The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program

# ANDRÉ GOODFRIEND

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber*
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## INTERVIEW PART I

*Q: Today is April 21, 2022. We're beginning our interview with André Goodfriend. And did I pronounce that right?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, you did.

*Q: André, where and when were you born?*

GOODFRIEND: I was born on September 24, 1957, in Los Angeles, California.

*Q: All right. Now, André, that's an interesting name. Were your parents originally from Europe?*

GOODFRIEND: My father was born in France in 1935 to parents who had emigrated from Poland. They became refugees during World War II. In 1940, when my father was five years old, they fled Paris and moved from place to place in southern France to escape the war. After the war ended, they returned to Paris. My grandmother, her husband, and her brother, along with his family, had all survived the war. However, the situation in post-war Paris was unstable, and their former home was no longer available to them. They had family in the United States — two sisters — who helped them relocate as refugees in 1949. At the time, my father was 14 years old. They settled in Los Angeles.

As for my mother, her parents came to the United States separately about 1920 from Cyprus. Her father first joined his brothers in Phoenix, Arizona. Later, his older brother returned to Cyprus to find a wife for him and brought back the woman who became my grandmother. My mother was born in Phoenix and later moved to Los Angeles to study music at USC. It was there that she met my father. They married in 1956, and I was born the following year, in 1957.

*Q: Wow, has any of your family traced your roots further back?*

GOODFRIEND: I've been the most avid genealogist in the family and have even done DNA tests. The results show I'm roughly fifty-fifty — half Cypriot and half Ashkenazi Jewish. I've traced my grandfather, my father's father, back through the family name

‘Goodfriend’ to around 1800 in Poland. I’ve even visited the town where he was born, as well as the town where his father was born. While I was there, I spoke with people at the local municipality, and they provided me with records going back to the early 1800s.

Tracing my grandmother’s side has been more challenging. Her records aren’t as easy to find, but through her memories and online research, I’ve been able to go back to the late 1800s. On my mother’s side, I’ve traced her parents’ lineage back to my great-grandparents. After I retired, one of my goals in visiting Cyprus was to connect with second cousins there and further explore the family genealogy.

*Q: Fascinating.*

GOODFRIEND: Looking forward to that.

*Q: Now I imagine on Cyprus, it's going back to the Greek side.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, I need to live there first. I have some relatives in Nicosia and Limassol, so we’ll see what I can find in terms of records. But I’m not sure how much I’ll uncover. Oral histories only go so far — people’s memories have limits, and many people don’t talk to their grandparents or great-grandparents while they’re still alive. It’s often only as adults that we take an interest.

I’ve been exchanging stories with second cousins about the family — those who came to the U.S. and what happened to them, and they’ve been telling me about the relatives who stayed in Cyprus or moved to Paris. I mentioned that my grandmother came to the U.S. with her brother and his family. Her brother eventually returned to France with his family, and my grandmother would have, too, if she’d been healthy enough. Unfortunately, all that wandering through southern France during the war damaged her hips. She had several surgeries after arriving in the U.S. and wasn’t able to go back.
I’m still in touch with second cousins, including the grandchildren of her brother who returned to France. I think I probably have the most comprehensive knowledge of the family and where everyone fits into our history. It’s been fun, especially as I go into retirement, to keep these connections alive and try to piece everything together.

*Q: Fascinating. The side of your mother's family that went back to France there in Paris?*

GOODFRIEND: Actually, that’s my father’s family. My grandmother had one son — my father — and her brother had one daughter. Each of them went on to have families. My father had three children with my mother and two with his second wife, and his cousin had two. Her children are about two years younger than me now, though of course, they’re not children anymore. They’re both in Paris.
One of them pursued a career as a cinematographic photographer but later transitioned into yoga. She now teaches yoga full-time, splitting her time between Paris and Sri Lanka. The other became a film director, following in the footsteps of their father. It’s been fascinating to see the different directions our lives have taken — how our family history has looped back in some ways and diverged in others.

As for me, I've always been fascinated by family, cultures, and languages — trying to make sense of it all. This interest was one of the reasons I joined the Foreign Service in 1987. In the application essay I submitted, I wrote about my family: how we are spread across the world, speaking different languages, holding different perspectives, and representing diverse cultural experiences. Even then, I was deeply interested in understanding those differences and staying connected with everyone.

It's remarkable how one family can branch out into so many places and hold such varied views of the world. Joining the Foreign Service felt like a natural extension of that curiosity. It gave me the opportunity to formally represent not only my own cultural perspective but also my country's perspective in a global context. This fascination with making sense of different cultures and connections continues to inspire me.

*Q: Let's then go back with you to Los Angeles. Your parents have met and you're the first child. Did they have other children?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, I have a sister and a brother. My parents met when my father was in the army. For a while, they were stationed in Alaska, but when my mother was pregnant, they returned to Los Angeles, and that's where I was born. My sister was born a couple of years later, in Phoenix, in 1959, where my mother's parents were living. My brother was born back in Los Angeles in 1961.
Around the time my brother was born, my parents separated. After that, my mother, my siblings, and I moved to Phoenix to be closer to her parents. That's where I grew up.

*Q: Okay, very interesting. All right, you really spent the majority of your childhood in Phoenix.*

GOODFRIEND: That's right. I went to university in Tucson starting in the mid-'70s, graduated in 1979, stayed there for a few more months, and then moved away from Tucson in 1980.

*Q: Okay, let's back up just a moment. Was your mother working when you went to Phoenix?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, she was. I mentioned earlier that she had studied at USC in Los Angeles and earned a master's degree in music. After she got married, though, she was focused on raising us kids and didn't pursue much with that degree at first.

