COUNCIL OF AMERICAN AMBASSADORS
Washington, D.C.

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF DIPLOMACY
Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

How Terrorism Affects American Diplomacy

A report based on interviews with American diplomats,
including ambassadors and other officers
currently serving abroad

THOMAS O. MELIA
Director of Research
Institute for the Study of Diplomacy

March 2004

Contents

About this Study 3

Executive Summary 5

Principal Research Findings 8

"Force protection" is the prime directive, everywhere 8

Recruitment and retention challenges are exacerbated, as stresses on families, in particular, are heightened 10

Security measures do not significantly hinder diplomatic outreach 13

New priorities are clear, and some issues fall by the wayside 15

Democracy and human rights receive greater or lesser attention—depending on where in the world one is working 17

Complaints about visas are now everybody's business 18

New pecking order at embassies 19

Diplomats divided about whether Iraq action helps or hurts War on Terror 21

Concluding observations 22

About this Study

The genesis of the present study lies in conversations between two distinguished former American ambassadors, Milton A. Wolf and William vanden Heuvel, in autumn 2002. Ambassador Wolf had served as President Carter's envoy to Austria during the late 1970s, while Ambassador vanden Heuvel was an ambassador to the United Nations, in New York and Geneva, during the same period.

In the context of escalating threats to U.S. diplomats that seemed in the autumn of 2002 to be proliferating around the world, as Osama bin Laden's al-Queda network regrouped after the ouster from Afghanistan, Ambassadors Wolf and vanden Heuvel grew concerned about how their successors as American diplomats—ambassadors and others, in various places around the world—would be able to maintain the personal relationships with local contacts that are so vital to the work of diplomats. Ambassador Wolf recalled quite vividly a 1979 showdown at the gates of the American embassy in Vienna with an angry crowd of Iranian exiles. They were protesting U.S. policies relating to the deposed shah of Iran and were emboldened by the incursions into the U.S. embassy in Tehran by militant students encouraged by the revolutionary government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As their conversation continued over the course of a few weeks, Milton Wolf decided to bring the issue to the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, where he has long been a leading member of the board of directors. So he came to us with the suggestion for the study and a financial contribution to enable us to make it happen. He also was kind enough to introduce us to the Council of American Ambassadors—an organization founded by Ambassadors Wolf and vanden Heuvel, and others, that brings together men and women who are not career diplomats yet have been appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate to ambassadorial positions.

The centerpiece of the resulting project—jointly sponsored by the Council and ISD—became an ambassadors' roundtable discussion, convened on September 4, 2003, on the campus of Georgetown University. That all-day event brought together a dozen current or retired U.S. ambassadors—including board members of the two organizations, ambassadors all. The purpose of the session was to review a first draft of a report that had been prepared by Thomas O. Melia on the basis of a series of one-on-one interviews with other ambassadors, active and retired. Those interviews, and the roundtable discussion, were enhanced by the marriage of the two groups—the non-career ambassadors from the Council's board bring complementary insights to discussions of diplomacy and terrorism to those offered by the career diplomats associated with the Institute.

This report continues a long tradition at the Institute, whose purpose is to examine in a variety of meetings and publications the institutions and processes of our diplomatic establishment. *Who Needs Embassies?* was published in 1997 and examines in depth how a range of embassy operations evolved to address new needs in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. *Embassies Under Siege; Personal Accounts by Diplomats on the Front Line*, published in 1995, is a collection of country case studies on critical moments in embassy security failures. It was assembled and edited by Joseph G. Sullivan, presently U.S. ambassador to Zimbabwe, during his time as an associate at the Institute in 1993. *Assassination in Khartoum*, by David A. Korn, an account of the murders of two U.S. diplomats in the Sudan in 1973, was published in 1993 in cooperation with Indiana University Press.

This report also represents the second major publication for the Institute by Thomas O. Melia, the Institute's director of research, following on his analysis of "Congressional Attitudes toward the Foreign Service and the Department of State" (produced in cooperation with the Una Chapman Cox Foundation and available on the ISD Web site). As in the previous exercise, Melia conducted each of the interviews and also prepared the materials for the September 4, 2003, roundtable discussion. Transcripts of the interviews and that discussion, along with completed questionnaires collected during autumn 2003, provided the basis for analysis and the report.

The usual caveats apply. While several dozen diplomats, currently serving and retired, contributed their observations to the study—in interviews, the roundtable discussion, and other exchanges—this report is not a consensus document, and the conclusions ought not be attributed to any of the individuals who participated. The opinions presented in this report do not reflect the views of the U.S. government or the Department of State. Neither the boards of directors or officers of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy or of the Council of American Ambassadors are responsible for the views presented here. The report reflects solely the author's analysis and conclusions. We are, however, proud to give this report wide circulation.

We invite comments on and discussion of the paper that follows and look forward to advancing the collective understanding of the ways in which the current practice of international terrorism, as well as the War on Terror declared by President Bush, is affecting the practice of American diplomacy.

Casimir A. Yost
Director
Institute for the Study of Diplomacy

Executive Summary

Interviews with several dozen senior American diplomats—including ambassadors and others currently serving abroad—indicate that the daily conduct of U.S. diplomacy has recently been altered in significant ways by

> the elevated threat of terrorism against American interests made manifest on September 11, 2001;
>
> the worldwide War on Terror declared by President George W. Bush in consequence; and
>
> the prosecution of the war in Iraq, on which diplomats are as divided as other Americans regarding whether it is or is not part of the global War on Terror.

