to define and crystalize long-term partnerships will triumph over the best meeting software or matchmaking service.

In my crystal ball, the future will see a broader mix of virtual and in-person work. If you're finalizing negotiations with a foreign partner, it may be acceptable to do some meetings virtually, but in-person interactions will remain vital. If you're not willing or able to hop on a plane to meet your negotiating partner to demonstrate your commitment, your competitor probably will. And that may make the difference.

In the meantime, the present pandemic circumstances demand we raise the bar. We're helping U.S. companies to clear the heightened bar and navigate evolving international business procedures and norms with aplomb. May we all emerge stronger. ■



# IN-PERSON EXCHANGES, INTERRUPTED

**Some virtual components have proved helpful, but the face-to-face experience—the heart and soul of an exchange program—is irreplaceable.**

BY DEENA MANSOUR



*Deena Mansour is executive director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, where she teaches public diplomacy and promotes the Foreign Service in high schools and universities throughout the state. A former Foreign Service officer, she was a member of the 99th U.S. Information Agency junior officer class and served in Jakarta from 1994 to 1997.*

*officer, she was a member of the 99th U.S. Information Agency junior officer class and served in Jakarta from 1994 to 1997.*

**K** *itih'kanamtsimatsinoh'poowaa anoom Siksikatsitapii sah'koyii* (Welcome to the Blackfeet Reservation). ... Gathered around the campfire in the chill of a Montana night, 20 young fellows listen as a Blackfeet elder shares the tribe's creation story. The fellows are participants in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders academic fellowship sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Selected by embassies at posts across Southeast Asia, they traveled thousands of miles for their first experience in the United States.

After a day of hiking along the Continental Divide, the “Backbone of the World,” they swap stories, sing American pop songs and sample s'mores. Their academic director, affectionately referred to as Dr. Len, is a global expert on transboundary environmental studies. He provides context for the next day's lessons before they retire to their tipis, sharing confidences late into the night.

This was what an exchange looked like in the pre-COVID world, before the disruption began. The next day, the group would journey to the Badger-Two Medicine wilderness, where young Blackfeet mother Kendall Elmo tells the story of how the U.S. government leased the area to oil companies for \$1 per acre without environmental review or consulting the Blackfeet Nation.

Elmo describes how the tribe partnered with diverse stakeholders to oppose the leases, reinforcing the importance of build-



The in-person experience is the heart and soul of exchange programs. Montanan Jenny Eck, second from left, with friends made in Myanmar during a Professional Fellows Program there in October 2018.

ing coalitions over time. These lessons ring true to the students, many of whom have firsthand knowledge of dislocation in the face of dams, deforestation and mining in their own countries.

The young people are united in their assessment that the exchange has been life-changing. They are forever affected by their time immersed in experiential learning, living with host families and developing friendships across borders. Ongoing evaluations demonstrate that participants in these exchanges develop a better understanding of the United States and acquire tangible skills with which to empower their own communities.

Such experiences are the heart and soul of exchanges. No matter how sophisticated the platform or how carefully crafted the content, electronic engagement cannot take the place of lessons learned under the Big Sky, along the bayous of Louisiana or in the halls of the U.S. Congress.

But as we've also learned over the past year, there are ways to adapt to disruption that have introduced economies and assets to exchanges that will last beyond the pandemic.

### Coming to Terms with Disruption

Flying back to Montana from Jakarta on Jan. 19, 2020, I transited Seoul's Incheon Airport the same day a traveler brought the novel coronavirus to South Korea. (My colleagues looked at me with alarm every time they heard my hacking, post-trip cough, as I nervously assured them that I was not Montana's Patient Zero.) Despite this personal glimpse of the pandemic, I naively believed that the virus would be contained, and that

we would soon host our next State Department exchange: academic fellows in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (known by its acronym, YSEALI). As weeks passed, we frantically booked and rebooked tickets as the pandemic forced us to avoid transit through critical hubs in China, then Korea, then Japan.

Eventually, it dawned on us that our constant rerouting was in vain: There was no way our fellows would make it; and even if they did, it would be to a world shut down. Their U.S. experience would then be nothing more than the view out a dorm window with no visits to Glacier National Park, the Flathead Indian Reservation, or even down the street to sample steak and eggs at the Oxford Tavern—where new keys were being made because until COVID-19, the doors at the Ox hadn't been locked since 1883.

Here at the University of Montana's Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center our mission is to foster globally minded leaders of integrity. This is a challenge in a state that ranks near the bottom in every assessment of internationalization, such as the number of persons who speak a second language, engage in international commercial partnerships or study abroad. The Mansfield Center—founded by Congress in 1983 to honor the legacy of Mike Mansfield, our country's longest-serving Senate majority leader and U.S. ambassador to Japan under Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan—supports K-12 and higher education across the state in both civic education and international engagement with speakers, conferences, workshops, classes, research and dialogs.

Exchanges are among the most important things we do.

## Virtual exchanges allowed us to set the stage for the students' U.S. experience by developing relationships while at the same time introducing foundational concepts.

They offer a unique window into the United States through rural Montana while supporting an underserved population with opportunities to develop their skills so that they can better engage in a globalized world. Exchange participants can be just about any age, depending on the program. YSEALI has two age groups: 18-24 and 25-35. The State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' programs range from high school through adult professionals. Educational and cultural exchanges generally seek to develop cultural understanding and a grasp of thematic content between U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries.

### Going Virtual

Assuaging the YSEALI students' disappointment, we (again, naively) told them that we hoped to see them in August. Then we embarked on reframing the first stage of their experience as a virtual exchange to make connections in both real-time and asynchronously.

There are some advantages in this: virtual engagement is cost-effective, and it has the capacity to reach far greater numbers of participants. As noted by a Tohoku University virtual exchange student, this method also empowers less assertive participants to gain confidence in language and engagement behind the barrier of a screen.

Virtual exchanges allowed us to set the stage for the students' U.S. experience by developing relationships while at the same time introducing foundational concepts. We facilitated camaraderie through icebreakers, movie nights and birthday celebrations. Our faculty led academic discussions on U.S. society, government and civic engagement. Experts joined us to talk about the pandemic and U.S. elections.

To keep the fellows engaged online, it was important that they take the lead in discussions and become an integral part of their learning. They introduced best practices of youth leadership, comparing techniques across borders. The fellows supported one another's work, including campaigns for flood and pandemic relief.

### Connecting Counterparts

Beyond academic content, we tried to preserve the most critical aspect of exchanges: the connection with U.S. counterparts. We developed the Global Peers Across Lands Sharing (PALS) Program to pair University of Montana students with YSEALI fellows. UM students responded with applications to PALS to build cross-cultural communication skills, virtual engagement competencies and leadership. For UM student McKenna Jones, the experience replaced her study abroad: "I had been on an

## Virtual Engagement Lessons Learned

- Identify a facilitator who can set the desired tone and be a constant throughout multiple sessions, set an agenda, create checklists for such items as breakout session participants, and have tech support available.
- Provide all accessible presentations and handouts in advance.
- Acknowledge the challenges of unstable internet connections. Sharing recorded session transcripts allows participants to review and reinforce session material.
- For participants with disabilities, the presenter should describe all images and text, utilizing the chat box to provide any description that might be missed.
- Start the meeting by establishing rapport and sharing meeting objectives and ground rules regarding respect, active listening, patience and questions.
- Use icebreakers to help reduce anxiety. Facilitate something simple, as superficial prompts can build to something deeper. Ask participants to describe one thing they're passionate about, the view from their window or a favorite local dish.
- When people are vulnerable, others open up. Create a safe space for sharing while managing oversharing. Consider setting a timer, and have a plan to reconnect with emotional participants one-on-one.
- To support nascent English speakers, screen-share or type instructions into the chat box.
- Make time for reflection at the end of each session, either verbally or in the chat box, with a simple prompt asking for one takeaway.

—DM



COURTESY OF THE MANSFIELD CENTER

2020 YSEALI Academic Fellows share their favorite books during the first stage of their experience, reframed as a virtual exchange.

exchange in Austria when COVID-19 hit hard. It was disappointing being forced to come back early; but being able to connect with my Thai partner, May, and share our cultures went a long way to making that loss of opportunity bearable.”

To supplement synchronous engagement by Zoom, WhatsApp and social media, we facilitated use of two asynchronous platforms. FlipGrid allowed participants to create and share short videos about their interests, hobbies and dreams. The UM course instruction hub, Moodle, housed readings and conversation prompts.

There have been unforeseen benefits of the move to virtual exchange. Participants have bonded over sharing the struggles of COVID-19, and the number of friendships developed exceeded

our expectations. As UM student Ahna Fox notes: “I didn’t think I would get a friend out of this experience. I saw academic gain, a positive for my résumé and an eye-opener involving culture. All this proved to be true, yet I gained so much more. The things that I didn’t expect to find are the things that I find the most rewarding.”

Despite the benefits, participants were united in expressing their desire for experiential learning and face-to-face interactions. As one YSEALI fellow notes: “It makes me want to end COVID-19 and visit Montana already. My PAL and I have a list of activities we will do together when I get there such as mountaineering, baking and biking.”

### Spontaneous Connections Lost

Similar sentiments were expressed by participants in the YSEALI Professional Fellows Program, which is centered on a monthlong fellowship in a U.S. workplace. A reciprocal exchange, participants then host their American partners to implement an action plan.

Fellow Mathilda Ho founded a nongovernmental organization to lead Singapore’s first volunteer movement to promote the dignified treatment of refugees and displaced persons. While her April 2020 exchange was postponed, she and her cohort met for online training and small-group work. Mathilda notes: “We were able to bond over common struggles, hopes and aspirations in our areas of work, to better our communities and the people we serve. This is the spirit that is missing and something very much needed in today’s fragmented world.”

While Mathilda and her cohort await a rescheduled U.S. program, it is important to note that one of the most powerful elements of in-person exchanges are the spontaneous connections that happen through people-to-people relationships. Take 2018 Vietnamese alumna Nguyen Thi Van: During her fellowship in Montana, her American partner realized Van could be much more comfortable in her wheelchair with a sheepskin seat cover—something commonly used in the United States. That opened Van’s world to numerous low-cost adaptive technologies that were not available in Vietnam. Now, with the assistance of her U.S. fellowship host and a small program grant, Van is



COURTESY OF THE MANSFIELD CENTER

Exchange participants raft Montana’s Clark Fork River in July 2018.

**One of the most powerful elements of in-person exchanges are the spontaneous connections that happen through people-to-people relationships.**



COURTESY OF THE MANSFIELD CENTER

Exchange participants say farewell on the last program night in Washington, D.C., in July 2018.

developing a showroom in Hanoi where people with physical disabilities can obtain simple modifications that facilitate mobility and comfort.

No virtual platform can deliver such effects—experiences that lead to innovations in the fellows’ work, which then have a ripple effect throughout their communities.

### **U.S. Communities: Capital Lost**

The transition to virtual exchanges has also tangibly disrupted some U.S. communities. The loss of hundreds of millions of grant dollars has had a significant economic impact on Main Street businesses. Citizen diplomacy, broadly speaking, is known for developing five forms of capital: knowledge, cultural, social, civic and economic. With the cessation of in-person exchanges, opportunities for Americans to become informed about international affairs, develop cross-cultural communication skills and prepare to engage in international commerce are fewer (especially in isolated Montana). Virtual exchanges cannot fill the gap.

Rachel Carroll Rivas, co-director of the Montana Human

Rights Network, had planned to travel to Thailand in June to assist her fellowship partner, Rojana Inkhong, in connecting the national government’s human rights agency to local stakeholders. This collaboration would have supported Rojana’s work to strengthen citizen participation in human rights at a critical time. While the contribution of U.S. participant knowledge to YSEALI communities is important, equally significant is the transformation of the American participants who become citizen ambassadors on their return home. In rural Montana, these community leaders play a critical role in shifting perspectives.

### **The Future of Exchange**

The importance of experiential learning has been proven, ironically, by the absence of in-person exchanges for the past year, and this should inspire a growth in exchange programming under the new administration. At the same time, we have learned the benefits of some virtual components that will continue to enhance the exchange experience. A new high school exchange with U.S. Embassy Hanoi, conceived of by Public Affairs Officer Pam DeVolder to celebrate the 25th anniversary of normalized relations between the United States and Vietnam, provides the ideal combination of program activities.

Cohorts of 25 Vietnamese and 25 American students will first engage virtually for six months. Then Vietnamese students will travel to the United States for two weeks to work with American students, who will follow that with travel to Vietnam to support community action projects. Ongoing program impacts will be maximized by continuing virtual engagement between the two groups.

DeVolder notes: “The past year has shown just how valuable virtual engagement can be. Hybrid programs, like the one we’re planning with the University of Montana, are really the future model for exchanges, fostering deep cross-cultural connections and meaningful projects that will benefit entire communities for years to come.” This expanded engagement through virtual platforms simply wouldn’t have happened without the lessons of COVID-19.

We can only hope that participants in our delayed exchanges will eventually make it to the United States to build on the relationships and learning already begun virtually. As Macon Barrow, chief of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ Study of the U.S. Branch, states: “Virtual exchange programs are a good substitute for in-person programming during a pandemic and an enhancement to these in-person exchanges. However, the in-person experience is the heart and soul of these exchange programs to the United States, and that experience is irreplaceable.” ■



# TRANSFERRING IN A TIME OF CHAOS



A rooftop track was a handy escape from lockdown during the stay at a temporary hotel after landing in a city under quarantine.

CAMERON WOODWORTH

## Challenging in the best of times, FS transfers have become crucibles of resilience and determination during the pandemic.

BY CAMERON WOODWORTH



*Cameron Woodworth is associate editor for The Foreign Service Journal. He and his wife, Monica Smith—a Senior Foreign Service officer with USAID—have been posted to Budapest, Islamabad, Tel Aviv, Washington, D.C., and currently serve in Bogotá.*

As any Foreign Service family can tell you, moving to a new post is not easy. Even in the best of times, it can be tough to adjust to a new culture, figure out a new embassy community and make new friends. During a pandemic, the challenges rise exponentially.

In January 2020, my wife, Monica Smith, a Senior Foreign Service officer who has served for 20 years as a USAID attorney, delayed retirement to accept a one-year assignment to Bogotá to fill a staffing gap. It had long been a dream of ours to serve in South America, and we expected to move sometime that spring.

## It was a sharp contrast to previous postings, when we could get out and see the country—and meet people—immediately.

Then the pandemic hit, throwing our plans into disarray. On March 17, 2020, Colombia closed its borders to international flights. Like thousands of other Foreign Service colleagues, we would experience several months of bureaucratic complications and general confusion before we finally arrived at post, where settling in presented another set of difficulties.

Our story and the experiences of others recounted here, along with some lessons learned along the way, will hopefully help those members of the Foreign Service facing transfers in the coming months and beyond.

### Getting There

For months, it was unclear if we would ever make it to Bogotá. In March 2020, the State Department began authorizing voluntary, no-fault curtailment to employees in any country considered to be at high risk of exposure to COVID-19. By the beginning of April, State had evacuated more than 6,000 American diplomats and their families from overseas posts. That month, the department announced a hold on summer transfers to overseas posts at least until the end of May 2020.

Diplomacy Strong, the department's three-phase road map for returning to normalcy released in the spring of 2020, outlined the difficulties ahead: "The global pandemic presents unprecedented challenges that will require extraordinary patience and perseverance in the face of uncertainty. Missions and employees will need to remain flexible, as the Department adjusts to gradual normalization of travel."