When my parents separated and we moved to Phoenix to live with her parents, she began teaching piano lessons from home. I remember my grandfather hammering a sign into the front lawn advertising her piano studio. Over time, she earned a teaching certificate and started working in schools. Initially, she taught music at elementary and high schools, but as school district programs expanded, she got an additional certification to teach general high school classes as well.

*Q: What was Phoenix like for you growing up?*

GOODFRIEND: I first visited Phoenix as a child before we moved there permanently. We lived in my grandparents' house, which had been built around 1945. We added a room to it. The house had a front yard and a backyard full of fruit trees. My grandparents, as I've mentioned, came from Cyprus. My grandfather worked with his brothers in a confectionery store they owned. It was like a coffee shop where they also sold candy, and they were very skilled at cooking and candy-making.

The backyard, though modest in size, was lush. We had sour orange trees along the side of the house, which my grandmother used to make marmalade. We also had grapefruit, regular orange, fig, and peach trees, as well as artichokes. Growing up, it was a lively household. My grandparents were very engaged with their friends, many of whom were also immigrants from Greece or Cyprus.

It was very much an immigrant community. The first second language I learned was modern Greek, which I studied on the weekends. My mother, who was a piano teacher, wanted all of us to learn piano. I've got to admit, though, that I preferred doing things rather than studying them. I think I realized that about myself from a young age.

For example, when we moved to Phoenix when I was four, I started piano lessons around age five. By the time I was seven or eight, I was confident enough to think I could perform. There was a local TV program called *The Lew King Ranger Hour*, hosted by Lew King. He featured talented kids, calling them "Lew King Rangers," and they would perform on the show. I thought I was talented enough to join, so I called the program and said I wanted to play piano. They asked to speak with my mother to arrange it, and she talked with them.

I was so excited, thinking, "Okay, I'm going to be on television!" I started telling my friends at school that I was going to be on *The Lew King Ranger Hour* in a week, maybe two weeks, or three. But that day never came. My mother decided I wasn't ready and told the producers I needed more practice. That disappointment led me to stop piano lessons altogether. I thought, "What's the point of learning if I can't use the skills?" That experience shaped how I approached learning — I always wanted to gain enough of a background and then apply it in real life.

My mother also taught us how to read in kindergarten. In first grade, I was that kid who was always raising his hand with the answer. Because I could already read and my classmates couldn't, I was moved up to second grade. That made me about a year younger than my classmates.

While I was confident as a child, being younger than everyone else in second grade dampened my confidence a bit. In some ways, that was a good thing because it kept me grounded. But developmentally, it was challenging. I had to work harder to keep up with kids who were older than me.
I had an interesting dynamic growing up. In school, I was a year younger than my classmates, but I was with kids my own age in Cub Scouts and later Boy Scouts. Those

were kids I had known since kindergarten or first grade, so I had two separate peer groups — one in school and one in Scouts.

Phoenix itself was surrounded by desert, which became our playground. We often went hiking in the South Mountains or other areas around the city. By the time I was nine or ten, I started delivering newspapers weekly for a small company. When I turned eleven, I began a daily paper route in the afternoons after school. I would ride my bike around the neighborhood, delivering newspapers. That job lasted about five years, and I saved the money to help pay for college. By the time I went to university, I had earned enough to cover some of the costs and even get a scholarship.

*Q: Now, the other things as you're growing up in high school, and so on, you had mentioned Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, but were you involved in other extracurricular activities?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, I was involved in several activities. I was in the marching band. I also took drama classes in high school and participated in a number of school performances. Additionally, I was an altar boy during that time.

I continued delivering newspapers, as I mentioned earlier, and I was also on the speech team in high school. We participated in various competitions, and my preference was always for spontaneous or impromptu speaking. This tied back to my earlier experience with learning piano — I preferred creating and performing in the moment rather than memorizing something and repeating it the same way each time.

In speech competitions, I enjoyed the challenge of quickly analyzing information and then putting together a five- to ten-minute talk on it. Initially, I struggled with timing. I would present the key facts and give a quick "elevator speech" style briefing, but I often finished too quickly. Over time, I learned to pad my speeches with stories and anecdotes to make them more engaging and to fill the allotted time.
Being on the speech team gave me a lot of confidence in public speaking and standing in front of an audience. Those experiences helped shape my communication skills. So, in addition to Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, my main activities included drama, marching band, and the speech team.

*Q: Now in the marching band, obviously, you weren't playing piano?*

GOODFRIEND: No, I played the clarinet. I gave up piano in fourth grade and began studying the clarinet instead. I do have some regrets that I didn't pick up the guitar or another instrument I could have sung along with. I played the clarinet in the band from fourth grade through high school, but by my sophomore year, I decided to stop to focus on other activities.

*Q: Yeah. Now, you mentioned you're an altar boy, was your faith community also an area of activity for you?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, actually, quite a bit. I took more than just a vague interest in it — I've always had an inquiring mind. One side of my family was Jewish, and the other side was from the Greek-speaking part of Cyprus and Greek Orthodox. It wasn't until we moved from California to Arizona and lived with my mother's parents that we were introduced to the Greek Orthodox tradition. I was already four years old at the time.

Both of my grandparents in Phoenix were very active in the local community and in the church, so when we lived with them, we naturally became involved as well. By the time I was seven or eight, I was already asking questions like, *What is this? What are these stories? How does this relate to that?* I was curious and inquisitive.