The principal findings include the following:

"Force protection" is the prime directive, everywhere. Terror-related changes in the professional and personal lives of diplomats apply in many respects to diplomats serving in Western Europe, Latin America, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa as well as to those living and working in the Middle East and South Asia. No matter where a U.S. diplomat is posted nowadays, he or she must be much more attuned than previously to issues of personal security and will be evaluated by superiors on adherence to personal and embassy security regimes. "Force protection" has become the prime directive for ambassadors, and other senior officials in the Department of State, and trumps traditional diplomatic or bureaucratic considerations.

Recruitment and retention challenges are exacerbated, as stresses on families, in particular, are heightened. While the terrorist threat posed by al-Queda and others to official American personnel abroad is a tangible, everyday issue for U.S. diplomats, they also tend—with some conspicuous exceptions—to downplay the degree to which the heightened threat affects their own personal lives and career paths. Many seem to have long since accepted the risks associated with the career they have chosen and tend to see the events of 9/11 more as an escalation of a long-standing threat than as the world-altering phenomenon that many others perceive it to have been.

Serving ambassadors speak of the high morale at their missions, in part due to the elevated calling they perceive in waging the War on Terror, though not everyone concurs that it is really the case that "the troops" are so pumped up about the opportunities thus presented. Some ambassadors who recently returned to Washington, and other senior managers in the State Department in Washington, refer to the growing "recruitment and retention" issues arising—not only from the heightened security

threat but also from the "force protection" measures taken to address it, such as ordered departures and the designation of more posts as "unaccompanied". Upon exploration, it appears that while the department has more applicants than ever at the entry level, there are problems associated with certain posts, particularly for Foreign Service officers (FSOs) with families, that exacerbate staffing problems at certain hard-to-fill posts that are also now on the front lines of American interests, in South Asia and the Middle East.

Security measures do not hinder diplomatic outreach. The enhancement of security measures at embassies and consulates (long under way but accelerated since 9/11) appears to many observers, including even retired diplomats, to intrude on the ability of FSOs to fulfill their principal function of establishing and maintaining personal relationships with key actors in the host country. The architectural modifications that have been made at most facilities trouble many diplomats—especially those dedicated to public diplomacy—who decry the practical and symbolic barriers that have been erected between American diplomats and the people they are sent abroad to engage. Yet currently serving diplomats at various levels insist this has not actually been a problem, noting they are more likely than previously to meet contacts outside the embassy or to make other minor logistical adjustments to sustain normal diplomatic contact.

New priorities are clear, and some issues fall by the wayside. Whatever their "cone" or specialty, American diplomats tend to be engaged with host governments and publics on a raft of terrorism-related issues that have assumed new or greater significance since 9/11. These include seeking cooperation on tracking movements of money, cargo, and people across borders and for U.S. initiatives in multilateral forums, as well as on arrangements of new traffic patterns, entry procedures, and construction at U.S. facilities to enhance site security. Notwithstanding the protestations of ambassadors, in particular, that the greater attention paid to the newly elevated priorities does not come at the expense of focus on other vital issues, other diplomats (including deputy chiefs of mission (DCMs) and principal officers at secondary posts) acknowledge that some other key policy priorities have been substantially downgraded. The areas most frequently cited are economic reporting and commercial advocacy, and domestic political reporting not directly related to terrorism or the Iraq war.

Democracy and human rights receive greater, and lesser, attention. The relative priority now paid to issues of democracy promotion and human rights varies widely, as U.S. counterterrorism interests lead to convergence with some otherwise unsavory governments. Whether the new focus on terrorism leads to greater attention to democracy and human rights seems to depend, to some extent, on geography. In

the Middle East, the combined effect of the War on Terror and the Iraq war has elevated the matter of democracy and civil liberties in the minds of senior diplomats in the region; ambassadors in the Arab world say unprompted that democracy promotion is a critical aspect of their counterterrorism programs. Further afield, the impact seems to have had the opposite effect, as efforts to enlist cooperation of governments in counterterrorism efforts lead to a lessening of the pressure on those governments for political and economic reform.

Complaints about visas are now everybody's business. Virtually all those interviewed agree that the aspect of embassy operations most dramatically affected throughout the world is the consular function, as new U.S. visa procedures have adversely affected (or at least greatly complicated) political relationships, trade and tourism, and such staples of public diplomacy as student, scholarly, and cultural exchanges. In consequence, visa and immigration issues now intrude to a greater extent than previously on almost every other aspect of embassy operations.

New pecking order at embassies is clear to all. The arrival or expansion of personnel from various security-related agencies, along with the shift in policy priorities for many missions, has led to a recasting of the internal mission dynamics. Ambassadors and other senior officials now devote greater time and attention to terrorism-related issues and consequently less to other aspects of the mission.

Diplomats divided about whether Iraq action helps or hurts War on Terror. U.S. diplomats are divided about whether the ouster of Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq was actually consistent with worldwide prosecution of the War on Terror that President Bush has declared. As the Iraq issue became the overriding policy priority for U.S diplomacy in late 2002 and into 2003 (when the interviews were conducted), diplomats were often obliged to set aside other tasks, including those related to counterterrorism, in order to enlist military allies or diminish political opposition among governments or publics worldwide. Some FSOs are also concerned that the alienation of some governments by the administration's approach to the Iraq war may have weakened international cooperation in the larger antiterrorist effort.