Given early concerns about the dangers of flying during a pandemic, we were not even sure we *wanted* to travel. Wouldn't it be safer to stay at home in Arlington, Virginia, than transit through three airports and sit on two flights to Colombia? Moreover, Bogotá issued a strict lockdown order in late March, which ended up lasting several months. Would we be able to get as much out of our assignment as we did at other posts? And would it be more difficult for Monica to feel part of the mission working from home?

Ultimately, we decided to go. Even if the pandemic did not



ANNE SCHOFIELD

The youngest member of an FS family, duly masked, naps in the airport during transit.

abate, and we were required to be on lockdown for our entire year in Colombia, we felt we would still learn much about the country just by living there, and Monica would have a great opportunity to contribute to U.S. foreign policy goals in South America.

In April 2020, USAID Bogotá informed us that Monica had been placed on a list of mission-critical embassy workers who would be permitted to fly to Bogotá on a humanitarian flight, even while Colombia's borders were still closed. Yet much uncertainty about the timing, and many bureaucratic obstacles, remained. Embassy personnel, most forced by the pandemic to work from home, scrambled to help incoming families deal with new Colombian government procedures for obtaining visas virtually and receive permission to enter the country. We greatly appreciated the professionalism of the Foreign Service officers and local staff who helped us figure out this puzzle.

### Landing in Lockdown

While we waited for a departure date, U.S. Embassy Bogotá invited us to participate in virtual town hall meetings designed to keep the embassy community informed about the emerging COVID-19 situation at post. We found these meetings, which have continued every several weeks since we arrived in Colombia, to be enormously helpful. Through them, U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg and his team have helped both the existing embassy community and incoming families deal with issues ranging from current COVID-19 restrictions in Colombia and permanent change of station (PCS) travel challenges to when Foreign Service families might get the vaccine.

In late July, we finally arrived in Bogotá. Walking through the mostly empty El Dorado International Airport, where workers in full-body hazmat suits sprayed us and other passengers with disinfectant, was decidedly eerie. Our apartment wasn't ready, because the pandemic had delayed the departure of the family living in it before us. We were required to quarantine for two weeks in a hotel apartment. It was a sharp contrast to previous postings, when we could get out and see the country—and meet people—immediately.

The embassy couldn't work on our assigned apartment because of neighborhood lockdowns and evolving COVID-19 protocols. We stayed in the small hotel apartment for nearly three months, trying to do our Zoom meetings without getting in each other's way. Monica struggled to complete the embassy check-in virtually. One problem was that embassy officials expected the check-in process to be completed on State Department computer systems, an obstacle for people from other agencies without access to those systems.

More than seven months after we arrived, Monica, like most U.S. Embassy Bogotá employees, is still working from home as the pandemic continues to rage here. While not having to commute into the office has its advantages, it is harder to build camaraderie, friendships and teams while working virtually.

## It is always good to be proactive with post, even more so during the confusion of a pandemic.

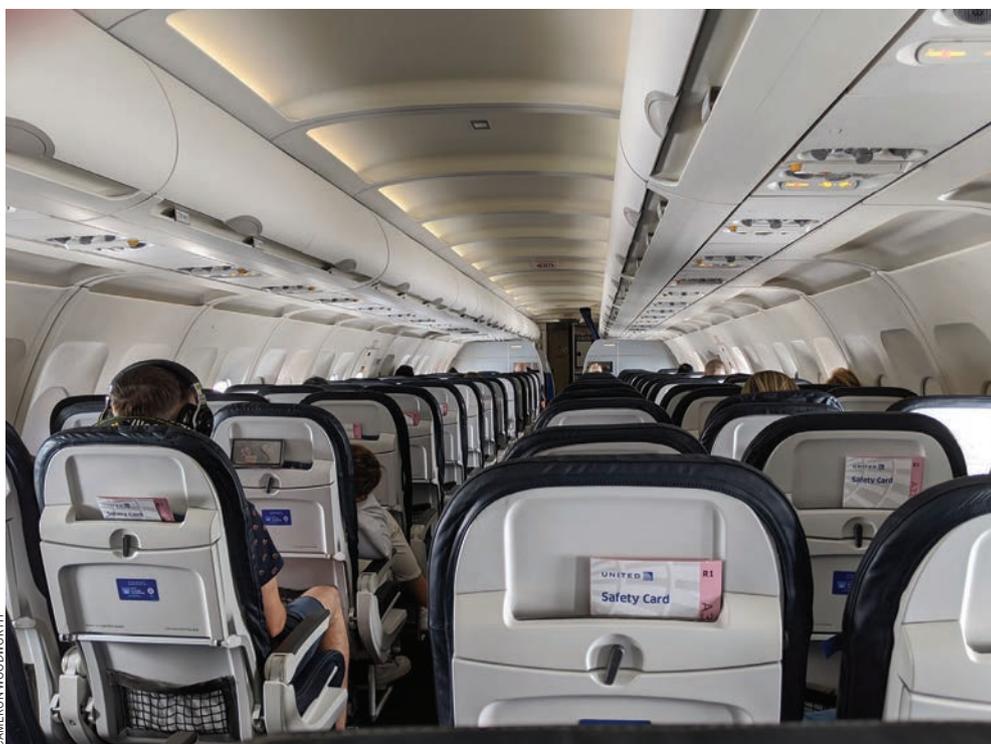
As this edition of the *Journal* goes to press, it seems that PCSing will continue to be complicated for a while longer. As of Feb. 10, 38 percent of posts worldwide were still in Diplomacy Strong's Phase I, which limits onsite embassy workers to 40 percent of the full staff. Only 8 percent were in Phase III, which allows 80 percent or more of workers to be onsite. The State Department had also announced that international trips should be avoided unless they were mission critical, given current high rates of transmission in the United States.

### Be Prepared for Anything

Our experience has by no means been unique, as my email exchanges with other members of the Foreign Service make clear. Take U.S. Ambassador to Uganda Natalie Brown, for instance, who had a bumpy ride PCSing from the United States to Uganda last fall. She found the changing COVID-19 testing requirements and practices of airlines and transit countries

frustrating. Uganda required a negative test for entry, but Amsterdam, through which she transited, had additional requirements, telling passengers to complete forms they had not been made aware of prior to departure.

"We were late leaving Amsterdam for Uganda," Amb. Brown says, "because Rwanda, the first stop on the journey, wanted all travelers to register online for contact tracing. At the airport, not everyone had a smartphone to do this, so passengers helped out each other, and KLM delayed departure to accommodate all travelers. There is nothing the department could have done to prepare travelers for this, but the lesson for me was to be prepared for everything."



The first leg of the trip to post was on a mostly empty plane.



CAMERON WOODWORTH

While working remotely in Bogotá, a city under rolling lockdowns, USAID legal counselor Monica Smith (at right) takes advantage of a biking outing to get to know her colleague USAID Mission Director Larry Sacks.

## Flexibility and proactivity are at the heart of some of the lessons we and others have learned.

Most difficult for Brown, however, was that extensive efforts to take her dogs with her proved futile. “I’m fortunate that friends and family are willing to take care of my pets,” she said shortly after arriving at post. “I know of many others without such a back-up plan.”

### Get in Touch with Folks Who’ve “Been There”

Anne and Aaron Schofield and their six children were scheduled to fly out of the United States to Amman, Jordan, on July 15. But there were many wrinkles along the way: securing medical clearances, obtaining eight diplomatic passports despite the passport office’s limited operations early in the pandemic, and setting up the kids’ schooling, for starters.

Two months later, just before their departure date, the family’s school of choice unexpectedly said it was denying all the kids’ applications. Five days before boarding one of the last repatriate flights to Jordan, “we applied to another school without any time or ability to consider whether it would be a good fit for our kids,”

Anne Schofield says. (The kids were accepted.) The family finally landed in Amman on Sept. 10, “just as cases locally started to skyrocket.”

Post didn’t have any available houses large enough for a family of eight, so the Schofields boarded in a hotel for five weeks. The family was given a choice of quarantining for three weeks without COVID-19 testing or quarantining for two weeks with two tests two weeks apart. “If any of the family tested positive, we would be evicted from the hotel with exactly nowhere to stay,” Schofield says. “We voted for three weeks of quarantine.” Fortunately, she adds, good folks at post arranged loaner toys for the kids, groceries and adapter plugs for the family’s many laptops.

Schofield recommends that people with upcoming PCS plans join Facebook groups such as Trailing Houses, which, she says, “has kind people with many years of experience PCSing.” Many posts have private Facebook groups (usually organized through the Community Liaison Office) that can prove invaluable. You might also find good expat Facebook groups in the city to which you are moving. Schofield also recommends taking care of health care appointments in the United States before PCSing.

### Be Flexible and Proactive

“2020 has been a year like no other in so many ways,” says Jimmi Sommer, the management counselor at Consulate General Guayaquil in Ecuador.

Sommer, who “never imagined moving during a global pandemic,” did a direct transfer from the Netherlands to Ecuador and started work, from home, the day after she arrived. “I met all my direct reports and colleagues virtually,” she says. “There are a few folks who were on full-time telework that I still haven’t met in person.” One plus? For the first time, internet was already set up when she arrived at her new post. “Honestly, from the logistics side, it couldn’t have gone smoother,” she says.

“As always, be flexible,” recommends Sommer, who found she had to juggle and change flight dates to get a direct route to post amid the confusion and upset in the airline industry and country border-closings.

Indeed, flexibility and proactivity are at the heart of some of the lessons we and others have learned:

*Communicate with your new post early and often.* It is always good to be proactive with post, but even more so during the turmoil of a pandemic. By now, more than a year into the health crisis, posts have hopefully worked out many of the kinks. We communicated constantly with Bogotá last spring and summer to try to line up our visas, humanitarian flight, shipments, housing and more, and that proved vital.

*Make an effort to find friends.* Working from home, and with significant city and embassy restrictions on our movement, we have found it harder to make new friends at post. Seek out permitted activities to meet people. Monica and I are avid cyclists, and we have made friends with USAID and embassy colleagues on weekend bike rides. An embassy book club has also proved helpful, though club meetings are often virtual, depending on current restrictions.

Sommer recommends finding ways to connect virtually during the pandemic. “Use it as a time to stay in touch with friends and family back home or at other posts,” she says.

*Take advantage of opportunities to take a break.* Ordinary relief valves such as local or regional travel, or organized sports or even restaurant outings, may not be available, so it is important to take advantage of opportunities that arise. Dealing with heaps of uncertainty is not easy. Be sure to have access to books, internet groups, online yoga or whatever works to relieve stress. And State’s WorkLife4You and USAID’s Staff Care programs provide invaluable counseling and referral services.

Despite all the pandemic uncertainty and myriad difficulties, more than halfway through our assignment, we are happy to have made the move to Bogotá and have already created many positive memories here. Traveling to a new post during a pandemic certainly is stressful and challenging, but it can still be highly rewarding. ■

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# PANDEMIC PARENTING

## HOW FOREIGN SERVICE MOMS ARE (NOT) MAKING IT WORK

**FS parents—in particular, FS moms—are stretched to the breaking point, and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight.**

BY DONNA SCARAMASTRA GORMAN



*Donna Scaramastra Gorman's articles have appeared in Time Magazine, Newsweek, The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor and the FSJ. A Foreign Service spouse, she has lived in Amman, Moscow, Yerevan, Almaty, Beijing and Northern Virginia.*

*Formerly an associate editor for the Journal, she is currently posted in Moscow with her husband and four children.*

**S**ince the early months of 2020, when the world shut down in the face of COVID-19, the impact on families has been unprecedented—especially on moms. Moms who were fortunate enough to have access to paid child care or nearby relatives lost that support when the world went on lockdown, and they left the workforce in droves, either because they were laid off or because they had to oversee their kids' online schooling and the rest of the details that go into managing a household—no easy task even without a pandemic outside your door.

Most parents in the Foreign Service have stayed on the job, many remotely, but they haven't been immune to the stresses of raising a family and managing a career while trying to avoid getting sick. It's hard for Foreign Service families. We're far from home, often in countries without quality health care. Our ability to access medevac flights if we get critically ill disappeared when borders closed. We can't visit sick or dying relatives back in the States. Many of us moved to new countries midpandemic and have no nearby friends to lean on. And through it all, we're juggling online school with spotty internet access, grocery shopping in foreign languages and near-impossible work deadlines.

FS parents—in particular, FS moms—are stretched to the



breaking point, and with the vaccine still far from guaranteed to arrive at post, there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. When the *FSJ* asked Foreign Service parents to tell us how the pandemic had affected their families and careers, numerous parents responded with their own stories from the trenches—and 100 percent of those responses were from working women.

### “Stay Home and Watch Netflix”

“I’ve forgotten what downtime is,” says Jessica, an FS family member who works as a lawyer outside the embassy. Her husband’s job hasn’t slowed down—he’s at the embassy five days a week, 12 hours at a stretch—so she’s at home “juggling not only all of the regular child care duties, but also the virtual school responsibilities, all while trying to work from home at the same time.”

When people joked at the onset of the pandemic that all we had to do to beat COVID-19 was stay home and watch Netflix, she says it felt like a dagger in the chest. “The idea of being in my pajamas all day, eating chocolate chip cookies and watching Netflix is so luxurious, I have dreams about it. But instead, I’m running from my laptop to the kids, getting lunch on the table, keeping track of three different school schedules, plus my work calls. And trying to do all the regular stuff in between. No time for Netflix. I spend *all* of my time on work/kids/housework.”

An FSO based in Europe, whose husband has stayed home with the kids this year, says: “He’s great at it, but we have two special needs kids and another with mental health struggles. He can’t do it all himself when they aren’t in school.” Since the start of the pandemic, she’s taken on more parenting duties, but she says her work has suffered as a result. “It’s incredibly hard to focus,” she explains. “I’m normally pretty good about being ‘work-me’ at the office and ‘mom-me’ at home, but it’s been hard to keep them separate.”

Senior-level FSOs aren’t immune. “The biggest change in terms of performance for me, as a relatively senior-level woman, leader and mother at an overseas post, is that I am no longer able to carry the emotional or social burden at work,” explains an FSO mom based at a post in South America. “Women at all levels often maintain the emotional and social intangibles that make an office a place where people feel connected, supported and recognized.” Now, she says, “I can gauge how focused I am on work by the relative increase in the number of notifications that the children are missing Zoom classes, assignments or online group meetings.”

Is it harder for parents serving overseas? Janet Moreth, a social worker with State’s Employee Consultation Services, says that Foreign Service parents “are facing many of the same pressures (i.e., virtual learning, lack of reliable child care and

## “The State Department has so many talented, independent and resilient people but ‘doing it all’ is not sustainable,” says Janet Moreth, a social worker with State’s Employee Consultation Services.

teleworking with young children present), but they’re doing it under complicated circumstances.” Moving between countries whose governments have different responses to the pandemic gives parents and children “mixed messages about expectations, protections and protocols,” causing anxiety and leading to socially awkward situations. Moreth is leading monthly parenting groups online for FS parents who need help navigating these murky waters.

### The 1950s All Over Again?

It’s 2021. Women no longer have to resign if they get married, and spouses aren’t rated on their FSO’s annual employee evaluation report (EER). Yet many moms in heterosexual partnerships report that their children still turn to mom first, even when dad is at home. An FS specialist mother based in Europe reports that her kids usually come to her for help, even when she’s working and her husband is not. The mental burden on women, she says, is higher than ever.

Other moms agree. “The constant struggle over who deals with the kids, who manages them through the day at the expense of the parent’s own work, has been a major stressor on our marriage, especially after our transfer, when no one in the family has outside friends or support networks.” The solution for this FSO in South America (who prefers to remain anonymous) has been “for me to lead parent (and lean out of my work) so that my husband can lean in more to his job. This might mean a less awesome EER and maybe a change in my corridor reputation, but those things matter less than my family.”