As a teenager, I became more deeply engaged. I served as an altar boy and was actively involved in church life, but I also started questioning and exploring. I would ask things like, *What supports this belief? What supports that belief?* I developed a stronger interest in reading original texts. In high school, I joined a club that focused on Bible study. For me, studying didn't just mean reading and agreeing. I spent time comparing different translations and wondering why they were different.
This questioning and exploration laid the foundation for further study when I went to university. I pursued a minor in Religious Studies, and during that time, I began to critically examine my beliefs. I came to the conclusion that there were certain aspects of Christianity I couldn't fully accept. Through my family history, I felt a strong connection to Judaism, both emotionally and intellectually, and I saw it as the predecessor to Christianity. So, during university, I made the decision to embrace Judaism, which felt like a natural fit for me both spiritually and rationally.

*Q: Now also while you were growing up, you obviously have family, in Europe and so on. Did you travel to Europe as well?*

GOODFRIEND: Not when I was growing up. I used to think of Phoenix like something out of *The Wizard of Oz* — watching Dorothy's journey to Oz, surrounded by vast nothingness, reminded me of being in the middle of the desert, far from everywhere else. The biggest trips we took when I was a child were to Los Angeles or San Francisco, where we had family as well.

That said, I was always keenly interested in the family I had overseas, particularly the French side. When I was seventeen, after my first year of university, I had the chance to go on my own. My father, with whom I had reconnected, gave me a ticket to Europe. I started in France, visiting family there, and I had a Eurail pass, which allowed me to travel throughout Western Europe. I stayed with relatives for a while and explored many countries as a seventeen-year-old.

That trip was the start of what became a life filled with travel. After that experience, I had many more opportunities to see the world.

*Q: Now, the other thing, of course, as you're growing up in high school, were you talking to your mother, you're talking to your family about college and what your expectations were?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes. There was definitely a general expectation that I would go to university, though I think the specifics — where and how — were more up to me. I took the initiative to figure it out. I applied to universities outside of Arizona because I wanted to get away from Phoenix. However, money was tight, and application fees limited how many places I could apply. I was able to apply to universities in Arizona for free, though, and I received a $2,000 scholarship through the newspaper job I had.
Both Arizona State University (ASU) and the University of Arizona (U of A) offered me scholarships that waived tuition, so I chose to go to U of A in Tucson.

*Q: How far away is that from Phoenix?*

GOODFRIEND: About 120 miles.

*Q: Okay, so just far enough to be on your own. And when you started, did you have an idea of what you were going to major in or what direction you wanted the studies to go.*

GOODFRIEND: In high school, I thought I might pursue Natural Sciences or Physics. When I got to university, I started by taking math and science courses alongside the general required courses. But somewhere along the way, my focus shifted, and I ended up declaring a major in philosophy.

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, during my first year, I took some philosophy courses, and they really resonated with me. I think it stemmed from all the discussions I had been having about religion and life — questioning why we think a certain way or believe certain things. Human thought and reasoning started to fascinate me more than the more rigid, black-and-white nature of the natural sciences.

I also began fulfilling the university's language requirement and chose Classical Greek. I didn't have a clear idea of what I'd do with it, but it interested me, and I saw university as a place to explore and better understand the world. By my second year, I was taking a heavier course load and found I actually worked better under pressure. The more credits I had, the more focused I became on staying productive and avoiding procrastination.

At that point, I decided to turn Classical Greek into a second major alongside philosophy. I also added a minor in Religious Studies. By my third year, I was piling on even more credits, studying a range of subjects, and asking myself, *How can I apply all of this?* That's when I started considering how to use my studies in a practical way, and I decided to add a third major in Radio and Television.
I was thinking about ways to communicate knowledge and context — how to engage with different societies, assess situations, and share insights through media. I thought I might go into documentary filmmaking, news broadcasting, or something similar. At the

same time, I took Hebrew and Yiddish, a bit of Russian, and added enough French credits to turn it into a fourth major.

When I graduated after five years, I had four majors: Philosophy, Classical Greek, Radio and Television, and French, along with a minor in Religious Studies. My education gave me a broad understanding of human thought, communication technologies, and global contexts. I came away with the tools to engage with communities, understand their histories and developments, and communicate their stories — whether through broadcasting or some other medium.

*Q: Let me just get this situated in time for a second because you've been entering schools a little early and leaving them a little early. What year do you graduate from college?*

GOODFRIEND: I graduated in 1979. I spent five years at university, from 1974 to 1979. Adding on the extra majors kept me in school a bit longer, which actually put me back within my age group. After graduating, I stayed in Tucson for about six more months, taking a couple of additional courses.

By that time, I was considering different career paths. One option I was looking at was broadcasting. Another was joining what was then called the U.S. International Communication Agency. It had previously been called the U.S. Information Agency, but President Carter had renamed it as the U.S. International Communication Agency, to highlight its focus not only on providing information, but on communicating. In 1979, I took the entrance exam for that agency and passed it. So, between 1979 and 1980, I was exploring different possibilities while waiting to see what would happen with the application process.

During that period, I also went to Guatemala to study Spanish in an intensive program. I took the train from Mexico to Guatemala, stayed with a family there, and then returned. After that, I went to Europe with my mother for her first trip overseas. I was the "experienced traveler" by then, so I accompanied her in 1980, and we visited several countries with a Eurail pass.

Before that trip, I had taken the oral exams for the Communication Agency. When we returned, I learned that I had passed both the written and oral exams. I was waiting to be placed on the hiring list when President Reagan was elected. One of his first moves was to freeze federal hiring, which effectively dropped me off the list. President Reagan also reverted the name of the agency back to the USIA.
I got a call from someone at the agency explaining that the hiring freeze meant no new hires would be brought on. They advised me that I could retake the test, but that candidates could only stay on the list for about a year. I decided to try again. At the time, I was in Los Angeles, staying with my grandmother, as my grandfather — my father's father — had recently passed away. I was helping her through that period of grief.