A caveat: other things are happening, too

A variety of things are affecting the quality of life for America's diplomats during this same period—some enhancing morale and professionalism and others complicating the lives of diplomats. The Diplomatic Readiness Initiative championed by Secretary of State Colin Powell, for instance, is frequently mentioned and is much appreciated by diplomats at all levels. The principal focus of this inquiry, however, has been the global War on Terror that the Bush administration has framed as its over-arching strategic priority and the ways in which this war may specifically affect the conduct of diplomacy.

Principal Research Findings

Interviews with several dozen senior American diplomats—including ambassadors and others currently serving abroad[1]—indicate that the daily conduct of U.S. diplomacy has in the course of the past two years been altered in significant ways by the combined effects of

> the elevated appreciation in the Department of State for the terrorist threat against American interests and diplomatic personnel that was made manifest on September 11, 2001;
>
> the worldwide "War on Terror" declared by President George W. Bush in consequence of the events of 9/11; and
>
> the subsequent prosecution of the war in Iraq, on which diplomats are as divided as other Americans regarding whether it is contributing to, or detracting from, the global War on Terror.

The principal findings include the following key points.

"Force protection" is the prime directive, everywhere

Terror-related changes in the nature of diplomacy apply in many respects to diplomats serving in Western Europe, Latin America, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa as well as to those living and working in the Middle East and South Asia. No matter where a U.S. diplomat is posted nowadays, he or she must be much more attuned than previously to issues of personal security and will be evaluated by superiors on adherence to personal and embassy security regimes.

> Even in non-front-line countries, American diplomats have the sense their jobs entail a certain amount of risk. (Junior FSO, former Soviet Union)
>
> The War on Terror has become topic number one and as such will form a key part of many officers' performance evaluation. (Senior FSO, Africa)

"Force protection" has become the prime directive for ambassadors, and other senior officials in the Department of State, and trumps traditional diplomatic or bureaucratic considerations—to the consternation of some more seasoned diplomats.

---

1. Interviews with approximately forty American diplomats, either currently serving or retired, took place in a variety of formats from June to December 2003—in one-on-one interviews, in person, or by telephone; two roundtable group discussions (one consisting largely of ambassadors, another including mid-level FSOs); and responses to a questionnaire, completed and submitted mainly by e-mail from FSOs in various regions of the world.

Under the direction of Secretary of State Colin Powell, in particular, leadership that emphasizes the welfare of one's subordinates is the primary charge given to ambassadors heading out to assume their posts. One current ambassador familiar with the training program for ambassadors at the Foreign Service Institute puts it in bold terms:

> Probably ninety percent of the discussion is on leadership. Colin Powell doesn't come in [to the ambassadorial seminar] to talk about policies; he talks about leadership. If ambassadors do not take care of their people, they will be pulled out. The issue that keeps being emphasized is that if ambassadors are seen to be failing, it will be because they are failing on the leadership issues.

One operational implication of this emphasis appears to be that chiefs of mission, and department officials back in Washington, are more likely than previously to close posts, order evacuations, or to designate posts as "unaccompanied." This is reflected in the rise in the number of evacuations from countries in 2002 and 2003 and a doubling in the number of posts deemed not fit for dependents between 2000 and 2003. As a retired career ambassador, experienced in diverse regions of the world and in senior Washington positions, notes:

> An ambassador would be far more likely today to take a protective position, to close the embassy, to send people home early, whatever, because they know that when the counting sheet is totaled up in Washington, people are not going to remember that extra political report that came in because the embassy remained open. They are going to remember that nine people got killed because the embassy was still open for business.

A currently serving ambassador in Asia puts it simply:

> The chief of mission has the responsibility and the accountability for official Americans—all Americans, in fact—in the country. It is explicit. So when there is an attack, it is the ambassador's responsibility.

At the same time, however, some older, more seasoned professional diplomats, whether still serving or retired, are made somewhat uneasy by aspects of this approach.

> Now that the notion of 'force protection' has arrived, we . . . are not inclined to accept any dangers. This has interjected some caution and a new prudence that may be stepping too far over the line. We also have a job to do, after all. (Former ambassador in Asia)

> This is a little bit the older generation looking back on the 'good old days' about the way the department is now run. But you begin to see the bunker mentality that I think has developed and seems to me to be much more pronounced than

> when I was in the State Department. People are concerned about their personal safety in a way that certainly, in the first 15 or 20 years that I was in the State Department, you had no concern at all. Exactly what you wanted to do was get out into the society and meet as many different kinds of people as you could. There is less of that now, partly driven by security concerns—but I also see a different kind of preoccupation from the younger Foreign Service officers with how they live their lives, what they do, how they spend their day. (Retired FSO, twice ambassador in the Middle East)

Recruitment and retention challenges are exacerbated, as stresses on families, in particular, are heightened

While the terrorist threat posed by al-Queda and others to official American personnel abroad is a tangible, everyday issue for U.S. diplomats, they also tend—with some conspicuous exceptions—to downplay the degree to which the heightened threat affects their own personal lives and career paths. Many have long since accepted the risks associated with the career they have chosen.

> We always accepted dangers as diplomats. We always understood that more ambassadors have been killed in the line of duty than generals in this country. We have deployed ourselves into very dangerous situations, and we always did it knowing that we accepted dangers. . . . You could get malaria, you could get parasites; you could die from disease, which is just as dangerous, frankly, as terrorists percentage-wise. (Currently active FSO, South Asia)

Diplomats interviewed also tend to see the terrorist events of 9/11 more as an escalation of a long-standing threat and less like the world-altering phenomenon that many in Washington and the United States more generally perceived it to be. Asked when they first realized terrorism was one of the facts of a diplomat's life, senior FSOs often reach back decades for references.