“My husband comes to me snitching on the kids,” says one FS specialist. “So-and-so just did this! Well, dad, hubby, what are *you* going to do about it? Why are you telling me when I am clearly occupied with something else?”

Another mom whose partner spends long hours at the embassy says there is an expectation that because so many

people work from home, there is more support at home. But “that just hasn’t been the case.” With her spouse still required to work full-time at the embassy, and no household help allowed in the houses at post, she’s on her own to manage their young children as they spend their school days in the dining room while she takes work calls in the same room.

Her situation is typical: FS families across the globe are feeling this pressure as the parents—mothers and fathers alike—try to find creative solutions that will allow them to make it through their pandemic days together, intact.

### What to Do?

None of the moms this author heard from blame the State Department or any other agency for their predicament—in fact, nearly all mentioned that there is not much their employer could do to fix this situation. But one says she’d like to see management recognize that “this is all really hard on the spouses—especially those who transferred last summer and have no community at post. ... So many of us have truly sacrificed to be here. It’s not easy on our families, on our careers, on our mental health. I worry about being away from my aging parents every day.”

Many others point to a need for technological upgrades, at work and at home. They recommend that the embassy upgrade at-home internet bandwidth to accommodate increased use by teleworking parents and distance learning students. “Give us the tech we need,” says one. “I need a monitor and a laptop I can use exclusively for work. I could spend \$3,000 and buy a setup here; but I can’t really afford it, and I would spend twice as much buying locally.”

Married couples need to find ways to support one another. “In our dual career household, we try to specify specific times for each parent to assume primary parental duties during the workday to increase transparency and accountability in the allocation of household responsibilities,” says one FSO mom.

Another mom recommends that families “do what is right for them.” As she points out: “Most Americans have more annual leave than they can ever use, and we shouldn’t feel guilty for taking time that is ours.” We all like to feel critical to the mission, she says, but don’t let work overtake all areas of your life.

Jason Singer, AFSA’s USAID vice president, says AFSA encourages Foreign Service members to take advantage of the agency’s Staff Care and talk with their supervisors about work-life balance needs and flexibilities. “I’m a parent of two teenagers,” he says, and “these are not easy times. Speaking personally, I encourage my colleagues to recognize your own needs and take advantage of agency resources.” USAID officers are passionate about the

mission, he says, and “this sometimes clouds our self-assessment of our own state of mind.” He encourages his colleagues to reach out to AFSA to discuss their challenges and seek support.

Make sure, too, that as a leader you are supporting your employees. Says one FSO: “State has, on paper, been great. The 10 hours of weekly COVID-19 leave, the incredible speed with which they set up telework capabilities, the messages of support. But at least for me personally, that hasn’t all been implemented. I’ve been strongly discouraged from using the COVID leave because ‘everyone will want to use it.’ I had to go back to the office long before the guidance indicated it was mandatory. Post ran out of laptops before I got one.”

### Lean Too Far In, and You’ll Fall on Your Face

What do these parents want their colleagues and bosses to know? “I cannot be in charge of fostering morale or team building at work right now,” laments a senior-level FSO. “As lead parent with multiple kids learning full-time at home, plus elder care responsibilities, I just cannot take on more.

## The big question on all of these parents’ minds: What’s next?

I can’t be a rock star social sponsor. I can’t organize or confirm participation in optional virtual events. It’s a pity, because these contributions are integral to my leadership style and success, they reflect my core values, and leading these efforts is highly satisfying to me in normal times.”

Dr. Catherine Saxbe, a regional psychiatrist (RMO/P) based in Moscow, reminds parents that they can’t “do it all.” “You can only toggle between the priorities of the moment,” she says. “Don’t stress about screen time or dust bunnies. But do pay attention so that family members don’t go and occupy separate silos all the time. Some alone time is fine and healthy, but sustained isolation is not, especially for children and teens. Be less critical of one another, and show kids that you enjoy their company and listen to their ideas and interests.



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ECS' Moreth agrees. "The State Department has so many talented, independent and resilient people, but 'doing it all' is not sustainable," she says. Modify expectations: "Are the clothes and dishes everywhere going to matter in five days, five weeks, five months?" She also recommends joining one of the virtual support groups offered by ECS, the Family Liaison Office and others.

When asked to give other parents advice, another FSO says merely: "I guess look at my last six months and do the opposite...?" (Helpful advice? Perhaps not. But I think we can all agree we need this woman at our post with us.)

Sociologist Jesse Calarco of the University of Indiana says we shouldn't be asking other moms for "tips and tricks" to surviving this work-life crunch. "The people I'd much rather target for recommendations are the people with the power to ensure that mothers get the resources and support they need," she says. "Because moms don't need advice right now. They need politicians and business owners and community leaders and their own partners to step up and give them the support they deserve."

## After the Pandemic

The big question on all of these parents' minds: What's next? Many hope that after the pandemic is over, those of us in the foreign affairs community can continue to take advantage of flexible telework opportunities.

"In Washington, D.C., there is a growing cultural acceptance around telework flexibility. I hope that the State Department will maintain flexible situational or scheduled telework options for overseas employees in the future," says one FSO.

Jason Singer says that AFSA and USAID are looking at lessons learned during the pandemic, including those related to workplace flexibilities and telework. But, he notes, "while we've learned to do many things on a virtual basis, the heart of our development work will remain about people, and no amount of Zoom calls can replace our personal, field-based engagement."

Family member Jessica says she has been working remotely for years, so "it feels a little bit like the rest of the world is catching up to the way I've been working." While she prefers teleworking, she misses the travel that was a central part of her job prior to the pandemic. "There is nothing like white hotel sheets, room service and alone time."

Travel and alone time: two things that Foreign Service parents are undoubtedly missing these days. ■



# MY REINTRODUCTION TO AMERICA A COVID-19 JOURNEY

**Returning “home” after years overseas is notoriously difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic gave the experience a whole new, and surprising, twist.**

BY KIMBERLY HARMON



*Kimberly Harmon joined the Foreign Service as a management officer in 2011 with her husband, their 4-month-old son, Tristan, and two cats. Her first assignment was to Hermosillo, Mexico, where daughter Marigny was born. She then went to Port Louis,*

*Mauritius, as the general services officer, and there the family welcomed their third child, Hudson. Next came a posting to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She is currently on her first domestic tour, at the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services in Charleston, South Carolina.*

**A**fter spending nearly eight and a half years overseas as a management officer, I started my first domestic tour in Charleston, South Carolina, with the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services in August 2019—just a few months before COVID-19, which had been silently gathering momentum, erupted into public view. The transition back to one’s “home-land,” by itself very difficult after so many years abroad, suddenly became even more challenging—and, as it happened, even more rewarding.

First, the culture shock: There is no one waiting at the airport, no move-in ready, no government housing, no motor pool or social sponsor. But the real clincher is the pay cut. Not only do you lose your overseas allowances, but you have a mortgage, utility bills and car payments, and no embassy community bubble. It’s a bit like being in a foreign country with people that all look and sound like you, but do not want to talk to you. It is harder outside Washington, D.C., because there are only 10 FSOs in Charleston instead of the large Foreign Service support network in the greater D.C. area. Even though I’m a native of South Carolina, it was difficult to find my village.



COURTESY OF KIM HARMON

The author, second from left, delivers food to residents at an extended stay hotel in Charleston. Inset: Mr. Henderson “Savannah” Sims, a veteran, talks with the author.

As I was navigating this new territory—buying and furnishing my first house; learning my new job; trying to meet Americans; joining book clubs, parent-teacher organizations, anything I could think of to reconnect with America—2020 happened.

### How It All Began

During the week of March 15, 2020, I noticed an odd post from a woman on one of the Facebook groups I had joined. It seemed like something was off, so I messaged her privately, only to learn that her family—husband and two kids—hadn’t eaten in four days. It was the result of unfortunate circumstances: a lost job, a dead car, no extended family and COVID-19.

I offered to help, and used the Nextdoor neighborhood app to ask for donations of food for the family. Within a matter of days,



I had a van full of food and some toys for the children. Someone told me about a church providing free hot meals, so I also picked up meals for the family, plus a few extra. I drove it all to the family at an extended stay hotel on the north side of Charleston.

While dropping it off, I saw two older men sitting outside their hotel room and decided to give them the extra meals I had in the car. Then other people asked if I had any more meals.

I realized there was a greater need than I knew, so I quickly returned to the church and asked for 20 more meals. When I returned, the older gentleman to whom I had given the first meal thanked me and told me he hadn't had food in his hotel room in two weeks. A group used to bring meal vouchers weekly, he said, but when the coronavirus started spreading and restaurants closed, they just stopped coming. "I'll get food together and be back next Saturday," I told him. I didn't even ask his name and room number, I just figured I would find him, sitting outside I suppose.

The next week I used the Nextdoor app again, and my neighbors responded generously. I made six boxes full of canned and packaged food to take to the hotel. I wasn't quite sure who they were all for, but I knew the first family and the two gentlemen, and I figured there would be at least three other people in need. I just had to find them. Once the food boxes were in my car, I collected 30 cooked meals from the church and delivered everything to the original family and the two older men, a single mother with two kids and two more elderly men—hoping that it would last through the week.

At first I didn't have a set time, or much structure. But after the second week, I told them I would be back weekly at the same time. I said I'd come with food until COVID-19 ended and everything was back to normal. I wanted them to use the food and to know I was not going to disappear. I am not sure if they believed me, some random person who just showed up on Saturdays. They didn't even know my name, and honestly, I didn't know theirs—just their room numbers.

At week four I realized my neighbors wouldn't be able to support me over the long term with food donations. I called it the "Quarantine Slump"—at that point none of us knew how long this would last; we just hoped it would end soon.

## How It's Going

I started posting on Facebook and reaching out to nonprofits and the food banks. One co-founder at a local nonprofit, Tri-County Veterans Services Network, introduced me to the founder of Project Street Outreach, where I could get bread and food boxes. Later, I began picking up food donations from a medical clinic that had transitioned to a food bank with the onset of COVID-19.

I have received unexpected donations from grocery stores and from people in different neighborhoods. Some days I find food on my porch late in the evening. I never really know where help or food will come from or who will bring it, but it comes. One woman donated all the meat from her freezer when she

## I never really know where help or food will come from or who will bring it, but it comes.

became a vegan. Early on, a college friend who owns a local diner gave me dozens of local eggs because he had to shut down his restaurant due to COVID-19.

Sometime in the first few weeks my numbers jumped from six boxes to 13, and now I am at 19 boxes, all delivered to families and individuals living at the motel under various government assistance programs. The majority (14) are veterans, some with families, who depend on the joint U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development–U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs supportive housing program for homeless vets. There are also a couple of disabled elderly men who are not vets and three women who rely on disability benefits. Since December, I have been bringing extra boxes of food to make sure I have enough for anyone who needs it. Each week volunteers and I bring food to 25 to 30 residents in this hotel. Their need for support has not diminished during the past year; rather, it has grown as COVID-19 persists and food shortages become more apparent.

My process starts on Monday and ends on Saturday, and then starts again. Every week I go to four different stores on Wednesday and Thursday (by now I know the cheapest place for most basic food items). Three volunteers help me make boxes on Friday. For the first six or seven weeks, I made the deliveries on my own on Saturday, but then ran out of space in my car and couldn't handle the volume alone. Now three to five volunteers help with the deliveries each week.

March 6 marked the one-year anniversary of my first food delivery. But the project is about so much more. It is about realizing that when you make yourself available to the world, everything lines up. In week 11 the church stopped making cooked meals, and I was sad that I would not be able to take those; but by the following Monday I had received a Facebook message from a stranger asking if I would like soup. She put me in touch with a volunteer who happens to live five minutes away and had been preparing six gallons of soup weekly since COVID-19 started and asked if I could use it. I now deliver 30-40 quarts of soup weekly.

Another lovely neighbor bakes homemade pastries that she delivers to me every Friday. When I was starting to give up on finding fridge space, a friend who has helped me for months donated a full-size refrigerator for my garage, and that solved the problem.



Stocks fill the author's garage; the food boxes are staged for packing and delivery on Saturday morning.

## I simply go because one sweet gentleman said he was hungry, and it isn't right. These men sacrificed for our country, and we owe them more respect than we give them.

I also started a Facebook fundraiser page to raise money for the project that helps pay for the food I buy weekly; it also allowed me to purchase Father's Day gifts for the veterans. They never ask for anything, but they have so little. I spend an hour a week just talking with them, listening for what they may need—I hear things like they only have two spoons and one fork in their rooms, or they don't own a folding chair, or do not have a toaster. These are little things that I can find to make their world a better place, things we think nothing of picking up at Target for \$20.

### So What?

These folks could probably get by without you, people say and ask me why I keep going each week. I explain that it is only partially about the food; it is also about these veterans (my kids call them "vitamins") knowing that someone cares enough to show up each week. Many of them haven't seen their children in more than 20 years. Their wives are deceased.

I do not go with an agenda. I simply go because one sweet gentleman said he was hungry, and it isn't right. These men sacrificed for our country, and we owe them more respect than we give them. I cannot help them all, but for now Savannah, Leon-

ard, Tadpole, Slim and I are forming a bond, and that matters. My kids will remember me helping these veterans. I will forever remember their stories and cherish the opportunity to have done something on a domestic tour that FSOs cannot do overseas.

Why am I sharing this with you as fellow FSOs? Where's the "so what?"—because that's the important part, right? Here it is: At first I was floundering, trying to find people and a way to be productive here "at home" like I had been overseas, trying to feel like I was getting things done. Well, I have succeeded: I am helping Americans in America.

The project gives sustenance directly to folks who are in dire need. But they are not the only beneficiaries. Those who donate each week are able to give back to the community in a way that they could not otherwise. Many are older and at high risk for COVID-19, so can't volunteer or work in food banks; but they love bringing by groceries and seeing pictures of the veterans. I am making connections with so many amazing people in my community through this project. Moreover, I am the first and only FSO most of these people will ever meet, so I'm able to educate people at a grassroots level about the work we do overseas. I am also doing something we cannot do as freely overseas, which is volunteering and helping others within my community without worrying about a public affairs angle or regional security concerns.

I never imagined that a random chat on Facebook while watching Netflix back home in America would change my life, but it has. I believe that if one is open to such moments, they can change the course of one's life—perhaps briefly, or perhaps forever. This moment has already changed mine forever. Thanks to Mr. Henderson "Savannah" Sims telling me he was hungry, I am doing something that heals my heart, renews my faith in the generous spirit of Americans, and helps a piece of America in my small corner of South Carolina. ■

# Effective Public Diplomacy LESSONS FROM TUK-TAM

**Listen first, one retired PD practitioner advises. Here is his story of a very successful program.**

BY KEN MOSKOWITZ

**T**he key to successful public diplomacy is authentic engagement with citizens of the host country. Despite the prestige and prominence of our work in foreign countries, our power and influence are often limited to persuasion or exhortation, and that is not always welcome. And though we may pay lip service to building relationships and “successor-generation” programs, our short-term assignments not only tend to preclude long-term relationships, but also handicap the means to monitor results and effectiveness.

Yet it is the deeper, longer-term programs and activities that are more likely to change opinions and bring new ideas to young participants. The International Visitor Leadership Program and Fulbright exchanges come immediately to mind, but not all long-term engagements are of the exchange variety. As public affairs officer (PAO) in Bulgaria from 2009 to 2012, I had the opportunity to work with young leaders on a unique project that continues to play a vital role in that country’s development—*Tuk-Tam* (translation: “Here-There”).

The experience offers lessons that are relevant today.