While I was there, I took the general test again and then flew to Washington, D.C., for the oral exam. Unfortunately, I was very tired during the oral, and although I did okay, I didn't score high enough to have a real chance of making the list again.
At that point, my focus began to shift. I started weighing whether I would pursue a career in the Foreign Service or in international broadcasting. Both paths were still options, but I wasn't sure which would come through first.

*Q: I'm just curious, how did you first learn about the international communications agency and then when it switched back to being USIA?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, I was still at university, and I remember thinking about what I was going to do next. I was looking for ways to apply the skills I had acquired during my studies. Just as I had been on my own when figuring out which university to attend and what to study, I was pretty much on my own again when exploring career options.

I spent a lot of time reading about different professional opportunities, and that's how I came across the U.S. International Communications Agency (USICA). There wasn't really any outreach to me or guidance from anyone — it was 1979, and finding this kind of information required a lot of personal initiative. I had to ask myself, *What's out there? How do I prepare myself for it?* So it was entirely through my own research that I learned about the ICA and its eventual return to being the USIA (United States Information Agency).

*Q: Now, eventually, you passed well enough to get on a location on the list to be accepted. But what happens between then, and the time you take the exam?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, I took the exam four times. The first time, I passed, but I was dropped off the list because of the hiring freeze Reagan implemented shortly after he was elected. The second time, I passed the orals, but I ranked too low to have a realistic chance of being hired.

At that time, I was staying in Los Angeles with my grandmother after my grandfather passed away. Relatives came from various places for the funeral — some from Costa Rica, some from Israel — and I had invitations to visit them. After staying in Los Angeles for about a year and a half, from 1981 to November 1982, I decided to pursue other opportunities.

I went to Israel, where I had family. My grandmother had a sister in Los Angeles and another in New York, whose daughter had moved to Israel. That cousin was about my father's age, and her daughters were about my age. I also had some more distant relatives on my grandfather's side in Israel. My first priority when I got there was to learn Hebrew.

I joined a kibbutz and participated in an intensive Hebrew program from November 1982 until the summer of 1983. While I was figuring out what to do next, I was accepted into a master's program at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, focusing on mass communication.

The program was much more theoretical than the Radio and Television courses I had taken in Tucson, which were oriented toward technical production — putting together TV or radio programs. At Hebrew University, the focus was on the sociology of communication: how different types of communication work, how persuasion and propaganda shape opinion, and how these tools are understood and applied. I studied there for two years, from 1983 to 1985.

While at Hebrew University, I decided to give the Foreign Service exam another shot. I took the written exam in Jerusalem at the U.S. Consulate and then flew to Washington, D.C., for the oral exam. Unfortunately, I wasn't feeling well when I arrived, and I didn't perform very well. That was my third attempt, and it turned out as I had expected.

In Israel, I had met the person who would later become my wife. We decided to move to England, got married near London, and I began a doctoral program there. My research focused on government use of information, particularly how emerging media like cable and satellite television were being used for government communication.

While in England, I decided to try the Foreign Service exam one last time. I took the test in London, passed it, and flew to Washington for the oral exam. This time, I made sure to arrive a couple of days early to rest, and I performed well enough to pass.
While I was in the middle of my doctoral program, I was contacted by the board of examiners. They told me I had a place in an upcoming class for consular officers. At that point, I had to make a decision. I was invested in my studies, but there was no guarantee I'd get another opportunity if I deferred.
I thought about it carefully. By then, USIA (United States Information Agency) had been reestablished after Reagan reverted the name. I'd always been drawn to USIA because it focused on mass communication — one-to-many communication, which aligned with my studies. But consular work, though one-to-one communication, also had a strong element of engagement and human connection. It was about applying U.S. government policy on a personal level and receiving immediate feedback.
I realized that consular work still involved the type of communication and interaction I cared about, so I accepted the position in November 1987.

*Q: Okay, one moment, I'm just gonna pause for a second.*

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*Q: Okay, so All right. What month and year did you enter the Foreign Service?*

GOODFRIEND: November 1987.

*Q: All right. And now you have been living in England and your wife is still in England. But you have to do your orientation in Washington.*

GOODFRIEND: That's right. I came over first and was hired around Veterans Day. After about two weeks, once I found a place for us to stay, my wife joined me with our oldest son, who had been born in April 1986. He was less than two years old at the time, and my wife was pregnant

with our second child. It was a challenging trip for her, but our second son was born in May 1988, while I was in the A-100 orientation course.

*Q: Now, to go back, just one second. Has your wife been working? Or what was her status now that you were having kids?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, I had mentioned that we met in Israel while I was studying Hebrew. She had just ended a previous marriage and was taking time to reset and get away. I should mention that we're not together now, but at the time, I was in Israel for the reasons I've already shared — studying Hebrew and preparing to attend university afterward. She was volunteering at the kibbutz, not as a language student, but to provide general support. That's how we met, and we stayed in contact after I left for university. She eventually left Israel, spent some time in the United States, and then returned to England. Later, she decided to come back to Israel while I was studying at the university. She enrolled in a Hebrew language program at the same kibbutz where we had first met. After completing that program, she moved to a different kibbutz to undergo conversion to Judaism.

After her conversion, we moved to England and got married. We initially lived with her parents while I found work. She was a professional secretary, but after we had our first child, she stayed home to care for him. By the time I joined the Foreign Service, our son was about a year and a half old, and she was pregnant with our second child.