> On my first assignment, within the first month of arriving in Laos in 1976, I received a death threat as a diplomat. That was a little note on my fence, threatening to kill me. So you know these kinds of issues have always been there for diplomats. (Former ambassador in Asia)

> When I went to Egypt in the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the assassination of Sadat, terrorism was part of the political landscape in Egypt and something you had to deal with both in terms of personal security and the political fallout of it. It was reinforced in the 1990s when I went back to Egypt. The phenomenon was part of my mental picture at least since the '80s. (Currently serving ambassador, Middle East)

> Well, the attacks against the embassy in Beirut . . . that was something that was very vivid in all our minds. On a very personal level, I knew Frank Malloy very well. He was our ambassador in Guatemala when I was a junior officer in the early '70s. And we saw him off when he went to Beirut . . . and then I was at his funeral. That left a very deep impression on me. (Currently serving ambassador, Asia)

Yet notwithstanding the increased hardships of the present, and their effects on recruitment and staffing, serving ambassadors and other senior diplomats in the field tend to insist that morale in their own missions is generally high, which is attributed in part to the elevated calling they perceive for front-line diplomats in the War on Terror. They believe that FSOs are invigorated by the greater challenges they now confront in their work and uplifted by the enhanced importance they feel in the work. They believe that diplomats knew when they signed up for this life that they were volunteering to live and work in dangerous places. These comments come from currently serving ambassadors:

> It is a new war, a new challenge, which people are accepting—no, 'accepting' is the wrong word—they are rising to it and viewing this as another campaign to work on. As we worked on the Cold War, or as we worked on so many other things the U.S. has battled . . . I see it as something that is in many ways inspiring people rather. I don't think that is an overstatement. There are people in my mission, who have been sent off on TDYs [temporary duty assignments] to work on pretty hot issues in the Middle East, and they came back pretty fired up about what they did. (Ambassador in Asia)

> A lot of people like to go to dangerous regions because it is professionally very exciting, rewarding. . . . If you really want to do things, you gravitate toward these crisis countries. In many ways, danger doesn't eliminate good people; it almost attracts them. (Ambassador recently posted in South Asia)

> During the war, morale got a bit shaky as fears grew, but we dealt well with it through meetings, information sessions, and heightened force protection measures. (Ambassador in the former Soviet Union)

> The level of ambient stress might be somewhat higher. But morale is affected more by other issues, in particular the quality of our top leadership, resources available to embassies (which have increased). While there might be some griping on policy issues, which there always is, most people at embassies feel quite committed to their work, which supports morale. (DCM, Asia)

However, not everyone concurs that it is really the case that "the troops" are so pumped up about the opportunities thus presented and the chance to live in "exciting places." Tellingly, comments by more junior officers on this score are sometimes

framed in terms of the ways in which the new working environment is having a detrimental affect on the lives and the careers of "others." And there is also some nuance and ambivalence expressed. A midlevel Foreign Service officer, informed that the ambassador in a particular country in the Middle East had spoken glowingly of the morale in his mission, offered a quite different perspective, based on personal contacts with FSOs serving there. The ambassador's comments "don't reflect reality as I see it," he says. The country in question is very difficult, with one-year postings the norms and suffers "many early curtailments even then; people just don't want to do it."

> Morale has been affected. We feel more vulnerable than we might have felt in the past, particularly those of us who serve in areas not traditionally concerned about terrorist issues. (Midlevel FSO, Latin America)

> Morale is good in the sense that we feel our job is more important than ever. But it has gone down in the sense that we know we have a big credibility gap in the region. (Midlevel FSO, Arab country)

> Morale is definitely worse. The issue is something none of us was prepared for or trained for. (Senior FSO, Western Europe)

Moreover, the longer-term consequence for American interests of having political officers and others posted consistently in some critical locations for just one-year tours—when in many traditional societies, the relationship-building that is a diplomat's stock in trade can take a long time—ought to be further explored. Even if the costs are not immediately apparent, long-serving diplomats, current and retired, believe that the proliferation of short-term assignments tends to undermine a central facet of the diplomat's duty.

> What do diplomats do? They need to build relationships. That is really the one thing that you can only do overseas that you cannot do—at least not to the same degree of effectiveness—if you are sitting half a world away at a desk in Washington. (Retired ambassador, South Asia)

> The Foreign Service can't do its work unless it is in areas for prolonged periods. We are not like the U.S. military, which is deployed for three months or six months and then rotated back, and a new group is deployed. The Foreign Service needs to create relationships and trust. They need people, the foreign people, with whom they are working, to change. And that requires a long association. So we have to be able to live in a place for three years. (Current ambassador to an Arab country)

Ambassadors recently returned to Washington, and other senior managers in the department in Washington, are more forthcoming about the growing recruitment

and retention issues arising from the heightened security threat and, more specifically, the "force protection" measures taken to address it, such as ordered and voluntary departures and the designation of more posts as unaccompanied. A former ambassador in Asia, now holding a senior position in Washington, says:

> In the Asia/Middle East region, there are five posts under ordered departure this year, five posts with families ripped apart, disrupted. This means enormous stresses on families. . . . So, yes, it has affected recruitment.

A former ambassador in Africa and Latin America, now in a senior management position in the department in Washington, describes the situation in similar terms yet comes to a different bottom line:

> All of a sudden, you have people who have been assigned for a three-year tour, six months after they get there, the family has to leave. And then it turns into an unaccompanied post. This has huge, huge morale issues. It is changing the composition of our embassy communities. It is seriously affecting morale. So far, however, we have not seen that it has affected our ability to hire and retain FSOs, or ambassadors. . . .