## Serendipity

Soon after arriving in Sofia in the fall of 2009, during a courtesy call to the rector of the American College of Sofia (a private high school), I happened to read in the “class notes” section of the alumni magazine about the creation of an interesting nongovernmental organization (NGO) by five recent graduates. The group



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TUK-TAM

Tuk-Tam's U.S. Alumni Club meets at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Sofia in June 2019.

would be dedicated to encouraging young Bulgarians to return from work or study in the United States or Western Europe and to pursue their careers domestically. This seemed like a perfect match for our outreach efforts, given that it could touch on several key themes: engaging youth, offering career training, sharing American ideas and boosting the domestic economy of a NATO ally.

But there would be more. I soon learned that the new NGO, Tuk-Tam, had been trying to organize networking and job training seminars, but their applications to the Bulgarian government for funding had been turned down. I imagined that this was due to their youth, inexperience and the absence of a record of responsible grants management.

At that time, I had started working with the Bulgarian branch of Junior Achievement, a job skills and entrepreneurship NGO that was organizing a two-day seminar for high school pupils called Smart Start. I noticed that, despite a Roma minority of more than 10 percent in Bulgaria, not one Roma had signed up for the seminar. Working through a local colleague in the embassy, I quickly got two Roma girls registered, but later learned that they felt uncomfortable at the seminar and did not return the second day.

This is where Tuk-Tam came in. For the next two annual iterations of Smart Start, I wrote a grant for the new NGO to find the Bulgarian high schools with the largest percentage of Roma pupils, to visit the schools with Junior Achievement representatives and to introduce the seminar and encourage the pupils to apply to it. With the Tuk-Tam members' remarkably savvy skills and hard work, we met our target of 10 percent participation by Roma pupils for the next two years.

At about the same time, the office of youth programs in State's Bureau of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy was urging all PAOs to create "youth councils" composed of youth leaders of

their choosing to coordinate and advise on youth-oriented programs. I struggled to explain to Washington that such a Bulgarian youth council would be vacuous, given the existence already of the homegrown and very promising Tuk-Tam organization.

### A Deeper Understanding: The Brain Drain

I worked intensively with Tuk-Tam throughout my three-year assignment. In fact, given the maturity and smarts of its leaders, they became my advisers and confidants not only on youth issues, but on many of the problems plaguing the country.

Thinking strategically, I asked myself what role a public affairs section with a modest program budget could play to address Bulgaria's biggest problems. We certainly didn't have the resources to stop the environmental despoliation, energize a limp economy, correct the rampant government corruption or introduce genuine rule of law in the country.

But what did seem a very important and worthwhile goal of our youth programming was to slow the brain drain from Bulgaria, the exodus of the best and brightest young people to better job opportunities overseas, which depletes a country's intellectual capacity and entrepreneurial work force. This was exactly the problem that Tuk-Tam was attacking in its own way.

The extent of the damage from brain drain in Bulgaria and the region is alarming, indeed. In a recent article for the *Financial Times*, Ivan Krastev called depopulation Eastern Europe's biggest problem. He cites Andrej Plenkovic, the prime minister of Croatia, who called depopulation Europe's "existential problem," and a United Nations estimate that, since the 1990s, Eastern Europe has lost about 6 percent of its population. This problem is greatly compounded by the departure of those with the most education and best job skills.

As the poorest member of the European Union, Bulgaria has had the world's fastest population decline by some measures.

## A true “brain gain” organization, Tuk-Tam also encourages mentoring and volunteer service to the Bulgarian community.

Its population was about 9 million at the end of the 1980s, but it had fallen to fewer than 7 million in 2018. The United Nations Population Division has forecast that Bulgaria will lose 23 percent of its population by 2050. The two factors contributing to the shrinking population are low birth rates and massive emigration.

But the migration statistics seem to be changing. According to Bulgaria’s National Statistics Institute, the number of expatriate Bulgarians choosing to return home is soaring. In 2016, more than 9,250 Bulgarians repatriated; in 2018, almost twice as many returned, 16,169. Unfortunately, the number of departing Bulgarians has not slackened, but rather continues to edge up. According to a Tuk-Tam representative interviewed on Dec. 12, 2019, by BTA, the Bulgarian news agency, Bulgaria needs more highly qualified recruits, and unemployment has reached historically low levels. She also cited an increasing number of Bulgarians who see opportunities for a career and personal development in their own country.

### Important and Rewarding Work

Could a bunch of college kids have played a role in this apparent demographic shift? Well, Tuk-Tam is no longer the clubby dozen youths of my era in Bulgaria. It has expanded to 10 full-time employees, opened an office in downtown Sofia and launched major projects of its own, in addition to disseminating positive information about Bulgaria via social media to an estimated 200,000 Bulgarians, now the largest online community of Bulgarians around the world.

Tuk-Tam’s projects include awarding 22 scholarships to date, based on fundraising totaling 210,000 Bulgarian Lev (about \$130,400) from more than 700 donors. It also continues to organize job fairs, helping 14,000 returnees and young people launch their careers. And branches of Tuk-Tam have opened in both the United States, with 650 members, and Great Britain with 350.

Tuk-Tam’s latest project is an online portal, Guide to Bulgaria, launched last year partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes a section of job offerings, recently from 30 companies. Its Community section, intended as the centerpiece of the portal, helps members stay informed and engaged with others, and make professional contacts. A true “brain gain” organization, it also encourages mentoring and volunteer service to the Bulgarian community.

I hope that Bulgaria has turned a corner. To the extent that it has, Tuk-Tam deserves great credit. At a time when the NGO could not get even the most meager support from the government of Bulgaria, our assistance to the leaders of this inspired and practical initiative proved invaluable. And those we worked with have gone on to positions of leadership in business and in their society. A decade later, in 2020, the Tuk-Tam Hive forum attracted close to 3,200 people—with support from the Ministry of Labor and the patronage of Bulgaria’s President Rumen Radev.

In retrospect, I consider my engagement with Tuk-Tam to be the most rewarding and important work of my career for two reasons. I have already stated one: This NGO attacks the brain drain eating away at poor countries’ skilled worker base. Second, I feel American diplomats should help fight brain drain because, ironically, we are partly to blame for it. Though little discussed, significant numbers of the Fulbright alumni we have sponsored—in addition to the private-scholarship grantees we advise via our Education.usa centers—do not return to their home countries if they are from the relatively poor countries of Eastern Europe or the developing world.

### Lessons Learned

My experience with Tuk-Tam more than a decade ago holds several lessons for today. One is for public affairs officers to welcome overall thematic direction from Washington, but for State to leave wide discretion to PAOs to create their own unique priorities and programs. More specifically, PAOs should search for programs and ideas that have roots in native soil, rather than just nominating local contacts to lead branches of worldwide programs created in Washington, D.C., however successful or durable.

Second, given the perennial shortage of resources, PAOs should choose mission-specific grantees carefully, and with an eye on the priority goals shared by Washington and the post. I have learned that the only programs with substantial results and staying power are those based on goals that Washington approves of and that local partners or grantees are passionate about and fully committed to.

Finally, Americans are often accused of preaching or lecturing about “American exceptionalism,” our superior values or the better ways we have of doing things. That charge will never stick if we listen first, and take our programming cues from promising local leaders, of whatever age, rank or experience. ■

# A Truly Trustworthy Leader

## George P. Shultz 1920-2020

BY STEVEN ALAN HONLEY

**I**n December 1985, news broke that the Reagan administration was planning to require State Department employees to take lie detector tests to keep their security clearances. Expressing “grave reservations” about the validity of polygraphs, Secretary of State George P. Shultz threatened to resign if the policy change went forward, calling it a sign that “I am not trusted.”

President Ronald Reagan took that threat so seriously that, after meeting with Secretary Shultz, he declared that he would leave it up to State Department officials to decide whether to administer polygraphs.

Although that incident did not change the status quo, and was soon forgotten by most people, it reveals much about

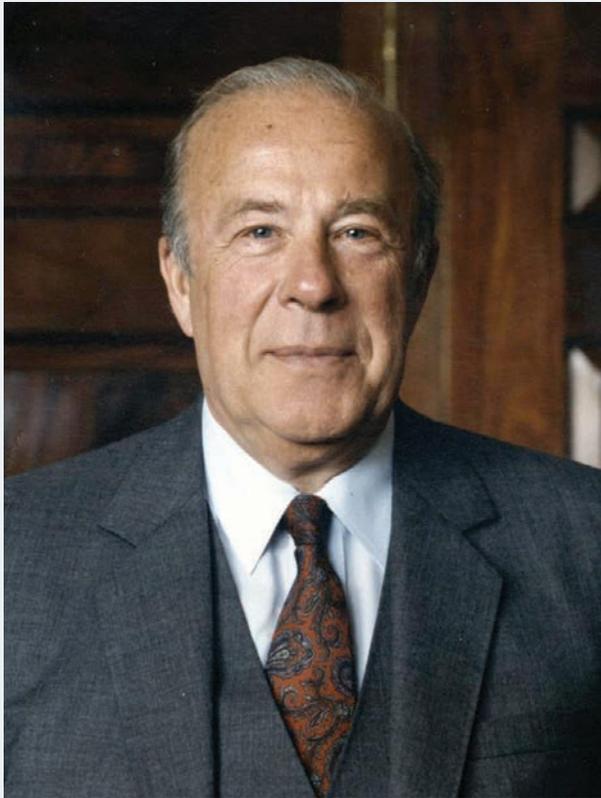


*Steven Alan Honley, a State Department Foreign Service officer from 1985 to 1997, and editor in chief of The Foreign Service Journal from 2001 to 2014, is a regular contributor to the Journal. He is the author of Future Forward: FSI at 70—A History of the Foreign Service Institute (Arlington Hall Press, 2017).*

George Shultz’s character. First, while he was a fully committed Cold Warrior, he instinctively understood that not every trade-off of liberty for security is warranted. Second, his background as an economist led him to value data over theory, so he saw no reason to trust polygraphs.

Third, he was intensely loyal to his employees, and they trusted him to have their backs. Although he couched his protest in personal terms (“I am not trusted”), everyone knew there was no chance he would ever be asked to take a lie detector test—let alone forced to do so to keep his job. But George Shultz understood full well that his subordinates at State did not enjoy that luxury, so he spoke out on their behalf—first through internal channels, then publicly.

For those reasons, and more, many Foreign Service members who served during Secretary Shultz’s tenure in Foggy Bottom (1982-1989) remember him fondly. (As far as I know, AFSA has never surveyed its members as to the Secretary of State they believe was the best leader of the department, but I’m willing to bet Shultz would come in at or very near the top of such a list.) A thoughtful institutionalist, he not only understood and valued the work of State and other foreign affairs agencies, but advo-



## The Road to Foggy Bottom

George Pratt Shultz was born in New York City on Dec. 13, 1920. He graduated from Princeton University in 1942 with a bachelor's degree in economics, and then joined the U.S. Marine Corps, serving through 1945. He received a Ph.D. in industrial economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1949.

Shultz spent most of the next two decades in academia. He taught at MIT from 1948 to 1957, but took a year's leave of absence in 1955 to serve as senior staff economist on President Dwight Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisers. In 1957 he was appointed professor of industrial relations in the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business, and he became dean of the school in 1962. From 1968 to 1969, he was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, the beginning of a long association with that institution.

Shultz served in the administration of President Richard Nixon as Secretary of Labor from January 1969 to June 1970, at which time he was appointed director of the Office of Management and Budget. He became Secretary of the Treasury in May 1972, serving until May 1974. During that period, he also served as chairman of the Council on Economic Policy and chairman of the East-West Trade Policy Committee. In that capacity, Shultz traveled to Moscow in 1973 and negotiated a series of trade protocols with the Soviet Union. He also represented the United States at the Tokyo meeting of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

In 1974 he again left government service to become president and director of the Bechtel Group, where he remained until 1982. While at Bechtel, he maintained his close ties with the academic world by joining the faculty of Stanford University on a part-time basis.

From January 1981 until June 1982, when he was nominated to succeed Alexander Haig as Secretary of State, Shultz was chairman of President Ronald Reagan's Economic Policy Advisory Board. He was sworn in as the 60th U.S. Secretary of State on July 16, 1982, during a period of especially icy relations between the world's two remaining superpowers, yet he immediately began pushing for a broader dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, Shultz was convinced Gorbachev was a new type of leader—one who understood the importance of nuclear arms control. "He helped Reagan and Gorbachev to establish an upward spiral of trust by creating positive experiences with each other," historian

cated for the resources and respect diplomats need and deserve.

In particular, he recognized the importance of professional education for the Foreign Service. When introducing Shultz at the May 2002 ceremony renaming the National Foreign Affairs Training Center as the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center, Secretary of State Colin Powell observed: "His is a name that the American people connect with selfless public service and solid integrity, a name that is synonymous with American statesmanship, a name that people all over the world recognize and which they associate with principled international engagement."

Powell went on to note: "George Shultz is a student of history, and he has made quite a bit of it himself. We have always known George to be a man keenly focused on the future, especially on preparing the rising generation for service to the country. ... It is not we who honor George Shultz by naming this center after him; rather, it is George Shultz who honors us and all who will pass through these halls by lending his name to this facility."

Long before George Shultz died at his home in Stanford, California, on Feb. 6 at the age of 100, he had validated Powell's prediction. Survivors include his wife, Charlotte Mailliard Shultz, as well as five children, 11 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

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George P. Shultz was a key player, alongside President Ronald Reagan, in changing the direction of history by using the tools of diplomacy to bring the Cold War to an end.

—The Hoover Institution, Feb. 7, 2021.

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Stephan Kieninger wrote for the Hoover Institution at Stanford University as part of the celebration of Shultz's 100th birthday in December.

Those talks eventually led to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned land-launched nuclear weapons capable of reaching targets between 310 and 3,400 miles away. Reagan and Gorbachev signed the agreement in 1987. By June 1991, the two countries had destroyed 2,692 ballistic and cruise missiles.

There is no dispute that, as Stanford's Hoover Institution said in announcing his death, "Shultz was a key player, alongside President Ronald Reagan, in changing the direction of history by using the tools of diplomacy to bring the Cold War to an end." He was able to "not only imagine things thought impossible but also to bring them to fruition, and forever change the course of human events."

As Secretary of State Antony Blinken observed in his own tribute on Feb. 7, his predecessor "not only negotiated landmark arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, but after leaving office he continued to fight for a world free of nuclear weapons. He also urged serious action on the climate crisis at a time when too few leaders took that position. He was a visionary."

### After State

Returning to private life in January 1989, Shultz rejoined Stanford University as the Jack Steele Parker Professor of International Economics at the Graduate School of Business. He was also the Thomas W. and Susan B. Ford Distinguished Fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Awarded the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, on Jan. 19, 1989, he also received the Seoul Peace Prize (1992), the Eisenhower Medal for Leadership and Service (2001), the Reagan Distinguished American Award (2002) and the American Foreign Service Association's Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award (2003).

Secretary Shultz published several books and countless monographs, articles and op-eds between 1953 and 2020, including a best-selling memoir of his time in Foggy Bottom: *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (Scribner's, 1993).

In November 2020, *The Foreign Service Journal's* cover story was an essay by Secretary Shultz titled "On Trust," later excerpted in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere. And in December, for his 100th birthday, the Hoover Institution published a related monograph by Shultz, "Life and Learning after One Hundred Years—Trust Is the Coin of the Realm: Reflections on Trust and Effective Relationships across a New Hinge of History."

In the monograph, the former Secretary of State summarizes the philosophy that animated his approach to international relations, both at State and beyond: "Genuine empathy helps to create sound relationships across countries, even when cultures seem far apart and when times are tough. Our country will face fresh challenges in an emerging new world: new pandemics, new technologies, new weapons, environmental change, demographic change, and the ever-renewing charge to effectively govern over diversity. A shared understanding, and a human connection, will help us navigate these unsettled waters."