Our second son was born in May 1988 while I was in the A-100 orientation course. Then, in July, we went to Israel for our first Foreign Service assignment.

*Q: Now, as you're entering the Foreign Service and so on, it's the late '80s. At that time, with orientation and so on, as you're beginning, were they at all talking about the possibilities of work for your spouse or any interest in spousal support while with two small children?*

GOODFRIEND: At the time, my wife didn't want to work outside the home — she preferred to stay with the children. The opportunities for spousal employment in the Foreign Service were much more limited then than they are now, but we weren't really focused on that in 1987.
We were coming from a place where I was working on my doctoral program, and she was at home with our first child. For a while, we had been living with her parents. Just two months before I joined the Foreign Service, in September, we managed to buy a small house outside of London. It was very modest, but it was ours.

When I joined the Foreign Service in November 1987, the salary, while not comparable to corporate salaries, was much more than what I had been receiving as a stipend during my doctoral studies. From our perspective, it was a big step forward. We weren't looking at spousal work opportunities back then — we were more focused on how to manage as a family.

The Foreign Service provided furnished housing, travel accommodations, and a salary that could support the family. That combination gave us the stability we needed at the time. It was a big improvement compared to where we had been, and for us, that was enough.

As an example of the changes we were experiencing, when we arrived in Tel Aviv in July 1988, the house we had been assigned wasn't ready yet. Instead, we were placed in the former residence of the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). It was a very nice house, but it wasn't ideal for young children — there were open staircases where they could have easily fallen.
We contacted the General Services Office (GSO), and they installed gates to make the house safer for our children. It was a new experience for us to have that level of support, and it made a big difference. We learned that while you might not always get exactly what you want initially, if you clearly define your needs and communicate them effectively, the system is generally responsive.

This approach also applied to travel. Instead of just relying on standard bookings, we found that doing our own research on routes and options, then making specific requests, usually led to better results. It taught us to balance taking initiative with working within the system — a lesson that proved helpful throughout my Foreign Service career.

*Q: And you speak Hebrew. Did you find that the level of Hebrew that you had was adequate for your daily work?*

GOODFRIEND: Absolutely. I had studied Hebrew extensively, first during my time on the kibbutz and later while completing my master's degree in Jerusalem, which was taught in Hebrew. Before coming to Tel Aviv, I had already met the required proficiency level, so I wasn't required to take any language training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Hebrew was also one of the languages I tested in when joining the Foreign Service, and I passed at the required level.

There's a common belief in the Foreign Service that prior experience isn't necessarily taken into account when determining assignments, but in this case, I was being sent to a country where I already knew the culture and spoke the language.

Part of the onboarding process also involved taking language proficiency tests for any languages we had studied. I took seven tests: French, Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and German. I had never formally studied German, but I had studied Yiddish, so I approached the test by stripping out the Hebrew and Slavic words from my Yiddish, and I managed to speak what came across as basic-level German.

Since I didn't need the six months of Hebrew language classes, Tel Aviv wasn't ready to receive me earlier, so I stayed in Washington until July 1988. During that time, I was asked to assist with preparations for the Visa Waiver Pilot Program.

The pilot program was being launched with the UK and Japan, and my role was to review entries in the State Department's visa lookout system labeled "double zero." These weren't tied to legally defined grounds of ineligibility but flagged cases where more information was needed before a person could be cleared to enter the U.S. The INS (now CBP) wanted these cases reviewed and formatted into documents for further processing.

I saw that the process as planned would require someone to manually copy data from one computer system and re-enter it into another, which seemed inefficient. I argued that the two systems — the State Department's IBM database system and its Wang word processing system — should communicate directly.

After discussing it with the systems personnel, they agreed it was possible to transfer the data digitally. Once the systems were connected, I was able to review and edit the data electronically. This approach saved significant time and ensured the project was completed on schedule.

The experience was a great start to my career, and it influenced my thinking going forward. It made me question why we adapt people to fit the limitations of technology rather than adapting technology to meet human needs. That lesson stayed with me and shaped how I approached many other projects throughout my career.

*Q: Okay. So you're a consular officer in the Consulate General in Jerusalem.*

GOODFRIEND: In the embassy's Consular Section in Tel Aviv.

*Q: Okay. Did they rotate you through the different sections? Did you do immigrant visas or non Immigrant Visas?*

GOODFRIEND: I started with nonimmigrant visas. There was one officer assigned to immigrant visas, and they were at a higher grade. Because of that, we weren't generally rotated through the immigrant visa section, but we would occasionally fill in when needed. The typical rotation was six months in nonimmigrant visas, then six months in American Citizen Services (ACS). After that, there was a rotation outside the Consular Section to either the Political Section, the Economic Section, or as a staff aide to the Ambassador.

*Q: Which one did you end up with?*

GOODFRIEND: I was offered staff aide to the Ambassador, but I said I'd rather be in the political section.

*Q: Good choice.*

GOODFRIEND: They were a bit surprised by my decision. Being a staff aide would have put me closer to the seat of power, and I could have made contacts that might have been useful later in my career. But I preferred to manage my own portfolio, take initiative, and have more control over my work. As a staff aide, you're not managing something — you're facilitating. That wasn't what I wanted to do.

*Q: Precisely. For a junior officer or first an entry level officer. It can be interesting because you interact with the whole embassy. But on the other hand, the amount of interaction and the level is pretty superficial.*

GOODFRIEND: I preferred working in a role where I could collaborate with others while managing my own portfolio, bringing something substantive to the table. During my time in the Nonimmigrant Visa (NIV) Section, one of the interesting aspects was processing visas for Lebanese applicants coming from the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon. These cases gave us insights into the lives of the Lebanese in that region — their occupations, the challenges they faced, and why they were seeking visas. This provided valuable context and helped me build a deeper understanding of the broader situation in South Lebanon.