On the other hand, a current ambassador in an Asian post not considered a high-risk location realizes in the course of the interview that this may affect his ability to attract certain people to his mission.

> I'm not sure it is a major consideration for people. Although for people with families, it is a consideration; this is a place from which you are very unlikely to have an evacuation, in which your wife or your husband and children are suddenly going to have to leave, as recently happened in Indonesia, for example. So, yes, there are definitely people who see that as an attraction.

Security measures do not significantly hinder diplomatic outreach

The enhancement of security measures at embassies and consulates (long under way, but accelerated since 9/11) appears to many observers, including even retired diplomats, to intrude on the ability of FSOs to fulfill their principal function of establishing and maintaining personal relationships with key actors in the host country. The architectural modifications that have been made at most facilities are troubling to many diplomats—especially those dedicated to public diplomacy—who decry the practical and symbolic barriers that have been erected between American diplomats and the people they are sent abroad to engage.

> Our embassy has turned into a real fortress and is quite ugly. This heightened security posture looks both defensive and overbearing to host country officials, the diplomatic corps, and the general population. (Senior FSO, Asia)

Yet, as one retired ambassador notes trenchantly, "There is no option to not do these modifications; the terrorist problem is real." Moreover, currently serving diplomats at various levels insist this has not actually been a problem, noting they are more likely than previously to meet contacts at venues outside the embassy or make other minor adjustments to sustain normal diplomatic contact.

Though retired diplomats are skeptical that this could be possible, the consensus expressed by currently serving diplomats, ambassadors, and lower-ranking officers alike is that the actual conduct of diplomatic business—the nature and the quality of interactions with official and/or nongovernmental interlocutors, to collect information or to advance U.S. interests—has not changed substantially as a result of the War on Terror. It is noted that ambassadors have long traveled with security escorts in certain places; now it is the rule just about everywhere. Working-level diplomats say that they meet contacts outside the embassy more often—as entrance procedures have become too time-consuming and cumbersome. While this is seen as burdensome to some, the predominant view is that these hurdles do not significantly affect FSOs' ability to do their jobs.

> Staging public events at the embassy is increasingly difficult as security procedures become more rigid. Even small lunches don't have the cachet they once did—after guests have struggled through two security screenings on their way into the building and been relieved of their cell phones. (Senior FSO, Western Europe)

> Our security concerns have affected the way we contact people less than you might think. The chief of mission usually travels with some security escort when he travels up country, but he still travels around the country quite a bit. For other members of the mission, there is little impact. Security for entering the embassy has become quite cumbersome. We still meet, but at offices outside the embassy or at social gathering points, such as restaurants. (Asia-based DCM)

> What affects my freedom of movement is much more the local reaction to U.S. regional policies, particularly the Arab-Israeli issue, than the War on Terror, per se. There are all sort of constraints, most of which can be worked around reasonably well without cutting off access, but they vary from post to post and even month to month and are not part of a linear development as a result of the War on Terror. (Ambassador in an Arab country)

> I don't think it has actually affected the day-to-day work, say, of political officers or other people that much. (Political officer, recently returned from East Asia)

> The physical changes in security make us look defensive and a bit overbearing, but I think a lot of people understand. (Senior FSO, Asia)

New priorities are clear, and some issues fall by the wayside

Whatever their "cone" or specialty, diplomats tend to be engaged with host governments and publics on a raft of terrorism-related issues that have assumed new or greater significance since 9/11. These include seeking cooperation on tracking movements of money, cargo, and people across borders and for U.S. initiatives in multilateral forums, as well as on arrangements of new traffic patterns, entry procedures, and construction at U.S. facilities to enhance site security. As one current ambassador in the Middle East says, "The priorities now involve things like money laundering, intelligence cooperation, and deployment of forces for the Iraq war."

> U.S. diplomats approach host country officials on terrorism-related subjects much more frequently than before, even in countries that are not at the center of the global War on Terror. (Junior FSO, former Soviet Union)
>
> There is a perception that access to resources is pegged to the War on Terror and that fewer resources are available for other priorities, including public diplomacy. (Senior FSO, Latin America)

While many of the most senior diplomats believe that the effect on other aspects of diplomatic agenda has been profound, not every diplomat seems to feel the same urgency or focus.

> The War on Terrorism has become a leading objective of all missions. If you are not working on counterterrorism, you are not doing your job. (Senior FSO, Asia)
>
> The administration has said we are at war, and if we are at war, there's certainly other things that are put aside. We now have quids for assistance, for other kinds of cooperation, access to the Oval Office, that sort of thing. Folks who are willing to play with us on this particular issue, which is all-consuming at the highest levels, will get more consideration for all these other things. Visits of senior officials, all sorts of things it affects. I think it really does affect the entire way we approach our bilateral relationships. (Former ambassador, Africa)
>
> U.S. antiterror policies form the basis of our overall foreign policy. They are certainly not the only factor, however, and the relative importance varies depending on the country to which a diplomat is assigned. (Junior FSO, former Soviet Union)
>
> Any bilateral ambassador is going to want to be able to show what his country—that is, the country to which he is accredited—can do to contribute to this effort of the United States. As a way of winning brownie points, of getting access to resources, it's a way of helping that country be relevant to our foreign policy agenda and priorities—and it also, by the way, might actually help do something about terrorism. (Former ambassador, Western Hemisphere)

> Perhaps ambassadors feel a special obligation/pressure to ensure the President's policies regarding the Global War on Terror (GWOT) are effectively conveyed to host governments, but the average diplomat likely feels that the GWOT will have little impact on their annual rating. (Midlevel FSO, Latin America)

While embassies have been obliged to juggle assignments and stretch limited resources, the War on Terror and the Iraq war are not necessarily seen as particular reasons for stress. Ambassadors, in particular, are reluctant to acknowledge the inevitable consequence of this shift in priorities—that other facets of the mission team, and other kinds of issues, are getting less top-drawer attention.