On Feb. 10, Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), co-chairs of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus, introduced a resolution honoring Shultz's life, achievements and legacy. "Statesmanship and service above self consistently characterized the remarkable life of George P. Shultz," said the senators. "Throughout his distinguished career, Secretary Shultz championed American diplomacy and strengthened its home institution—the Department of State—all in pursuit of a more peaceful, prosperous and cooperative world order. Secretary Shultz's example as a patriot and public servant will undoubtedly serve to inspire and guide future generations of American leaders." ■

In honor of George P. Shultz, *The Foreign Service Journal* invited members of the Foreign Service who knew and worked with the former Secretary of State to send us their remembrances. This living memorial is on the AFSA website at [afsa.org/remembering-george-shultz](https://afsa.org/remembering-george-shultz).

For more articles on George P. Shultz from the FSJ Archive, please visit our special collections page at [afsa.org/fsj-special-collections](https://afsa.org/fsj-special-collections).

## AFSA Celebrates Win on Meritorious Service Increases

The Foreign Service Labor Relations Board ruled on Jan. 19 in favor of granting payments to FSOs who were ranked by the 2015 and 2016 State Department selection boards to receive Meritorious Service Increases. AFSA is extremely pleased with the decision.

In a close vote, two members of the FSLRB ruled in AFSA's favor while the chair of the board, appointed by the previous administration, dissented. As there is no appeal in this type of case, AFSA believes the department is now legally required to retroactively pay the 2015 and 2016 MSIs, with interest, to affected employees.

Individuals who are expected to benefit from the

FSLRB's decision are those who were identified as "... demonstrating potential to serve at higher levels" in department cables announcing the 2015 and 2016 promotion lists.

While the calculation of back pay can be complicated and time-consuming, we will urge the department to move forward expeditiously. As of this writing, the department has advised AFSA that it is reviewing the FSLRB's decision.

The 2015 and 2016 cases are the last of four implementation disputes AFSA filed based on the department's decision not to award any MSIs, or to award a smaller percentage of MSIs than called for in AFSA's collec-

tive bargaining agreements (i.e., the selection board procedural precepts) with the department.

AFSA prevailed in the 2013 MSI dispute, and more than 550 individuals received retroactive MSIs or adjustments to their annuities if retired. Unfortunately, while the Foreign Service Grievance Board ruled in AFSA's favor in the 2014 dispute, the FSLRB reversed this decision.

For nearly 40 years the department and AFSA have negotiated and agreed on the procedural precepts (i.e., the "ground rules" for selection boards). The precepts include provisions relating to the award of MSIs to employees who were not promoted, but whose performance was of sufficient quality that an MSI was deemed appropriate by the selection boards.

For approximately 30 years prior to 2013, MSIs were paid to whatever number of employees the selection boards recommended, up to a percentage limitation of the competitive class specified in the precepts.

AFSA's Labor Management team has devoted hundreds of hours over the past six years litigating MSI cases to make certain our members and all Foreign Service employees get what is rightfully theirs.

As a result of AFSA's efforts in this dispute, more than 1,000 Foreign Service

Please check [www.afsa.org](http://www.afsa.org) for the most up-to-date information. All events are subject to cancellation or rescheduling.

## CALENDAR

April 5  
Deadline:  
**2021 High School Essay Contest**

April 21  
12-2 p.m.  
**AFSA Governing Board Meeting**

April 22  
12 p.m.  
**AFSA Virtual Book Notes: Tecumseh and the Prophet: The Shawnee Brothers Who Defied a Nation by retired FSO Peter Cozzens**

May 6  
**AFSA Foreign Service Day Virtual Programming**

May 7  
**Virtual Foreign Service Day**

May 13  
12 p.m.  
**AFSA Governing Board Election Town Hall**

May 19  
12-2 p.m.  
**AFSA Governing Board Meeting**

employees have received or are expected to receive a permanent increase to their salaries, or to their annuities if retired.

These are your AFSA dues at work.

If you have any questions about this matter, please write AFSA at [afsa@state.gov](mailto:afsa@state.gov). ■



## Foreign Service Day May 7, 2021

Please save the date for the annual AFSA Open House on Thursday, May 6.

See page 67 for more details.



## Are Linked Assignments Worth It Anymore?

As many of you know, linking an assignment after service at a Special Incentive Post—Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba and certain other tough places to live and work—has been a long-standing incentive to bidders.

But as the years have gone by and the number of SIP positions has decreased, is the linked assignments process still needed as an incentive? More to the point, is it a fair process?

In the most recent department survey on SIP incentives (May 2018), a majority of respondents felt linked assignments provided incentive to fill SIP posts and were good for the Foreign Service. But less than half believed the process was fair.

That said, linked assignments took a distant third place (equal to “needs of the Service”) when those surveyed were asked their primary reason for bidding on an SIP post. Career development and financial incentives were first and second, respectively.

**Concerns from Members.** Recently we have heard from a number of our members that the process appears to be broken, and few are happy with it.

Indeed, one member who was unsuccessful in getting a link wrote us and said that a link bidder’s success this year was “lottery-like,” and dependent on the order in which bureaus manually

sent the handshakes. This member noted that all 75 links were given away in a matter of minutes after they could be issued.

Another member, who was ultimately successful in getting a link, expressed misgivings about the process, saying that a number of his link bids were not seriously considered.

This member goes on to say that bureaus deny link requests for reasons unrelated to position requirements or, if they do provide such reasons, they are not credible. Some posts said they wanted to wait for the normal assignments to see who else might bid or that they wanted to save the jobs for people coming out of hardship locations within that bureau.

This member also points out that the SIP link tracking team is woefully understaffed, calling into question the department’s commitment to honor its incentive for SIP service.

**Are Links Seen as Entitlements?** On the other hand, there is the feeling that some bidders have come to see links as entitlements—that is, if an employee requests a link, that should be enough, and the bureau should have little right to evaluate the employee’s actual qualifications for the position.

There is also the concern that links distort the

**Recently we have heard from a number of our members that the process appears to be broken, and few are happy with it.**

bidding process, especially with regard to the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. According to 2020 statistics, 40 percent of link requests were made to EUR. That reduces possibilities for people who want to serve in EUR but not through a linked assignment—such as those coming from other hardship locations or in tandems.

**Diversity and Inclusion.** Anecdotal evidence suggests that linked assignments may undermine the department’s attempts to promote diversity in hiring because the majority of those seeking links appear to be white and male.

To the extent that such data exists, AFSA has asked the department to provide a breakdown by gender, race and other identifying information on who has sought linked assignments, and who has been successful in getting them.

In any event, the link process means that some jobs are filled without the ability to consider the full slate of eligible bidders, including those who for a variety of reasons are unable to serve in a SIP location.

### What Is to Be Done?

AFSA has continued to support linked assignments by negotiating with the department on the number of such assignments each year.

The number has steadily fallen in recent years, due particularly to the drawdown in positions in Iraq and Afghanistan. From a high of 220 links in 2009, 150 were available in 2018 and 75 in the most recent bid cycle.

But with the problems and challenges identified above—which, to be fair, are also largely associated with the regular assignments process as a whole—should the department continue with this particular incentive? Or is there a possibility for reform?

AFSA wants to hear what you think about the linked assignments process and other efforts to incentivize service in high hardship locations. Please send your thoughts to [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■



## Schedule F(SL)—Noncareer Hiring Takes a Toll

I have written here before about USAID's overuse of noncareer mechanisms, including Foreign Service Limited appointments.

I'm writing again—not because I don't value the work of dedicated professionals in FSL positions, but because the FSL mechanism has (d)evolved to a point where its overuse undermines agency operations, obfuscates use of tax dollars, lowers morale and short-changes employees.

The FSL mechanism shares characteristics with the previous administration's Schedule F proposal. It is past time to address these.

There was considerable controversy around Executive Order 13957, issued by President Donald Trump last October. I haven't encountered anyone who supported the proposal as written.

It envisioned converting thousands of career Civil Service positions to the Schedule F category, thereby removing competition requirements, stripping protections and rendering jobholders more beholden to political agendas than to the rule of law.

President Joe Biden quashed Schedule F soon after taking office, but the whole affair highlighted the value and necessity of a competitive, merit-based, nonpartisan career bureaucracy, particularly a Foreign Service, which, as Congress specifies in the Foreign Ser-

vice Act of 1980, "is essential in the national interest."

The FSL mechanism flies in the face of this. Over time, career FSO numbers have declined as FSLs have risen. In Fiscal Year 2016, FSLs made up 12 percent of the combined total of career FS and FSL employees. In FY 2020, this had risen to more than 17 percent. So nearly one in six people appointed at USAID under the Foreign Service Act are serving in a "limited" noncareer capacity.

USAID policy on FSL appointments is relatively clear if not always followed. "Foreign Service Limited (FSL) Appointments are noncareer appointments appropriate for overseas and Washington-based positions that require skills that are unique and/or are required to address an urgent, unforeseen, time-bound need for development expertise," states chapter 414 of USAID's Automated Directive System.

FSL hiring may have been appropriate at the beginning of the Afghanistan and Iraq crises, particularly because USAID was then (and remains) short of career FSOs. But later, USAID started appointing FSLs to noncombat areas and, increasingly, to Washington.

Next, USAID requested and received congressional approval to use "program funds" to hire FSLs instead of being limited to the relatively scarce "operating

expense" (OE) funds used to hire career Foreign and Civil Service employees. This unlocked resources, and the slippery slope of what was considered a unique skill or an unforeseen circumstance became slicker.

Positions such as country desk officer and environment officer were declared temporary, and the need for them unforeseen(!?). Even "time-bound" became a fluid concept, as the agency granted four-year extensions to five-year appointments. Nine years may be time-bound, but that's a long time!

Issues involving accountability, transparency and "evidence-based (HR) policymaking" need to be sorted out, perhaps by the Government Accountability Office. I have concerns that the FSL mechanism may skirt the merit-based, competitive requirement in the Foreign Service Act; I haven't seen an FSL job advertised on USAJobs.gov, but I have seen institutional contractors become FSL appointees.

There are also concerns about whether the Foreign Service Act is being respected, and whether the agency may be undermining its own institutional strength by choosing noncareer staff.

The agency needs to rebuild the *career* Foreign Service and wean itself off its dependency on "limited" arrangements.

There are opportunity

costs to the career Foreign Service in terms of positions, training and career growth prospects that increase with continued fragmentation of USAID's workforce.

Last but by no means least are the human implications of noncareer hiring. FSL colleagues do not enjoy the benefits or security that come with career positions, even though many are doing similar work. They can be terminated for an array of reasons, such as "when the need no longer exists for the employee's service" or "for such other cause as will promote the efficiency of the service."

This places FSLs in a precarious position akin to those envisioned under Schedule F—not a best practice, particularly for a development agency. I can't see USAID proposing such an arrangement as part of any project!

The solution is to strengthen USAID's career cadre—Foreign Service and Civil Service. It is decades past time for agency and congressional leaders to develop a new budget approach based on need.

A stronger, better resourced and larger career Foreign Service, reinforced by a similarly reinvigorated career Civil Service, should be a primary goal for the new administration.

If accomplished, the legacy would get an "A"—not an "F"—from me. ■



## Our Biggest Untapped Resource

In my January-February column, I touched on the idea of working more with our vibrant alumni community. A few of my now retired colleagues saw the piece, and one, Jim McCarthy, decided to contact me and make a contribution to this space. He has great ideas and, like almost all our retirees, would like to give something back.

Here's what Jim and I have put together for your consideration. We would love to hear more from you.

To start with, we have all heard the jest that the Commercial Service is the "best kept secret in the U.S. government." It's the unfortunate outcome for a small, but highly successful business unit that gets only scattered attention from its very large parent agency, the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Of course, the 33,000-plus clients that we serve know differently, and as commercial officers, it gives us a great deal of pride to be on the receiving end of their praise and appreciation for what we do.

### A Good Story to Tell

The basic point is that we have always had a good story to tell, but we rely on others to tell it. That works to a point, but we can do better. Our stakeholders should also be hearing from those who have been there and lived it—our alumni.

Over the past decade, our numbers have shrunk by more than 10 percent, mainly due to attrition. Many senior officers have gone on to noteworthy careers in the private sector, while others have gotten into politics or even returned to government in some other capacity.

Still, regardless of the next stage in life, these retired officers bring with them an immense amount of knowledge and international experience—something that should not so easily be let go.

One thing that still puzzles many of us is the fact that the Commercial Service does not do any sort of exit interview when an officer retires.

There is no effort to gather their experiences and advice, little or no acknowledgment of their contributions to the U.S. government as they leave and, perhaps most importantly, no attempt to maintain contact with retirees who would certainly have more to contribute to the Commercial Service if called on.

### More to Contribute

Unencumbered by the restrictions of their former positions in government, our alumni—as members of the public, the corporate world, or even as political constituents—can be forceful and effective advocates for the

**Unencumbered by the restrictions of their former positions in government, our alumni—as members of the public, the corporate world, or even as political constituents—can be forceful and effective advocates for the “best kept secret in government.”**

“best kept secret in government.”

In addition, for the Commercial Service itself, they can be sounding boards for new ideas in the area of trade promotion, or as mentors to new and midcareer active-duty officers. Their experiences can, and probably should, be preserved in some form for the next generation to learn from and for the sake of the historical record of the Commercial Service.

These are just a few of many ideas, just the start of what can be done.

So, how to begin? It's simple. Senior leadership in the Commercial Service need to endorse and initiate a formal program for reemployed annuitants.

### Foster Alumni Groups

The Office of Foreign Service Human Capital should also designate someone, full- or part-time, to connect with the FCS alumni community. The good news is that several small alumni groups already exist, par-

ticularly in the Washington, D.C., area. Further connections can easily be made to those across the country, from Washington, D.C., to Washington state.

It's time to finally tap this important resource, get active and engaged, and allow our best experts to showcase that expertise for the benefit our organization, which contributes so much to the U.S. economy and still has much more to offer.

Finally, I want to call your attention to an excellent piece written by my colleague Aileen Nandi on page 31 of this month's issue. It talks about the pivot to virtual services and how the Commercial Service has stepped up for our clients during this past year, despite significant economic headwinds. I encourage you to give it a read! ■

## AFSA President Meets with Members in Virtual Town Halls



AFSA President Eric Rubin speaks on Feb. 16 during an AFSA town hall Zoom meeting with members serving in Europe.

AFSA President Eric Rubin and AFSA constituent agency vice presidents held a series of seven virtual town halls for AFSA members in different regions in the world in February.

At the first, on Feb. 16, Ambassador Rubin told an audience of more than 50 AFSA members serving in Europe that the association greatly appreciates all the input it is receiving from its members, including the more than 80 responses *The Foreign Service Journal* received for its March “Notes to the New Administration” feature.

With a new administration in place, we are in “a moment of possibility” where change can happen, he said. The leadership of all the foreign affairs agencies AFSA represents “are interested in what we have to say,” and there is enhanced interest in Foreign Service issues in Congress.

“I’m very aware of how difficult the past four years have been for many of us,

and I say that in a nonpartisan way,” Amb. Rubin said, noting in particular the first impeachment of former President Donald Trump, which involved testimony by many Foreign Service employees, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Foreign Service employees were pushed out of the policy process by the previous administration, but Amb. Rubin said he hopes the State Department will be able to play a stronger role in that process now.

“We take it as a given that a lot needs changing in the Foreign Service,” he said.

AFSA is focused on contributing ideas on how to advance diversity in the foreign affairs agencies, he said.

