

## VIEWPOINT

# Terrorism and Diplomats

Security realities in the world's danger zones hamper foreign policy.

BY HENRY BUTTERFIELD RYAN



**TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE** In the wake of terrorist attacks like the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in 1998, Congress has appropriated only \$1 billion so far to make posts secure.

U.S. diplomacy looks very different today than it did 45 years ago when I joined the Foreign Service, serving with the U.S. Information Agency (now the Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs). The main difference—terrorism. During my service it was far from the focal point, although it was an ominous presence. For example, in 1968, Guatemalan rebels assassinated my colleague, John Gordon Mein, then ambassador to Guatemala. The next year terrorists kidnapped Charles Burke Elbrick, ambassador to Brazil and my former boss. The terrorists threatened to murder him, but luckily for Elbrick, the Brazilian government met their demands.

For decades, terrorist attacks occurred worldwide, but the government tried to ignore them. Security was expensive and it got in the way of diplomatic work. But the Sept. 11 attacks put it firmly at the top of the foreign affairs agenda.

## The Iraq Tax

Iraq dominates everything—resources, assignments, relations with other government agencies, and even the department's sense of itself (whether it's tough enough for the job). Love it or loathe it, American involvement in Iraq is by far the main event in U.S. foreign policy.

And it likely will continue, since the United States has begun construction of the world's largest embassy in Iraq's Green Zone. The enormous complex will provide all the necessities and more than a few luxuries—restaurants, movies, sports facilities—for approximately 1,000 people.

For now, controversy has focused on staffing. Critics maintain that the State Department has failed to get Foreign Service officers to Iraq fast enough and in sufficient numbers to do what needs to be done, leaving the Pentagon and the CIA to carry the load. State points out, however, that 1,000 employees, 10 percent of its Foreign Service workforce, have served in Iraq since 2003.

But State depends on employees who volunteer for assignments, straining its ability to get the best-qualified people in the right places at the right time. It relies on a variety of inducements: 25 percent hardship pay plus 25 percent danger pay, short tours—usually only a year long—in addition to the undeclared, but widely assumed benefit that an Iraq assignment will earn an officer a promotion.

Critics assert that State should assign people to difficult posts, but the department has been leery of such directed assignments since the Vietnam War, when postings to that country were mandatory. Divisiveness



**FAILURE TO ACT** The alarm sounded in Washington in 1983 after terrorists bombed the U.S. embassy and Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, killing 300, but few precautions were adopted.

reigned, morale sank and resignations were common. Nobody at State wants to revisit all that.

While attention is trained on Iraq, every other American diplomatic post pays the Iraq tax. Jobs worldwide remain vacant and language training is curtailed in an effort to provide people and resources for Iraq. For many posts, massaging the Iraq issue with local governments, gaining their support or discouraging their opposition, has become so urgent, along with related counterterrorism priorities, that important functions such as economic reporting, commercial advocacy and political reporting have been substantially downgraded, according to the March 2004 study "How Terrorism Affects American Diplomacy," by Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.

### Fortresses Abroad

Terrorists have been attacking American diplomats and facilities for decades, but security remained a low priority because it complicated the jobs of diplomats and carried a huge price tag. Then in 1983, terrorists bombed the U.S. embassy and the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, killing more than 300 Americans. That sounded an alarm in Washington, but little happened. The simultaneous bombings of American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that killed and injured thousands in 1998 served as a louder warning. But the true wake-up call came on Sept. 11, 2001. (For a historical timeline of violence against U.S. diplomats overseas, go to [www.govexec.com/dailysfed/0706/071506timeline.htm](http://www.govexec.com/dailysfed/0706/071506timeline.htm).)

Security is a pressing concern for the more than 180 Foreign Service officers in Iraq, a huge number for one mission. Most serve in the Green Zone, the heavily protected area of Baghdad where American and Iraqi officials have huddled. Foreign Service officers live in temporary trailers, which bullets pierce occasionally. And when officers venture outside the zone, they wear battle gear and travel in armed convoys with as many as 20 guards. Iraqis hesitate to meet with them for fear of becoming terrorist targets.

In the wake of the Africa bombings, Congress appropriated \$1 billion to make posts

more secure, a painfully inadequate amount. Considerably larger sums were approved after Sept. 11, under the prodding of Secretary of State Colin Powell, who also unveiled the military concept of "force protection." The policy established that the first responsibility of any mission leader was to assure the safety of employees.

In 2001, the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Building Operations standardized new structures that can be built quickly and economically to the highest security standards. Any post whose buildings cannot be renovated to meet security requirements becomes a candidate for one of the new buildings. In 2005, the bureau obligated \$2.5 billion for construction. It has opened 27 new buildings, with 40 more projects under way.

The U.S. government wants activities in any overseas city to be located in one complex, not spread around town as they often have been in the past. As one ambassador pointed out, however, these new embassy compounds turn missions abroad into fortresses. All this security comes at a high price, not only in money and effort. Safety concerns make it much more difficult to meet with host country citizens.

### Risky Reforms

In Iraq and in other places around the world, many of them dangerous, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wants a larger diplomatic presence.

She has announced plans to place 16 provisional reconstruction teams outside Baghdad to help build sewer systems, schools, electrical grids and other infra-

structure. Staffing usually will include Foreign Service officers, short-term American volunteers and specialists from the Agency for International Development.

The Pentagon at first refused responsibility for protecting them, but finally relented. Nonetheless, some officials remain worried about the extent of protection for the provisional reconstruction teams.

In a similar but more sweeping initiative, Rice in January announced “transformational diplomacy,” which aims to place American diplomats in every corner of the globe. Believing too many are assigned to Europe, she wants more personnel sent to transitional countries—China, Brazil and India, for example. She plans to move 100 positions from Europe and Washington to new posts in 2006 and another 300 in the following two years.

Many will be “American presence posts,” consisting typically of only one

American officer assisted by one or two national employees. They probably will be located in rented spaces, not in quarters built to the new diplomatic security standards. Here’s where transformational diplomacy butts heads with force protection. “How will we protect our people?” says Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, president of the American Foreign Service Association.

Even if State lives up to its promise to put security first, the new posts will add to the roster of 600 places where families cannot accompany Foreign Service officers because living conditions are too difficult (inadequate health facilities or no schools, for example), too dangerous, or often both. The number of such posts has doubled since 2001.

State’s budget, \$10.4 billion for 2006, is not sufficient to fund Rice’s agenda. Retired Ambassador John W. Limbert, whose varied service includes Iraq, says in

many places, posts must set up their own health, water, power and security systems. They become almost like small towns, with consequently huge budget requirements.

As Holmes warned in the February 2006 issue of the *Foreign Service Journal*, “Unless our transformational agenda has the necessary resources behind it, it won’t amount to much more than empty rhetoric.” Rice must find a way, he added, to reconcile her new diplomacy “with our enduring penchant to try to be a superpower on a shoestring.” Whether or not that will happen remains a major question for American diplomacy. **GE**

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