Another significant aspect of my work was helping to implement a new computer system for processing nonimmigrant visas. Previously, everything had been paper-based, and we relied on telex machines for name checks. When the new system was introduced, the process still had inefficiencies. Applicants would wait in line, hand their paper applications to an officer, who would then interview them and make a decision. The application would then go to the staff for a name check. If there was a problem, it would return to the officer. If there wasn't, the data was entered into the system after the adjudication.

I proposed switching the process so that the data would be entered into the system first, and the name check could be completed before the officer made a decision. This way, officers would have all the information they needed at the time of adjudication. However, the system was not designed to allow data entry without simultaneously entering the adjudication decision. While this limitation couldn't be addressed at the time, the experience underscored the importance of systematic accountability and efficient workflows.

This became even more apparent later, following a temporary rotation to Jerusalem. After I returned to Tel Aviv, I received a call from a colleague in Jerusalem asking if Tel Aviv had issued visas to individuals from the Jerusalem district. The consulate had been shown passports of people whose applications they had denied with U.S. visas issued in Tel Aviv, but we had no record of these applications. My supervisor and I reviewed our files and found no record of these visas being processed.
It turned out to be a much larger issue. After I rotated to the American Citizen Services section, Diplomatic Security and the Inspector General conducted an investigation in Tel Aviv. They discovered that several local employees had been issuing visas literally behind the backs of the American officers. They were pulling rejected passports from Jerusalem out of their pockets or socks, issuing visas without applications or records, and returning the passports the same way. Since there was no paper trail and the reconciliation processes were inadequate, the fraud went undetected for some time.

The local employees were arrested, and the fallout was significant. My supervisor was sent back to the United States, and several entry-level officers were given directed assignments elsewhere. Temporary personnel were brought in, and I had to return to the NIV section for a time. That incident reinforced the need for systematic accountability and technology that facilitates accurate and transparent workflows. It also highlighted the risks of weak oversight systems.

Eventually, I transitioned to the Political Section, where I covered Israel's relations with Africa and the diaspora communities. This was around 1989, during a period of significant geopolitical change with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of borders in Eastern and Central Europe. Large numbers of Jewish immigrants from diaspora communities began arriving in Israel, and many were being settled in the West Bank.

My reporting on these developments, including the demographic shifts and their impact on Israeli policies, received recognition. There was significant interest in how these changes were affecting Israel and what the U.S. approach should be, particularly regarding funding and policy alignment. It was a dynamic and fascinating portfolio that demonstrated how much an entry-level officer could contribute.
Whether it was improving visa processing or analyzing demographic and policy changes, this first tour gave me opportunities to contribute meaningfully. It was an exciting and formative start to my career.

*Q: You were unquestionably in the right place at the right time for a new entry level officer to have a very important portfolio. But I do want to ask one question about this new immigration to Israel. Israel was not the only place that Jews left Eastern Europe for. Was the embassy also keeping tabs on other places in the world where Jews were going or was it just localized?*

GOODFRIEND: At our embassy in Israel, the focus was primarily on people immigrating to Israel. In other countries, the situation varied. For instance, during a later tour in Moscow, there were significant issues involving members of the Jewish community who initially declared their intention to immigrate to Israel but then opted to go to the U.S. instead, often through Vienna or Rome.

This created challenges for both Israel and U.S. policy. At that time, U.S. refugee policy required individuals to apply for refugee status outside of their home country. For Jews in Russia, the only way to leave was to declare their intention to immigrate to Israel, obtain an invitation from Israel, and then leave. However, once they reached a transit point, some would change their destination to the U.S.
This situation caused tension with Israel, as it jeopardized the process that allowed these communities to leave. Ultimately, U.S. policy changed to allow members of the Jewish community in Russia to apply for refugee status while still within the country, which alleviated some of these issues. But that's a story from a later tour.

While I was in Israel, our focus was on understanding the routes these immigrants were taking, the thinking within the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe, and

how freedom of movement was evolving. We looked at which countries were facilitating immigration, what airlines they were using, and other logistical aspects.

There were also notable changes in other areas. For example, Syrian Jews were starting to gain greater freedom of movement during that time. So, it wasn't just about immigration to Israel but about broader shifts in the ability of Jewish communities to move freely.

For us, in the Embassy in Tel Aviv, the primary focus was on how this immigration affected the demographics within Israel and the West Bank. These shifts had significant political and social implications, which made it an important portfolio for us to monitor and report on.

*Q: Interesting. Wow. Okay, so at this early point, when the new wave of migrants were arriving, what were your early conclusions about what was happening?*

GOODFRIEND: At that early stage, it was clear that many of the new immigrants were being settled — or allowed to settle — in areas within the West Bank. The Israeli government was allocating funds to facilitate this, particularly in areas around Jerusalem, rather than within the pre-1967 borders.
A key question for us was whether U.S. government money was indirectly contributing to these settlement efforts. Even if American aid wasn't explicitly designated for settlement expansion, the fungibility of funds meant that our assistance in one area could free up Israeli government resources for settlement activity elsewhere.

This could have had significant implications for the ongoing peace process. We were closely examining how our aid could be structured to minimize the possibility of indirectly supporting policies that were counter to U.S. objectives in the region.
At the time — this was 1989 — the situation was very different from what it would become in later years. Many of the settlements that are now entrenched realities were still in the early stages, being discussed as *potential* facts on the ground. Thirty years later, what we were analyzing then has, in many cases, become established realities.