Hiring and retention will also be areas of focus, he added, noting that the Foreign Service needs to double the hiring of new employees to keep up with attrition.

The Senior Foreign Service is 87 percent white and two-

thirds male, much less diverse than when he joined the Service in 1985, Amb. Rubin said. “I’m confident that we’ll see some change in those numbers.”

In partnership with three Rangel Fellows at Harvard’s Kennedy School, AFSA recently surveyed its members about retention issues. Harvard will also sponsor focus groups on the issue.

Amb. Rubin noted that the United States now has the second-largest diplomatic service in the world, trailing China. “Ever since World War II, we were the foremost diplomatic power,” he said, adding that AFSA wants to see the Foreign Service expanded and more Foreign Service officers posted overseas.

He noted that Secretary of State Antony Blinken had reached out to AFSA and

other unions and held a meeting with them just three days into office, a strong sign of support from the new administration and that AFSA’s opinion will be sought and respected by State leadership.

AFSA State Vice President Tom Yazdgerdi added that on the macro level, AFSA deals with important issues such as advocating for greater information about COVID-19 vaccine distribution by the State Department and pushing for meritorious service increases (see story on page 59).

He also noted that AFSA’s Labor Management office fields dozens of queries from members each day on a wide variety of issues. “We are happy to be your advocate,” he said.

AFSA welcomes input on issues of concern to members at [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■



### AFSA Governing Board Meeting, Feb. 17, 2021

**Legal Defense Fund:** The Governing Board approved changes to the Standard Operating Procedures for the Legal Defense Fund. The board also approved moving LDF funds into a new and separate bank account with Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

**Associate Members:** The Governing Board approved the applications of two new associate members.

**Vice President Resignation:** The Governing Board approved the resignation of Foreign Agriculture Service Vice President Michael Riedel and agreed to seek an interim FAS VP to finish out his term. ■

## State Med Director Briefs AFSA Members on Slow Vaccine Rollout



AFSA/CAMERON WOODWORTH

The State Department's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Larry Padget discusses the department's rollout of COVID-19 vaccines with AFSA members during a Feb. 2 Zoom event.

In a Feb. 2 Zoom call arranged by AFSA, State Department Chief Medical Officer Larry Padget addressed concerns about the slow vaccine rollout to employees and their families. More than 900 people participated in the call.

Last July, Dr. Padget explained, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services officials told the department that it would receive 270,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses as part of Operation Warp Speed, and State officials made a plan to rapidly deploy the vaccine overseas.

"We felt very confident that we'd be able to get all the vaccines out around the world within two weeks," he said, adding that the department wants to provide vaccines to everyone

from Foreign Service direct hires and family members to contractors and locally employed staff.

But two days before the vaccines were supposed to arrive, in early December, officials told State's Bureau of Medical Services that they would receive only 16,500—or five percent—of the vaccines in the first batch. "And we had to make some tough decisions," Dr. Padget said.

State MED makes data-driven recommendations on vaccine allocation to the under secretary for management, who makes the final decision on distribution, he said.

State allocated doses in the first tranche to embassy personnel in Kabul, Baghdad and Mogadishu, since those cities had large COVID-19 outbreaks, he said.

Also receiving vaccines from that first tranche were frontline workers such as State MED employees and department cleaning staff, and Diplomatic Security staff who were working on the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Joe Biden.

As of early February, the department had received less than 25 percent of the total allotment. So far, MED has received small tranches of vaccines on a monthly basis, Dr. Padget said.

The second tranche of vaccines, in January, was a

little bigger at 33,000 doses, he said. The department sent vaccines to 28 posts in western Africa, which he said is one of the most medically underserved regions in the world. Embassy Mexico City also received vaccines, since it has some of the highest coronavirus numbers, and six local staff members there had died from COVID-19 as of early February.

As of Feb. 2, 42 locally employed staff at U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide had died from COVID-19, Dr. Padget said. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in January that five American State Department employees have died from COVID-19.

Several passport agencies in the United States also received vaccines from the second tranche because employees there were required to go to work in their offices, he said.

MED received 26,400 doses in the third tranche. State distributed those vaccines to southern and eastern Africa, because many of those posts are in cities in the top 10 or 20 percent of cases worldwide, as well as to Beirut and Tunis. State also increased the number of vaccines offered to the local workforce in Washington, D.C., and New York.

Dr. Padget fielded several questions from AFSA members. One participant asked

what State's plans are for people who are moving to a new post in the upcoming summer transfer season. He explained that if you are traveling overseas in a couple of months and you have your orders, MED will contact your new post to see what their supply is. You will either be vaccinated at that post, or MED will try to vaccinate you in Washington, D.C., if it has sufficient supplies, he said.

Another member asked who is responsible for USAID and other foreign affairs agencies locally in Washington, D.C. Dr. Padget said there is considerable concern among officials about the issue: "Who's responsible for the five [other] foreign affairs agencies? It's not for me to decide that, but we are working toward a resolution."

Dr. Padget said he hopes that by late spring or early summer, the department will be able to "get a lot more vaccines out."

He also cautioned that "we don't have anywhere near herd immunity" against COVID-19. Even people who have been vaccinated should continue to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on self-quarantining after international travel, social distancing, washing hands and wearing masks, Padget advised. ■

## AFSA Seeks Award Nominations for 2021



The AFSA Constructive Dissent trophies.

AFSA seeks to highlight achievement, performance, courage and sacrifice within the Foreign Service community. Our awards program began in 1968 and has continued to expand to recognize the work of our colleagues. We are proud to be able to spotlight the best of our community.

### Constructive Dissent Awards

AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards recognize Foreign Service members who work within the system to change policy and performance for the better. Such dissent may be made in any nonpublic channel including meetings, emails to superiors, memoranda, telegrams or via the State Department's formal Dissent Channel. Thus, AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards may be given to, but are not

restricted to, employees who make use of the Dissent Channel.

These awards are unique within the federal government and remain the lynchpin of AFSA's awards program. There is no democracy without dissent, and the U.S. Foreign Service must remain a leader in the encouragement of respectful yet provocative constructive dissent.

We welcome nominations for the four constructive dissent awards:

- **The W. Averell Harriman Award** for entry-level Foreign Service officers.
- **The William R. Rivkin Award** for midlevel Foreign Service officers.
- **The Christian A. Herter Award** for Senior Foreign Service officers.
- **The F. Allen 'Tex' Harris Award** for Foreign Service specialists.

### Exemplary Performance Awards

We also invite nominations for exemplary performance awards. These awards are meant to highlight the professionalism and spirit of service and volunteerism within the Foreign Service community. These awards honor community liaison officers, office management specialists and family members for their important contributions at work, at home and in the community at large.

• **The Nelson B. Delavan Award** recognizes the work of a Foreign Service office management specialist who has made a significant contribution to post or office effectiveness and morale, both *within* as well as *beyond* the framework of her or his job responsibilities.

• **The M. Juanita Guess Award** recognizes a community liaison officer who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, dedication, initiative or imagination in assisting the families of Americans serving at an overseas post.

• **The Avis Bohlen Award** honors a Foreign Service family member whose volunteer work with the American and foreign communities at post has resulted in advancing the interests of the United States.

• **The Mark Palmer Award** for the Advancement of Democracy is bestowed on a member of the Foreign Service from any of the foreign affairs agencies, especially

those at the early to mid career level, serving domestically or overseas. The award recognizes the promotion of American policies to advance democracy, freedom and governance through bold, imaginative and effective efforts during one or more assignments.

Note that we accept awards nominations all year, but the deadline for 2021 is Monday, May 17. Anyone may send in a nomination; self-nominations are also accepted for performance awards.

AFSA is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that make our awards and honors programs possible through their generous support. Our thanks to the Delavan Foundation, the Ambassador William R. Rivkin family, the Avis Bohlen family, Dr. Sushma Palmer and Clements Worldwide. We deeply appreciate their dedication to the Foreign Service community.

All of AFSA's awards programs, as well the AFSA memorial plaques, are administered by Awards and Scholarships Manager Theo Horn. Contact him at [horn@afsa.org](mailto:horn@afsa.org), and visit [www.afsa.org/awards](http://www.afsa.org/awards) for more information.

AFSA's Awards and Plaques Committee has institutional oversight over these programs and has primary responsibility for the recommendation of award recipients and plaque honorees. ■

## AFSA Welcomes New Hires to the Foreign Service

AFSA welcomed 161 members of the State Department Foreign Service Orientation 159-205 class of generalists and specialists to the Foreign Service in a Zoom call on Feb. 8.

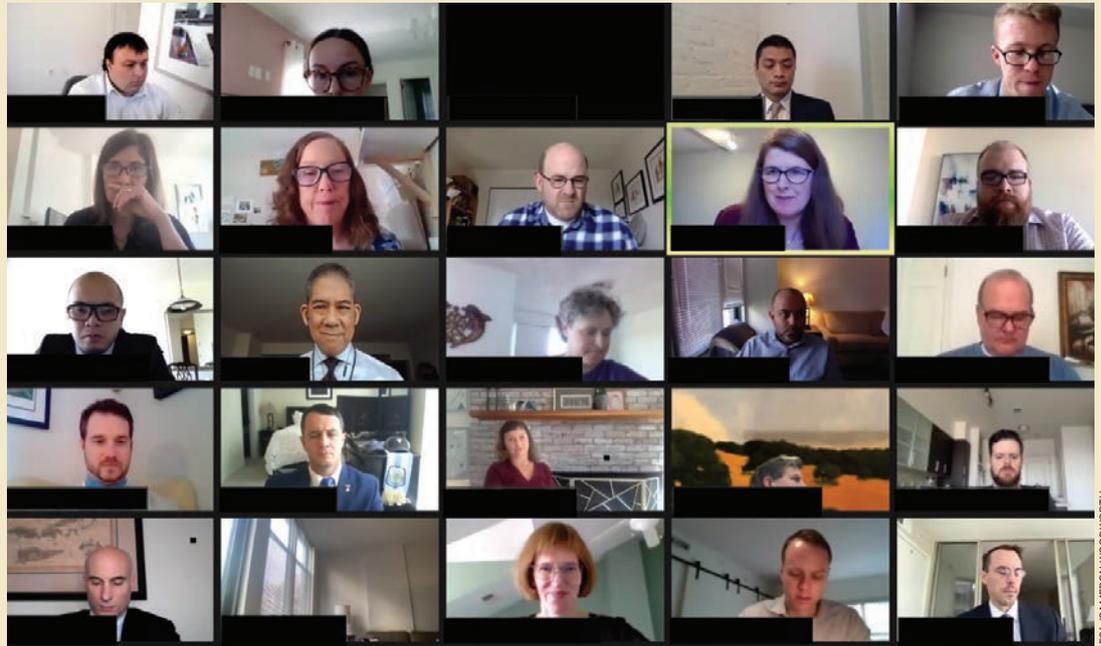
AFSA President Eric Rubin hosted the call and discussed the many benefits AFSA offers to members.

Also sharing their views on AFSA membership were AFSA Governing Board members Tom Yazdgerdi, Tamir Waser, Virginia Bennett, Kristin Michelle Roberts, Carson Relitz Rocker, Jason Snyder and Joshua Archibald, as well AFSA staff members Christine Miele, Julie Nutter and Dolores Brown.

The FS Orientation 159-205 class comprises 79 Foreign Service generalists and 82 specialists.

Among the generalists, 44 are in the consular career track (still widely known as cone); 11 in the political track; 10 in the management track; seven in the economic track; and seven in the public diplomacy track.

Among the specialists are 45 Diplomatic Security special agent candidates; eight facility managers; eight information management specialists; eight office management specialists; three general services officers; two



AFSA greeted members of the FS Orientation 159-205 class in a Zoom call on Feb. 8.

construction engineers; two human resource officers; two medical providers; two security technical specialists; an information management technical specialist and a regional public engagement specialist.

The class includes four Pickering Fellows, 47 former members of the U.S. armed forces and 44 former employees and contractors with other U.S. government agencies. Ninety-five class members worked for the State Department in some capacity before joining this orientation class.

Those coming from the private sector have worked as analysts, consultants, attorneys, ballet instructors, real estate agents, teach-

ers, students, engineers, law enforcement personnel, researchers and medical providers. Ninety-three members of the class have postgraduate degrees, and most worked, studied or volunteered abroad.

Class members speak the "big six" languages of the United Nations, as well as 25 other languages: Albanian, German, Pashto, Mongolian, Japanese, Urdu, Korean, Lao, Italian, Czech, Kinyarwanda, Vietnamese, Polish, Bahasa-Indonesian, Swedish, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai, Hebrew, Bulgarian, Bambara, Greek, Farsi, Hungarian and Georgian.

Members of the class have also performed at the 2000 Sydney Olympics:

served as extras in TV shows either in the United States or abroad (including Zambia and South Korea); circumnavigated the globe on a ship; traveled to more than 50 countries; led former Secretary of State John Kerry to Narnia; and climbed all sorts of mountains (from Kilimanjaro to Macchu Pichu). Many enjoy hiking in national parks or backpacking (and eating food) abroad, while others are culinary adventurers who make their own bacon, hot sauces and honey.

AFSA looks forward to hosting in-person lunches again for incoming classes at our Washington, D.C., headquarters as soon as it is safe to do so. ■

## Save the Date

# Foreign Service Day Virtual Events

This year, Foreign Service Day will fall on Friday, May 7. As has become tradition, AFSA will host a full day of programming the day before, on May 6. Because of the ongoing restrictions due to the pandemic, AFSA's programming will be virtual.

As a part of the commemoration, we will again encourage members to send

*Inside Diplomacy* is geared toward a more traditional foreign affairs audience. Liz Schrayner, president and CEO of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, was our inaugural guest on March 11.

*Diplomats at Work* is focused on introducing younger audiences to the Foreign Service. This centers

## Speaking of speaking, keep up the great work on the New Year Outreach Challenge!

On Feb. 10, AFSA President Eric Rubin appeared on the MediaFile student podcast, Long Time No See. Ambassador Rubin joined Ambassador (ret.) Marc

roster by emailing Nadja Ruzica, AFSA's manager of outreach and strategic communications, at [ruzica@afsa.org](mailto:ruzica@afsa.org).

Speaking of speaking, keep up the great work on the New Year Outreach Challenge! We look forward to hearing from you by Foreign Service Day about your engagement with your local community colleges and local organizations.

As a reminder, many resources, from videos to talking points, can be found at [afsa.org/first-line-defense](https://afsa.org/first-line-defense). It's a great place to start as you consider any opportunities to spread the word.

As always, if you have any questions, please contact [ruzica@afsa.org](mailto:ruzica@afsa.org). And don't forget to follow us on social media and share information on latest podcasts and events with your community. ■

## U.S. FOREIGN SERVICE

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# The First Line of Defense

letters to the editors of their local papers to raise awareness.

We are also crafting a social media campaign for members to help spread the word about the work and value of the Foreign Service. AFSA members will receive more information about all of these initiatives this month.

Members interested in receiving information about what is happening at the State Department for Foreign Service Day 2021 should email [foreignaffairsday@state.gov](mailto:foreignaffairsday@state.gov).

**Outreach News.** We have been busy this spring in AFSA's outreach department. In March, we rolled out two new speaker series.

on compelling stories that illustrate the work of the Foreign Service in a very tangible way for new audiences.

If you missed these events, you can find the recordings at [afsa.org/first-line-defense](https://afsa.org/first-line-defense).

At this writing, we are planning for May and June events for both of these new series.

We continue working with the American Diplomat podcast to bring the reality of what diplomats do to the public's attention. Every Thursday, you can catch new episodes featuring retired and active-duty Foreign Service members. To listen, go to [amdiplistories.org](https://amdiplistories.org), or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Grossman to discuss the future of the Foreign Service after four years of a "hollowing out" of the State Department.