> I don't think in our case, . . . it may be true in other . . . I wouldn't actually say that it [the War on Terror] has displaced other issues. (Current ambassador, Asia)

> Embassies that can't walk and talk and chew gum at the same time—that is, embassies that can't multiprocess on multiple different agendas at the same time—frankly ought not to be in business. (Retired noncareer ambassador, Western Hemisphere)

> We never have enough people, and right now three of our staff are in Iraq. We manage through an active process of reviewing our priorities, shifting our resources, and occasionally refusing a task. It is important to recognize that even as the War on Terrorism has raised our requirements, the initiatives of Secretary Powell have added new financial and personnel resources to our ability to cope with the work. We are seriously stretched and will remain so for some time. However, I would lay far more of this responsibility to the disastrous cutbacks in the last administration than the additional workload following September 11. (Current ambassador, Middle East)

Notwithstanding the protestations of ambassadors that the greater attention paid to the newly elevated priorities does not come at the expense of focus on other vital issues, more junior diplomats (including DCMs and principal officers at small posts) acknowledge that in fact a number of other policy priorities have been substantially downgraded. The areas most frequently cited are economic reporting and commercial advocacy, and domestic political reporting not directly related to terrorism or the Iraq war.

> Our political section has pretty much stopped doing domestic political reporting. Our economic section spends much more time on cargo and aviation security than on analyzing economic trends. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> Other issues have diminished in prominence, and things we once thought important—like trade relations—get short shrift. (Senior FSO, western Europe)

> No Country Team would want to be seen as not undertaking activities and programming that further the administration's objectives in this area—whether terrorism is a specific issue in-country or not. As PAO [Public Affairs Officer] (for example), I have been tasked to quantify the number of terrorism-related activities/programs the post has undertaken, in order to justify funding that was provided from the Department to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. (Senior FSO, Latin America)

Democracy and human rights receive greater or lesser attention—depending on where in the world one is working

An interesting paradox arises in discussing the related issues of democracy and human rights, which are presented in some formulations of U.S. foreign policy as fundamental American values and key organizing principles.[2] In some Arab and Muslim countries, it appears that the War on Terror has given new urgency and saliency to official American efforts to promote political reform by autocracies that have proved to be fertile breeding grounds for terrorist recruitment by al-Queda. Further afield, however, where this specific objective may seem less urgent or relevant, the effect of the global mobilization of American policy to enlist allies in the War on Terror leads to accommodation, and sometimes warm embraces, of governments that prior to September 11, 2001, did not enjoy good relations with the United States.

Two currently serving U.S. ambassadors in Arab countries raise unprompted the observation that the recent reordering of priorities in these relationships has in each case pushed democratic development, as well as systemic economic reform, higher on the bilateral agenda. New rationales have thus emerged for policies previously given short shrift in both places.

> The focus on terrorism has done many things but, paradoxically, it has also given rise to a renewed focus on economic reform and democratic development in the Arab world. In our case, this has led us to begin new programs of support for the development of judicial reform, democratic change, and to initiate free trade agreement negotiations.

> If you are going to do effective counterterrorism, you have to use all the tools in your foreign policy toolbox. And that means you need to do economic development . . . you have to work on political development, because democracy itself

2. See, for instance, the five-year Strategic Plan for the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, http://www.state.gov/m/rm/rls/dosstrat/2004, which presents American goals in the world as threefold: "Prosperity, Democracy, Security."

> and the engagement of people in a legitimate democratic process also is useful in countering the alienation and denying operational space to terrorists.

A senior FSO in another Middle Eastern country confirms this and broadens the point:

> 9/11 has increased our focus on security and military affairs, but it has also led to increased educational and cultural exchange. It has led to a greater desire to engage the host country across the board.

Other diplomats, however, posted far from the Middle East, see the focus on counterterrorism as diminishing U.S. determination to press for democratization. One, now posted in Southeast Asia, frames the dilemma in these words:

> As counterterrorism and security issues have displaced human rights and democratization as our top priority, as in many countries, the fundamental problem we face is that host government officials who can help us fight terrorism are often the same people whose performance on human rights we find wanting.

A recently retired ambassador, who has been posted to several Asian countries, says:

> What issues have fallen by the wayside? The first and most obvious one is human rights. The compelling need for support in combating terrorism has strengthened the case for dealing with governments implicated in human rights abuses—the most obvious example being Pakistan. More broadly, the terrorist threat has tilted our foreign policy more toward an interest-driven policy than a values-driven one . . . only after the September 11 attacks were we willing to identify the Uighur independence group as a terrorist organization.

Complaints about visas are now everybody's business

Virtually all those interviewed agree that the aspect of embassy operations most dramatically affected throughout the world is the consular function, as new U.S. visa procedures have adversely affected (or at least greatly complicated) political relationships, trade and tourism, and such staples of public diplomacy as student, scholarly, and cultural exchanges. In consequence, visa and immigration issues now intrude to a greater extent than previously on almost every other aspect of embassy operations.