*Q: Yeah, yeah. All right. So you're also covering relations with Africa. Was there anything significant there, in your recollection?*

GOODFRIEND: Africa was a place that was increasingly welcoming an expansion of bilateral relationships. In South Africa, for instance, new diplomatic missions were opening up, and there were growing opportunities for engagement. I don't recall anything particularly specific, but one issue that stood out was Ethiopia.

At that time, a Jewish community from Ethiopia had recently been brought to Israel, and there was ongoing attention on how they were being integrated. Questions arose about housing, funding, and how they were being treated compared to Jewish communities arriving from Eastern Europe. This wasn't necessarily a U.S. policy issue but rather an internal Israeli matter — how Israel was defining itself through the integration of different Jewish communities and the societal adjustments that entailed.

Now, thirty years later, things have changed significantly. The sheer number of people who have immigrated to Israel from Europe has reshaped Israeli society. One of the key concerns back in 1989 was how Israel would handle the arrival of large numbers of non-Jews from Eastern Europe. Interestingly, while some in Israel questioned the Jewishness of the deeply devout Ethiopian community, there was comparatively less scrutiny of the Jewish identity of those arriving from Europe.

Today, Israel faces new questions: What does it mean to be Israeli in an increasingly diverse and intricate society? What were the aspirations of these different communities — to integrate fully, to maintain distinct identities? The challenges that seemed pressing in 1989 have evolved into broader and more complex issues in Israeli society today.

*Q: Were there any other developments while you were there, as a first tour officer, that I haven't covered?*

GOODFRIEND: We talked about the situation with the Lebanese coming into Israel from the occupied zone in southern Lebanon and how we tried to assess that movement. My work involved engagement with these Lebanese individuals and reporting on their circumstances, which attracted some regional attention. Other U.S. embassies in the region, including in places like Cyprus, were observing similar patterns, so there was a valuable exchange of information. It was an example of how sharing reporting across different posts helped provide a more complete picture of regional developments.

Within the Political Section and the American Citizen Services (ACS) Section, I don't recall any particularly dangerous incidents during my time there. ACS primarily dealt with the routine issues of serving the American citizen community in Israel. Some Americans came to Israel for religious or spiritual reasons, and in certain cases, they experienced what has been called Jerusalem Syndrome — a phenomenon where individuals, regardless of their religious background, would become convinced they had found their destined place in the world and begin behaving accordingly.

One particularly notable group was the Hebrew Israelites, an African American community originally from Chicago. They identified as the original Hebrew people and believed they had the right to settle in Israel. Many of them entered Israel as tourists but, upon arrival, would destroy their U.S. passports in an effort to remain permanently. This created legal and diplomatic challenges, as Israel had to determine how to handle their presence while the U.S. government had to navigate issues surrounding their lack of travel documents. It was an interesting case of identity, migration, and legal status intersecting in unexpected ways.

Many of these individuals who arrived in Israel as tourists and destroyed their passports would join the community they had established in Dimona, in southern Israel. The Israeli government was uncertain about how to handle their presence. They were not recognized as Jews under the Law of Return, so they were not granted citizenship or legal status. Instead, they were left to fend for themselves within their community.

There was a self-contained aspect to their existence — they lived within the structured community in Dimona but were largely isolated from the broader Israeli society. They had no real means of earning a livelihood outside their community, apart from selling trinkets or small crafts. This created significant challenges, not just for the Israeli government but also for U.S. officials and the families of those who had joined the community.

One of the key complications was that many of these individuals, upon destroying their passports, also renounced their U.S. citizenship. This meant they could not be deported, which left them in a legal limbo. Meanwhile, their family members in the U.S. often reached out to the embassy, deeply concerned that their loved ones had been influenced by what they perceived as a cult-like movement. They worried that their relatives had given up everything to live in isolation, cut off from their previous lives.

At the time, we managed to establish a principle that those who had renounced their U.S. citizenship had done so under duress. This provided a way for individuals who later regretted their decision to have their U.S. citizenship reinstated. If someone wished to leave the community and return to the U.S., there was now an avenue for them to do so. Ensuring that people had a legitimate way to return if they chose to was a key issue we dealt with during that period.

This was also around the time of Meir Kahane, an American citizen who had emigrated to Israel and lost his U.S. citizenship. At that time, the legal standard was that an American who applied for and accepted foreign citizenship was automatically considered to have expatriated. It was a complex issue that raised broader questions about citizenship, identity, and the consequences of legal renunciation.

*Q: That's interesting because I thought we accepted dual citizenship.*

GOODFRIEND: Well, it depends on intent. The Kahane case was one of the key moments that shaped how the U.S. interpreted expatriation and dual citizenship.

Before that case, the principle was fairly straightforward. If a person was born a citizen of another country, that wasn't a choice they made, so there was no intent involved. As a result, holding dual citizenship by birth was not considered an expatriating act. In fact, we often advised people to be aware of potential complications — for example, if someone's father was a Greek citizen and they traveled to Greece, they might not have actively sought Greek citizenship, but Greece could still consider them a citizen by descent. That could lead to unexpected obligations, such as military service. However, since they never chose to acquire Greek citizenship, they would not be considered to have relinquished their U.S. citizenship.

On the other hand, if an American citizen actively applied for and accepted citizenship from another country, that was considered an expatriating act. For instance, if an American moved to France and said, "I like it here, I want to become a French citizen,"

or if an American married a French citizen and applied for French nationality, the very act of voluntarily seeking another nationality was considered to be an intent to relinquish U.S. citizenship. This was the legal interpretation at the time.