Ambassadors Rubin and Grossman gave a rundown on how the Foreign Service got to this point, what problems within the Service predate the Trump years, and what needs to be done going forward. Visit the podcast at [bit.ly/mediafile-fs](https://bit.ly/mediafile-fs).

**We are seeking more messengers.** As the result of our outreach campaign to community colleges and local organizations, we have seen an uptick in virtual speaker requests to AFSA. If you are interested in these speaking opportunities, please join the messenger

## AFSA Webinar: Reviewing Your Retirement Plan



AFSA Retiree Vice President John Naland spoke with AFSA members about retirement planning during a Zoom webinar on Jan. 27.

AFSA hosted a webinar, “Reviewing Your Retirement Plan,” with AFSA’s Retiree Vice President John Naland on Jan. 27. It was the first of AFSA’s 2021 Federal Benefits Speaker Series.

Naland, a former director of the State Department’s Office of Retirement, walked participants through a number of topics related to retirement: reviewing and updating your annuity records, keeping beneficiary designations updated, what your survivors need

to know, how to best review your Thrift Savings Plan allocations and estate plan, and when to launch Social Security and reemployment rules, among other topics.

Members can view a recording of the webinar at [afsa.org/videos](https://afsa.org/videos). Whether you have been retired for a few months or many years, it is worthwhile to assess whether or not you need to make any course corrections.

See also Naland’s article, “Twelve Retirement Pitfalls

to Avoid,” on page 70 in the special Retirement Supplement.

You can also visit AFSA’s one-stop shop for retirement information at [afsa.org/retirement-services](https://afsa.org/retirement-services). The webpage features mid-career and pre-retirement checklists and other tools for retirement planning, as well as extensive resources for retirees. ■

## USAID Seeks Assignment and Career Counselors

USAID seeks to hire assignment and career counselors (ACCs), preferably FSO retirees at the FS-01 or senior levels, with skills in the following backstop areas: agriculture; private enterprise; health; education; economics; environment; crisis, stabilization and governance; engineering; program/project development; financial management; procurement; executive management; and legal advisors.

ACCs will provide assignment and career development counseling services to FSOs throughout their careers. They will be the point of contact for information and guidance on annual performance evaluations (AEF), the process of obtaining tenure, the assignment

and bidding process (formal and informal); the performance and evaluation counseling interaction with tenure and performance boards, coaching and mentoring of new FSOs hired under the C3 initiative; and, interacting with FSOs requiring exceptions and special attention.

ACCs will be required to understand and support personnel policies found in ADS 400 Series and all other executive and administrative directions and regulations so that they can provide accurate information to their FSO clients. They will provide recommendations to the Policy and Programs Information Management Division (PPIM) on proposed policies that would affect FSOs. They

will review and comment on changes in the ADS that would affect FSOs in the field and in USAID/W.

### Education and/or Experience

Master’s degree  
5 years of experience

### Qualifications and Requirements

In depth knowledge of the full range of human resource management regulations, policies, systems, and procedures as related to the Foreign Service.

Demonstrated senior level expertise in the development and interpretation of human resource policies related to the Foreign Service.

Strong interpersonal and teamwork skills.

Must have authorization to work in the United States as defined by the Immigration Reform Act of 1986.

Must be able to obtain and maintain USAID Facility Access.

If interested, please apply via the following links:

<http://bit.ly/usaid-acc1>

<http://bit.ly/usaid-acc2> ■



## NEWS BRIEF

APHIS OFFERS  
FOREIGN SERVICE FELLOWSHIP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is funding a new Foreign Service Fellowship Program to attract and prepare outstanding individuals for Foreign Service careers with APHIS.

Based on the fundamental principle that diversity is a strength in U.S. engagement with the world, the program welcomes applications from members of minority groups historically underrepresented in USDA, women and those with financial need.

The program provides graduate fellowships to qualified individuals who will be attending Tuskegee University in the 2021-2022 academic year and matriculating in either the agriculture or veterinary sciences/medicine programs, and who are committed to joining the APHIS Foreign Service.

The fellowships provide financial support for graduate studies at Tuskegee University in Alabama, two summer internships (one domestic and one overseas), mentoring from a Foreign Service officer and professional development activities.

Howard University in Washington, D.C., administers the APHIS Foreign Service Fellowship Program on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

APHIS is the lead U.S. government agency that keeps American agriculture healthy. APHIS comprises more than 8,000 employees across the United States and around the world, working together to secure the future of American agriculture.

APHIS FSOs protect and expands the integrity of American agriculture. They find solutions to complicated issues, such as collaborating with local ministry and international organizations to eradicate a medfly infestation in the Dominican Republic; collaborating with animal health authorities overseas to combat transboundary animal diseases; ensuring that avocados from Colombia are safe to import into the United States; releasing California cherries to India; and much more.

Please visit <http://afsfprogram.org> for more information. ■

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# 12 Retirement Pitfalls to Avoid

What to do and what not to do when planning for life post-career.

BY JOHN K. NALAND

**D**uring my service as director of the State Department's Office of Retirement, I spent a lot of time assisting employees and retirees who were facing the delay or denial of some federal benefit due to their own failure to take necessary actions. While there is no need for you to spend weekends studying the Foreign Service Act and the Foreign Affairs Manual, you do owe it to yourself and your family to do due diligence in key areas. Below are a dozen common retirement benefits pitfalls and how to avoid them.



*John K. Naland served in the Foreign Service for 29 years, including as director of the Office of Retirement. In the five years since retiring, he*

*has facilitated retirement planning seminars at the Foreign Service Institute. He is currently serving as AFSA retiree vice president.*

## For Everyone

**1. Beneficiary Designations.** There are sad cases every year of benefits not going to the immediate next of kin because the employee or annuitant neglected to update their beneficiary designations after marriage, divorce or other relationship change. Federal survivor benefits are paid to whomever is designated on beneficiary designation forms, even if there are different instructions in the person's will. The forms are TSP-3 (Thrift Savings Plan), SF-1152 (unpaid compensation for employees), DS-5002 (unpaid annuity for retirees) and SF-2823 (Federal Employees' Government Life Insurance, or FEGLI).

Employees and retirees who need to revise their TSP-3 should send it to TSP as explained on the form. Employees needing to update other forms should submit them to their agency's human resources office (State employees to HRSC@state.gov). Foreign Service retirees from all agencies should submit

non-TSP forms to HRSC@state.gov, except that retirees must send updated FEGLI beneficiary forms to the Office of Personnel Management as explained on the form.

**2. TSP and Other Investments.** Over the past 25 years, inflation has cut the purchasing power of each dollar in half. If you or your survivor anticipate drawing on your TSP savings or other investments such as IRAs and mutual funds several decades from now, most experts recommend investing in funds containing more stocks than bonds to increase your chances of generating long-term rates of return that outpace inflation.

From time to time, you should review the stocks-versus-bonds balance in your investments to make sure the balance is appropriate for your investment timeline and risk tolerance. Consider talking with a financial adviser before making a major financial move. A list of financial and tax advisers who have assisted Foreign Service members

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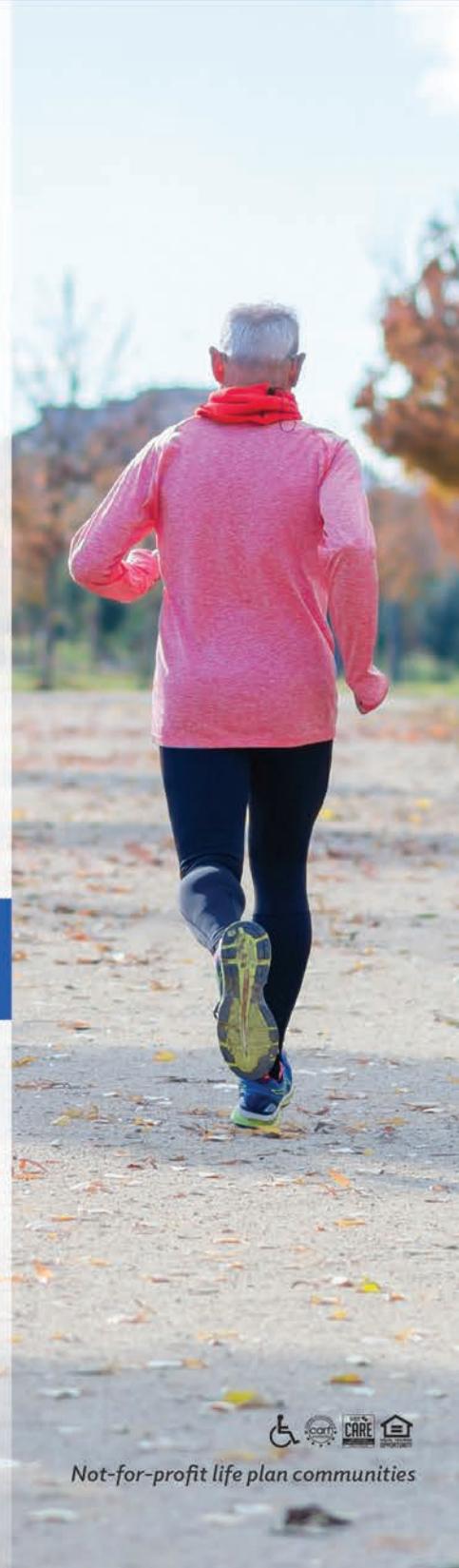


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Not-for-profit life plan communities



**Abbreviations**

ALDAC	all diplomatic and consular posts
FEGLI	Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance
FSPS	Foreign Service Pension System
FSRDS	Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (the "old" system)
HRSC	Human Resources Service Center (at the Department of State)
IRA	Individual Retirement Account
JSP	Job Search Program
MRA	minimum retirement age
PCS	permanent change of station
RMD	required minimum distribution
SCD	service computation date
TIC	time in class
TSP	Thrift Savings Plan

is at [www.afsa.org/financial-planners-tax-help-and-estate-planners](http://www.afsa.org/financial-planners-tax-help-and-estate-planners).

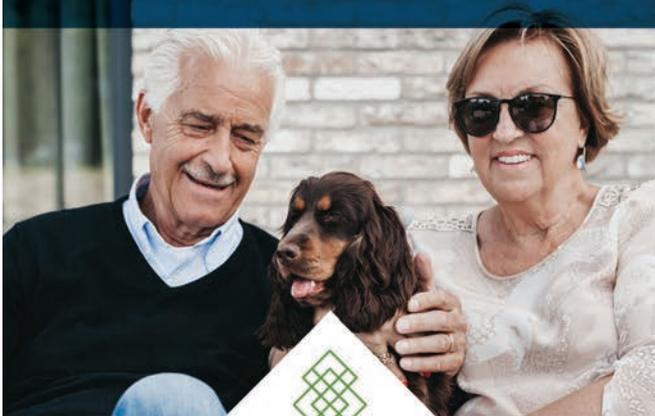
3. *Estate Planning.* Most Foreign Service members and retirees have estate planning documents such as a will, trust, power of attorney and/or medical directive. But if 10 or more years have passed since your documents were written, most estate planners suggest getting an attorney to review them to determine if they need updating due to changes in your state's laws or procedures. An immediate review is advised if you move to a different state, gain or lose a family member, or have significant changes in assets. A list of estate planners who have assisted Foreign Service members is at [www.afsa.org/financial-planners-tax-help-and-estate-planners](http://www.afsa.org/financial-planners-tax-help-and-estate-planners).

**For Active-Duty Employees**

4. *Prior Service Credit.* If you worked elsewhere in the federal government prior to joining the Foreign Service, the service computation date listed in your records may be wrong for retirement purposes. The SCD that you have seen on your SF-50s over the years (documenting promotions, reassignments, etc.) is for leave purposes only. While employees get leave credit for almost any federal employment, we get retirement credit only for certain employment.

If your retirement SCD is inaccurate when you apply for retirement, the State Department's Office of Retirement may have to inform you that you are not yet eligible to retire, or that your monthly pension payment will be lower than

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you expected. To avoid such bad news, see ALDAC cable 21 State 10876, "The Retirement Process: Retirement Credit for Prior Service," posted at [www.afsa.org/retirement-services](http://www.afsa.org/retirement-services). If applicable, take action to add eligible service to, or remove ineligible service from, your retirement SCD. In some cases, processing by multiple agencies is required, so you should initiate action at least several years before you plan to retire.

5. *Divorce.* Foreign Service ex-spouses enjoy a default statutory entitlement to retirement benefits under the Foreign Service Act if they meet certain requirements. The default entitlements can be altered through a court order or spousal agreement. The order or agreement, however, must include specific language to be valid. Even many Washington, D.C.-area divorce attorneys are unaware of this and unknowingly draw up divorce paperwork that the State Department's Office of Retirement cannot accept.

An explanation of the rules is in ALDAC cable 19 State 53266, "Divorce and Foreign Service Retirement Benefits," at [www.afsa.org/retirement-services](http://www.afsa.org/retirement-services). If applicable, submit divorce documentation to the Office of Retirement for review at least several years before you plan to retire.

6. *Retirement Planning.* If you have not taken any of FSI's retirement planning seminars, you owe it to yourself to do so. Watching in-depth presentations by subject matter experts may help you avoid major oversights in your retirement planning. As of this writing, the classes are being presented online and are thus available to employees anywhere in the world. The courses are RV105 (2-day; early and mid-career) and RV101 (4-day; late career). RV101 has two subcomponents that can be taken individually: RV103 (1-day; financial planning and estates) and RV104 (1-day; annuity, TSP and Social Security).

State Department employees can register via the FSI intranet site. But if the training is in conjunction with a permanent change of station (PCS) or home leave, then register via your career development officer (CDO). Non-State employees register via their agency's human resources office, which submits a funded SF-182 Request for Training to FSI. For registration procedures for eligible family members (EFMs), see <https://fsitraining.state.gov/Search?q=RV>, and then click on the course number.

7. *Short-Career Retirement.* While most Foreign Service members serve at least 20 years before retiring, it is possible to retire after five to 19 years. If you are considering this, be aware that most such options come with substantial financial penalties.

For example, most pensions based on less than 20 years of service are calculated at a 41 percent lower rate (1 percent instead of 1.7 percent per year of your high-3 salary, the average of your three highest years of pay). Exceptions include FS-1s or above who TIC out (reach their time-in-class limit) prior to attaining 20 years of service and employees with less than 20 years of service who retire on the last day of the month in which they reach age 65. In the latter case, those employees should not retire via the FSI Job Search Program, because it ends before the last day of the month. Also, retirements after 10 to 19 years of service under minimum retirement age (MRA) provisions prior to age 62 are subject to substantial reductions. To learn more, attend an FSI retirement planning seminar or contact a retirement counselor at your agency.

#### For Retirees

8. *Marital Changes.* Post-retirement divorce, marriage or death of a spouse or former spouse are occasions to change your survivor annuity election by remov-

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ing a former spouse or adding a new spouse. But you face a deadline to do so: one year for retirees in the “old” FSRDS retirement system, and two years for those in the “new” FSPS system. If you miss the deadline, you forfeit the opportunity to elect survivor benefits.

In addition, you likely will want to update your beneficiary designations for life insurance, annuity and TSP savings (see details earlier in this article). You may also wish to adjust your Federal Employees Health Benefits election. Therefore, you should promptly report post-retirement marital changes to the Human Resources Service Center. For more information, see the 2021 Foreign Service Annual Annuitant Newsletter published by the State Department’s Office of Retirement

at <https://RNet.state.gov> under the “What’s New?” tab. It is also on the AFSA website at [www.afsa.org/retirement](http://www.afsa.org/retirement).