Several describe the tensions with local contacts arising from visa issues as having gotten worse during the past two years. Although some department officials in Washington state that the interagency coordination issues that gave rise to unwarranted delays are being resolved, this has not yet filtered through the system sufficiently to affect the views of those interviewed abroad.

> We find a great deal of tolerance in our host nationals for delays required by name checks. But the disaster is in our inability to formulate and operate a consistent

> system . . . people are denied entry even though they are trying to follow the new rules. All these things feed the presumption that we are at war with all Muslims because it is very hard for people to believe that the United States is incompetent to operate a well-managed system nearly two years after it began the effort. (Current ambassador to a Middle East country)

> Relations with host countries are strained by more complicated and cumbersome visa processing. This hurts our image overseas generally. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> The U.S. is perceived as being less welcoming and more arbitrary than before. . . . I think we are going to see a dramatic shift in the number of international students and business people, who will decide to go elsewhere. (Senior FSO, Latin America)

> Less than in predominantly Muslim countries, it has contributed to a decline in student visa applications, which down the road is going to hurt us badly. The next generation of this country is going to be much less American-oriented than its parents and grandparents. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> We've all had to learn to be much harder-hearted in order to hear the sad stories we hear about missed weddings, late arrivals for university slots, and forfeited airplane tickets because of the inability of the USG [U.S. government] to produce visas in a timely fashion. (Minister counselor, Western Europe)

New pecking order at embassies

The arrival or expansion at many posts of details from various security-related agencies, along with the shift in policy priorities for many missions, has led to a recasting of the internal mission dynamics, as ambassadors and other senior officials devote greater time and attention to terrorism-related issues, and consequently less high-level attention is directed to other aspects of the mission.

Virtually all those interviewed concurred that after the East Africa embassy bombings of 1998—and even more so since September 11—ambassadors tend to spend significantly more time with the security agencies within their mission communities. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is a new arrival in some places and has quickly become a major component of the ambassador's day. Yet a suggestion is also raised that other facets of the mission, such as public diplomacy, have become more central—at least in some places.

> As security has become more important, the regional security officer has become a more important and more listened-to player. Other folks working on counterterrorism have also gained greater 'face time' with the chief of mission. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> I would say I spent more time with my station chief and his team, or with the FBI—the new FBI office—than would have been the case when I first arrived, before the East Africa bombings, or before we had direct threats aimed at our people in our facilities. (Retired ambassador, South Asia)

> Oh yeah, sure. Your security agencies, like diplomatic security have increased multifold. Certainly the role of the FBI and the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] increased enormously since 2001. (Former ambassador, South Asia)

> The embassy's security and intelligence officers have what might be considered increased access. . . . The front office has also been pro-active in trying to secure more resources from U.S. law enforcement agencies from the Department of Homeland Security, DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration], etc. (Yet) I wouldn't say the War on Terror has had a significant impact on internal dynamics of the mission. (Senior FSO, Latin America)

> Intelligence and law-enforcement agencies have way more access, budget, and resources and therefore have risen in the pecking order. Economic, trade, and public diplomacy agencies/sections have fallen in rough proportion in the pecking order. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> I work in public diplomacy. The perceptual problems we face in the Middle East are such that my portfolio has greater visibility, and I suspect I am more integrated into the embassy structure as a result. (Senior FSO, Arab country)

At the same time, some ambassadors say, the prospect of greater intramural friction within the U.S. mission abroad that this re-sorting might portend has not come to pass. Indeed, a case can be made that interagency cooperation has actually increased, and turf battles diminished, in light of the new urgency that obtains in many places. (Several of those interviewed had explained that managing interagency tensions and leading a complex, multidimensional team is a principal function of an ambassador, so it is unsurprising that current ambassadors would hesitate to say this was not being done well; therefore, comments like the one below perhaps ought to be discounted somewhat.)

> There is excellent interagency cooperation. Our Special Forces people appreciate what the political officers are doing. The consular officers have a direct role in terms of the visa process. There is high esprit. . . . If you are doing it right, you are using all the tools in the tool kit, and your people who are engaged in economic development are making as significant a contribution as the regional security people. The political officer who is doing elections, as much as the CIA guy who is trying to figure out the threat. So if you are approaching this in the way you should, in a coordinated, across-the-board spectrum, almost everyone has a significant role to play. (Currently serving ambassador, Middle East)

One former ambassador, a retired FSO who was an ambassador in multiple locations, speculates on the degree to which those newly empowered security agencies are fully integrated under the ambassador's authority.

> You can suppose that the CIA plays a larger role in an ambassador's life—and the military. In the past, there were very few places where the ambassador was not in charge of most all of the official Americans within his purview. That has certainly changed as we have put large numbers of military units into various faraway places. I don't think, for example, that Ambassador Finn in Afghanistan has much to say about the fight against al-Queda. In Pakistan, I am sure it's the same way, and in the central Asian republics and Djibouti. I suspect that the way it plays out is that the ambassador has less of a formal say over what those agencies are doing than was the case prior to September 11. (Retired FSO, Middle East)

Diplomats divided about whether Iraq action helps or hurts War on Terror

U.S. diplomats are divided about whether the ouster of Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq was actually consistent with worldwide prosecution of the War on Terror that President Bush has declared. As the Iraq issue became the overriding policy priority for U.S diplomacy, diplomats were often obliged to set aside other tasks, including those related to counterterrorism, in order to enlist military allies or diminish political opposition among governments or publics worldwide. Some FSOs are concerned that the administration's approach to the Iraq war may have weakened international cooperation on the larger antiterrorist effort (although most agree the jury is still out on this question). Others are persuaded that eventual success in the larger global War on Terror depends on the success of the Iraq intervention. Some hedge their bets.