9. *Survivor Benefits.* If a Foreign Service employee dies, his or her agency automatically initiates the process of authorizing survivor benefits. But when a Foreign Service retiree dies, a next of kin must take the first step. Until that happens, no benefits can be paid to survivors.

Because our family members often are unfamiliar with offices and functions in Foreign Service agencies, AFSA created a list of steps to take in the event of the death of a Foreign Service retiree. The checklist is in the 2021 AFSA Directory of Retired Members (pages 23 and 24), and it is also posted at [www.afsa.org/retirement](http://www.afsa.org/retirement). We suggest that retirees download and

print the checklist (perhaps on a brightly colored sheet of paper), show it to your next of kin, and leave it in a place where they can easily find it if the need arises.

10. *Keep Up-to-Date.* Each November, the State Department’s Office of Retirement posts an updated Annual Annuitant Newsletter on <https://RNet.state.gov> under the “What’s New?” tab. You must access that newsletter if you need a form to change your health insurance during open season or to file an annual earnings statement if you receive the annuity supplement. But all retirees should at least skim through the newsletter to make sure you are aware of important rules and procedures governing your federal benefits. In addition, the 2021 AFSA Directory of Retired Members has 25 pages of guidance



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on retiree issues. A larger collection of fact sheets, guides and videos is on the AFSA Retirement Services webpage at [www.afsa.org/retirement-services](http://www.afsa.org/retirement-services).

**11. Age Milestones.** Are you approaching age 62 and need to decide when to file for Social Security? Are you approaching 65 and need to decide whether to sign up for Medicare Part B (note that there are stiff financial penalties for signing up late)? Are you approaching 72 and need to figure out what to do about required minimum distributions (RMDs) from your investments? AFSA's Retirement Services webpage has information on all these topics, including videos of presentations at AFSA by experts on Social Security, Medicare Part B and TSP.

**12. AFSA Membership.** The final potential pitfall is letting your AFSA membership lapse. Membership qualifies you to be assisted by AFSA's Retirement Benefits Counselor Dolores Brown ([brown@afsa.org](mailto:brown@afsa.org)) if you have questions or concerns about retirement benefits. Your dues help AFSA defend both the active-duty Foreign Service and the earned retirement benefits of Foreign Service annuitants.

If your membership depends on you writing a check each year, please switch from paper billing to paying dues via annuity deduction. Switching will ensure that your membership does not inadvertently lapse due to lost or unnoticed mail. Contact [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org) to make the switch.

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## A Realist's Call to Action

### **Why Nation-Building Matters: Political Consolidation, Building Security Forces, and Economic Development in Failed and Fragile States**

Keith W. Mines, *Potomac Books* (an imprint of University of Nebraska Press), 2020, \$40.00/paperback, e-book available, 402 pages.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL M. MCCARTHY

*Why Nation-Building Matters* is a special piece of research in which the author successfully combines independent thinking with a profound sense of mission to drive home a controversial argument: We need to make nation-building a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

Marking a refreshing change from doctrine-driven visions of foreign policy, Keith Mines, a recently retired diplomat now directing the Latin America Program at the United States Institute of Peace, arrives at his conclusion about the need to rescope U.S. foreign policy while staying grounded in a series of constructive criticisms about it.

This pragmatic approach helps Mines find a balance between promoting big ideas and examining the nitty-gritty implementation challenges that invariably crop up in the field. It is also one of the reasons this book is likely to make a seminal contribution to debates on the proper scope of U.S. foreign policy in the unfolding post-Trump, COVID-19 era.

Mines' account does not proselytize, but it does issue a call to action—to reflect on and see the challenge of nation-building more clearly by reminding ourselves that the United States has accomplished more foreign nation institution building than it often gives itself credit for, and that those accomplishments could be squan-

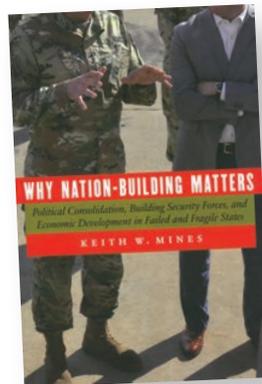
dered if we do not consolidate our gains before the vicissitudes of geopolitical competition result in permanent losses for U.S. interests.

I label this a realist's call to action, not because the author offers a full-throated defense of realism's theories of international relations, but because Mines' argument about how to unleash the hidden strengths of U.S. foreign policy emerges from an honest practitioner's account of what plans have worked and what plans have not worked.

In this respect, John Dewey's "learning by doing" is a key theme throughout. Tacitly, Mines appeals to the power of experiential learning as the driving force that can help the United States progressively accumulate knowledge about nation-building and eventually succeed as a nation-builder.

Part of what makes this book such a good read is that it is a deeply personal account. Mines weaves together his experience in conflict zones as both soldier and peacemaker, at the tables of high-stakes negotiations, and in the office carrying out ordinary diplomatic business. This engaging account convinces readers it would have been a joy accompanying the author for the ride. One narrative high point is when he reflects on his highly formative time as a soldier in El Salvador and Grenada, sections that read like pages straight out of a diary.

When Mines explains his personal commitment to finding fixes for situations as dicey as Sudan, post-conflict Iraq and Afghanistan, the account hits a second narrative high point. The results of such efforts may have fallen short of the author's expectations, yet Mines' professed love for the craft of diplomacy and



manifest desire to dive into the work, no matter where it leads, make readers feel they are shadowing a Foreign Service officer throughout his adventurous career.

This book is likely to be popular among a variety of influential communities within the international affairs profession,

a few of which immediately come to mind. Since the book takes on the tough issues of nation-building in a nonpoliticized manner, professors and students at international affairs schools may find it a perfect addition to courses examining the intersection between the theory and practice of international affairs.

The military is another community that may want to add *Why Nation-Building Matters* to its must-read list. The book's subplot is an examination of the relationships between military force, elite-level political negotiation and community building, a trio of factors that military leaders often bring into action as they carry out their missions in times of peace and war.

And finally, though Foreign Service officers may not need exposure to more stories from the field, they are likely to profit from critical engagement with an account that provides many lessons learned from some of the biggest crises faced by U.S. foreign policy leaders in the last four decades.

---

*Michael M. McCarthy is founder and CEO of Caracas Wire LLC, a research advisory firm specializing in comprehensive political risk analysis of the crisis in Venezuela, and an adjunct professor of political science at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.*

## Consequences of the Threat of Prosecution

### The Justice Dilemma: Leaders and Exile in an Era of Accountability

Daniel Krčmaric, Cornell University Press, 2020, \$39.95/hardcover, e-book available, 240 pages.

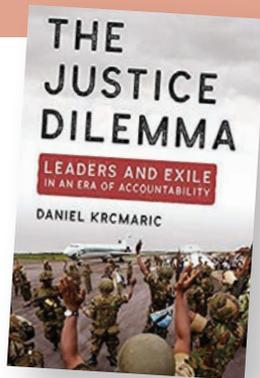
REVIEWED BY JOYCE E. LEADER

Preventing conflicts from escalating into war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide has preoccupied policymakers, practitioners and researchers especially since the horrific genocides in Srebrenica and Rwanda in the early 1990s. Considerable soul-searching soon after—within governments, international organizations and nongovernmental aid groups—led to new thinking about how to respond more effectively in future situations of conflict likely to escalate into mass atrocities.

One area of new thinking ushered in a system of international justice aimed at worldwide accountability for perpetrators of atrocity crimes. International laws criminalized atrocities, and new institutions were created with global authority to adjudicate such crimes.

The United Nations set up tribunals to prosecute perpetrators of war crimes and genocide in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The intergovernmental Rome Statute established the International Criminal Court. Under these statutes, many former leaders are now serving long prison sentences.

Daniel Krčmaric, a political science professor at Northwestern University, predicated his scholarly work, *The Justice Dilemma*, on his observation that the post-1998 “era of accountability” marked a sharp departure from the pre-1998 “era of impunity.” He asks whether this new inter-



national justice regime has, as its supporters intended, deterred atrocity crimes and influenced the duration of conflicts.

To answer these questions, Krčmaric examines decisions made by “culpable” leaders—those with a history of responsibility for atrocity crimes—who were faced with judicial accountability instead of a comfortable life in exile.

Krčmaric takes the reader through his research process that centers on three hypotheses about choices expected of culpable leaders in relation to exile, conflict duration and the onset of mass atrocity. He uses both a statistical analysis and a case study to examine each hypothesis.

The former involves extensive background research (available online) to arrive at the charts and tables included in the book. For the latter, he reviews decisions made by Charles Taylor of Liberia (exile), Muammar Gaddafi of Libya (conflict duration) and Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso (mass atrocity onset).

Krčmaric concludes that his research supports each of his hypotheses: First, the threat of international justice makes the exile option less attractive to culpable leaders in the era of accountability than in the era of impunity. Second, culpable leaders of civil conflicts who see no safe exile option are more likely to keep fighting to the end. And third, a culpable leader is more likely to avoid initiating atrocities if it might enhance chances of a safe exile.

Krčmaric’s findings also reveal what he calls the “justice dilemma.” He shows that using international justice to achieve accountability and deter mass atrocities (a positive result) is likely to produce prolonged conflict when leaders choose to continue fighting rather than risk facing international justice (a negative outcome).

Krčmaric asks whether policymakers are aware of this contradiction and how it might affect their policy choices.

Krčmaric’s justice dilemma usefully alerts policymakers to what I would call an unintended, negative consequence of a well-intentioned policy. Policymakers who rely on international justice as an atrocity-prevention tool can anticipate prolonged, though possibly less violent, civil conflicts, as foreshadowed by the justice dilemma Krčmaric identifies.

Accountability and fewer mass killings resulting from international justice should not need to be sacrificed because of the risk of a negative downside. Instead, complementary conflict-prevention policies need to be developed to address and hold in check the unintended consequences—prolonged civil conflicts—of well-intentioned international justice policies.

In my book, *From Hope to Horror*, on the origins of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, I write: “Finding effective ways to prevent mass atrocities and genocide is the unfinished business of our time.” Daniel Krčmaric’s book, a rigorous analysis of the effectiveness of international justice on curbing mass atrocities and genocide, is a welcome addition to academic literature on this issue. ■

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*Ambassador (ret.) Joyce E. Leader served as deputy chief of mission in Rwanda from 1991 to 1994 and, during two months in 1993, was a U.S. observer to the Rwanda peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania, among many assignments during a 21-year Foreign Service career. Her book, From Hope to Horror: Diplomacy and the Making of the Rwanda Genocide (Potomac Books, an imprint of University of Nebraska Press, 2020), traces the political wrangling, human rights abuses, and ever-escalating violence of a three-way struggle for control of democratization and peacemaking among Rwanda’s ethnic and regional factions.*

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# The Case of the Bungled Blacklist

BY KEVIN CHAMBERS

Unbeknownst to 11 of America's largest companies, a list was being created in Stockholm with their names on it. It wasn't the kind of list anyone wants to be on. It was a blacklist that could cost them billions of dollars.

On June 12, 2017, while scanning a Swedish newspaper in my Foreign Commercial Service office in the U.S. embassy in Stockholm, I spotted an article about the largest bank in the Nordic region. The bank was touting the fact that it had placed 40 international companies, including 11 U.S. companies, on a blacklist prohibiting investments. The bank's fund managers were ordered to divest bank funds and their clients' investments from these companies.

The bank accused the blacklisted companies of "violating global norms and conventions" and, mysteriously, included some of America's largest retailers, defense manufacturers and companies doing business with Israel. The bank claimed this action would remove more than \$50 billion from the listed companies. Within hours, another large Nordic bank announced it would follow suit.

I contacted bank officials I knew for background and learned that the blacklist had been generated by an unregulated proxy advisory firm the bank had hired. Firms were being placed on the

**Firms were being placed on the devastating list arbitrarily, based on policies the advisory firm didn't agree with.**

devastating list arbitrarily, based on policies the advisory firm didn't agree with, such as doing business in Israel or being in the defense industry. Notably, none of Sweden's large defense manufacturers were on the list.

I informed our chargé d'affaires, David Lindwall, an experienced and well-respected diplomat who had taken charge at the epicenter of the earthquake crisis in Haiti back in 2010. I also informed Nick Kuchova, the regional senior commercial officer. The chargé immediately called the bank's leadership and requested a meeting.

I then contacted the U.S. companies to advise them of the situation. None knew about the impending threat, nor had any been contacted by the Nordic banks to be given a chance to respond to the allegations. They asked for our commercial diplomacy assistance to head off the banks' action.

On June 14, the chargé and I met with bank leadership to deliver a letter referencing Section 909 of the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015, requesting they remove the U.S. firms from the list. Section 909 of the

act includes an anti-boycott provision regarding Israel.

Three hours after the meeting, the bank that had drawn up the list informed us that it would remove the U.S. firms, and did so publicly the next day. We immediately followed up with the other banks that had announced blacklists, and they agreed to drop U.S. companies from their lists, as well.

Quick action by the chargé and FCS resulted in public retractions by the banks and dissuaded other European banks from unfairly targeting U.S. firms with blacklists. These efforts also saved the companies billions in aggregate losses.

FCS offices in more than 80 embassies and consulates around the world are charged with assisting U.S. companies with exporting, attracting foreign investment into the United States, and protecting the interests of U.S. companies in overseas markets. Much of the day-to-day work of FCS focuses on helping industries and individual companies expand their exports into new overseas markets. The more U.S. companies export, the more Americans they hire.

But helping companies understand the markets and find qualified representatives and distributors is far from all that FCS does. FCS personnel are on watch to spot threats to U.S. business and economic interests early on, and as demonstrated by this case, it works. ■



*Kevin Chambers is a retired commercial officer with the U.S. Foreign and Commercial Service. During his Foreign Service career, he served in Shanghai, Tokyo and Stockholm. A graduate of the Thunderbird School of Global Management, he currently runs the U.S. Commercial Service's trade office in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*



**T**he moodiness of the Baltic Sea and Latvian summer—where it can be 75 degrees Fahrenheit one day and 45 the next, even in July—is captured in this photo taken at the beach in Jurmala, about 10 miles from Riga last July. It was my last visit to the beach before leaving Latvia at the end of my tour. I took the picture with an iPhone 8. ■

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*Paul Poletes is an Uzbek language student at FSI. He joined the Foreign Service in 1998 and has served in Athens, Dhaka, Bishkek, Tirana, Ashgabat, Riga and Washington, D.C.*

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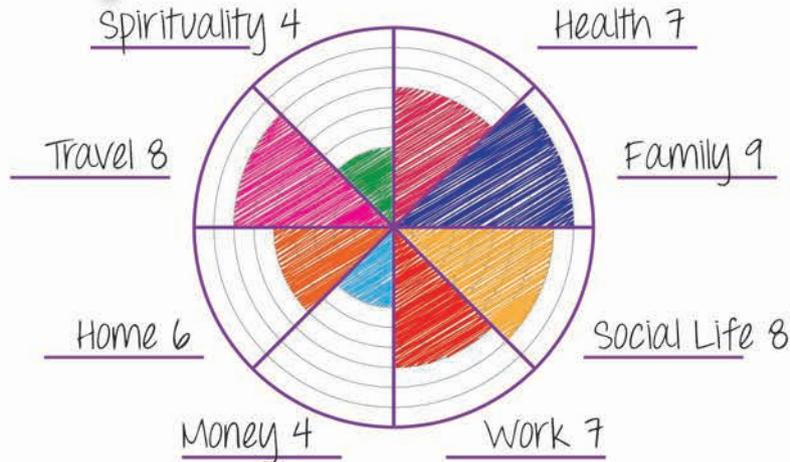
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