> I think the intervention has dramatically worsened our security worldwide and hindered the overall global War on Terror. (Ambassador in the former Soviet Union)

> The war in Iraq and our actions in the UN have hindered our efforts in the War on Terror by concentrating valuable resources in one country and squandering the massive amount of international solidarity we had after September 11. In order to win a War on Terror, the U.S. needs more, not less, international support and cooperation. The war in Iraq has made garnering that support more difficult. (Senior FSO, Latin America)

> America has, in a few short years, lost the 'magic' in its image in this part of the world. It is still seen as a leader in terms of power and resources, but it has failed fundamentally to justify its actions in Iraq and elsewhere. . . . The bottom line is

> that even in countries that are long-standing friends, where the majority of the population is favorably predisposed to the U.S., a majority of the public just doesn't agree with our actions or our current world view. The biggest disconnect has been our bullying approach—'Take it or leave it,' 'Our way or the highway,' 'You're with us or you're against us'—at a time when we are not giving substantial amounts of military or development aid to any country in this region. (Senior FSO, Asia)

> I would argue that, more often than not, the President's desire to convey to nations that they are either "with us or with the terrorists" has been effective in achieving a convergence between U.S. and foreign priorities. It shows how much we have in common on the things that matter most. Operation Iraqi Freedom is merely a battle in the larger global War on Terrorism. The intervention in Iraq has advanced the war by removing at least one regime that was 'with the terrorists' and would have shown no reservation would it have had the opportunity for the mass murder of American citizens. Removing it has made the world a safer place. (Senior FSO, former Soviet Union)

> My personal view is that the action in Iraq has helped protect the U.S. from a devastating terrorist attack in the future. I have colleagues who disagree. . . . (Junior FSO, former Soviet Union)

> Too early to tell. If it [Iraq action] succeeds, it will advance the War on Terror. If it doesn't, it will make it much worse. (Senior FSO, Arab country)

Concluding observations

Even as it is being called upon to fulfill a more difficult, and clearly more dangerous, mission during the War on Terror, American diplomacy is being buffeted by pressures that profoundly affect the way it operates overseas. The Diplomatic Readiness Initiative championed by Secretary of State Coin Powell has enhanced the resources, including personnel, available to the State Department—and this is much appreciated by diplomats. The Foreign Service Institute has revamped its programs, the better to prepare ambassadors and others for the new challenges they confront. Yet the State Department seems to be still in the midst of reorienting itself to confront the heightened dangers America's diplomats daily encounter and to adjusting to some of the policies that have been developed to address this problem of terrorism.

The author was struck by the considerable degree of anxiety the interviews seemed to occasion for many of the currently serving diplomats. This was not universally the case, but nervousness about how careers might be endangered for providing forthright answers to an anonymous survey was cited by many, including both some of those who participated and some of those who declined.

As one senior FSO put it, “The way that [terrorism] has been allowed to dominate the conversation and elbow aside other key U.S. concerns . . . is something that few career officers would be brave enough to complain about to the political leadership at State.” Others, however, indicated that there are always politically sensitive issues in play in U.S. foreign policy, and the present climate is no different.

In any event, about forty American diplomats currently working on five continents did participate. While it is not possible to extrapolate or presume that those interviewed are necessarily statistically representative, the interviews did yield sufficiently rich discussion that certain observations can be proffered at this point, at least as a basis for further review and contemplation.

Council of American Ambassadors

Honorary Chairs
George H.W. Bush Paul H. Nitze

Chairs
Ogden Reid William J. vanden Heuvel
Robert D. Stuart Jr. Milton A. Wolf

President
Keith L. Brown

Vice Chairs
David M. Abshire Glenn A. Holden
William McC. Blair Jr. Henry L. Kimelman
Donald Blinken John L. Loeb, Jr.
Joseph B. Gildenhorn (and Treasurer) Joseph Verner Reed

Vice Presidents
Patricia Gates Lynch Leon J. Weil
Timothy L. Towell

Secretary
G. Philip Hughes

Council of American Ambassadors
888 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 901
Washington, D.C. 20006
Telephone: 202-296-3757 Fax: 202-296-0926
Web site: http://www.his.com/~council/

Institute for the Study of Diplomacy

Board of Directors
Thomas R. Pickering
Chairman of the Board

Max M. Kampelman
Chairman Emeritus

Peter F. Krogh L. Thomas Hiltz
Vice-chairmen

Dennis Blair David C. Miller, Jr.
Thomas Boyatt David D. Newsom
Chester A. Crocker Phyllis E. Oakley
Joseph B. Gildenhorn William E. Odom
Brandon Grove, Jr. Mark Palmer
Lee H. Hamilton Rinaldo Petrignani
Brian C. Henderson Janmarie C. Prutting
Frank J. Hogan Cokie B. Roberts
Arthur H. House J. Stapleton Roy
Andrew Jacovides Tara Sonenshine
Farooq Kathwari Peter D. Sutherland
Tommy Koh Robert Trice
Carol J. Lancaster Nancy Bernkopf Tucker
Samuel W. Lewis Frank G. Wisner
Donald F. McHenry Milton A. Wolf

Institute for the Study of Diplomacy
Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20057–1025
Telephone: 202-965-5735 Fax: 202-965-5652
Web site: http://data.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/isd/