The Kahane case and later court rulings refined this standard, ultimately leading to a more nuanced understanding of dual citizenship. Today, it is generally accepted that an American can acquire a second citizenship without automatically losing U.S. citizenship, unless they explicitly renounce it. But back then, prior to the Kahane case, intent was a critical factor in determining expatriation.

*Q: I see. Okay.*

GOODFRIEND: And in Israel, the situation was even more complex. Israel has a system where, if you enter the country with something akin to a resident alien status — meaning you haven't asked to be a citizen, but you have requested permission to live and work there — you are granted resident status. However, after a certain period, that resident status automatically converts into citizenship. Since you never actively applied for citizenship, this was not considered an expatriating act under U.S. law.

On the other hand, under Israel's Law of Return, a person who qualifies can immigrate to Israel and immediately apply for citizenship. If someone moved to Israel and declared, "I am exercising my right under the Law of Return, and I am becoming an Israeli citizen," that was considered an expatriating act because they were choosing to become a citizen rather than simply allowing it to happen over time.

The distinction was subtle but important. If citizenship was automatic after a period of residency, it was not considered voluntary and did not affect U.S. citizenship. But if a person explicitly applied for citizenship upon arrival, that was interpreted as intent to expatriate.

*Q: Interesting, okay.*

GOODFRIEND: We dealt with many Americans who had become Israeli citizens and, as a result, lost their U.S. citizenship by requesting immediate citizenship under the Law of Return. Meir Kahane was one of them. He challenged this loss of citizenship because he wanted to return to the U.S. to raise funds for his political activities in Israel.

Kahane had been one of the leaders of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in the United States, which was considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. government due to its activities. When he applied for a visa to return to the U.S., he was denied entry based on his past involvement in the JDL. His response was, I don't need a visa. I'm a U.S. citizen. You can't stop me from returning. The U.S. government, however, argued that he had relinquished his citizenship when he became an Israeli citizen.

Kahane took the case to court, arguing that he had never intended to give up his U.S. citizenship. He won, and his U.S. citizenship was restored. This ruling set an important

precedent: simply acquiring citizenship in another country no longer meant automatic expatriation. From that point forward, loss of U.S. citizenship required a clear expression of intent — an individual had to state to a consular officer that it was their intent to give up their U.S. citizenship rather than it being an automatic consequence of applying for another nationality.

This ruling changed the way expatriation cases were handled. If, for example, an American became a British citizen and later applied for a U.S. passport, they would now be asked: Was it your intent to relinquish your U.S. citizenship when you became a British citizen? If the person said yes, then their expatriation would stand. But if they said no, that was not their intent, their U.S. citizenship remained intact.

After having his U.S. citizenship restored, Kahane ran for office in Israel. However, Israeli law required members of the Knesset to hold only Israeli citizenship. This meant that, to serve in the Israeli government, he had to formally renounce his U.S. citizenship. He submitted a form letter stating that he was renouncing his U.S. citizenship due to Israeli law, but that was not sufficient under U.S. legal standards. The renunciation had to be done formally, in person, before a consular officer, where the individual would state that they understood the consequences and were acting of their own free will. Kahane went through the formal process, and the U.S. issued the renunciation.

Shortly afterward, however, the Israeli government ruled that his party, Kach, was ineligible to run for the Knesset due to its racist ideology. This left him without a political future in Israel. He then attempted to reapply for a U.S. passport, arguing that his renunciation had not been voluntary in the fullest sense, since he had only done it to comply with Israeli law and had never truly intended to give up his U.S. citizenship.

Once again, the case went to court. While the case was being reviewed, the U.S. issued him a passport on a temporary basis. He returned to the U.S. to raise funds. It was during one of these fundraising speeches in New York that he was assassinated.

*Q: Right. Yes. Yeah. I'll quickly give you two examples from my own work. One is a U.S. citizen who lived in Austria, in Vienna and worked for an international organization, but had an Austrian spouse. And he worked there and lived there for twenty-five years . And during those twenty-five years, however, he had arranged his social security and medical insurance, it was all from the Austrian state. And the Austrians do not recognize dual citizenship, so as he's getting ready to retire, and he wants those benefits, he's faced with the decision. Well, do I stay here with my spouse and get the benefits? Or do I try to go back to the U.S. with my spouse and we don't know what kind of retirement we'll have if he eventually renounces U.S. citizenship. Because he could not see a way of making a living again at age sixty, or however late. But the other one was, I knew a Foreign Service officer, who had been born in the U.S, had U.S. citizenship, went to Israel, fought in the Israeli army, had enough of it, came back to the U.S. and joined the U.S. Foreign Service. And somehow we can do it all. Usually, joining a foreign military as an expatriating act, but somehow—*

GOODFRIEND: It's considered an expatriating act only if you serve as an officer, if I recall correctly, because at that level, you are required to take an oath of allegiance. If he served in the Israeli military but did not become an Israeli citizen, or if he held a rank that did not require taking an oath of allegiance, then it wouldn't automatically result in expatriation.

*Q: I see. Okay. Yeah, that element I didn't know. Okay.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, it comes down to intent again. Taking an oath of allegiance to a foreign country while serving in its military is considered an expatriating act, but only at a certain level — typically for officers or those in positions that require such an oath. If someone serves in a foreign military without taking that oath, it doesn't automatically lead to expatriation. That distinction is important in cases like this. If I recall correctly, that's how it was applied.

*Q: Well, he was a bright guy. And I imagine he had examined that issue. It was a detail that I was not aware of.*

GOODFRIEND: It's something I always considered seriously in my own life. Before joining the Foreign Service, I spent some time traveling, including in France. When I was there with my mother, we traveled around. After she returned to the U.S., I briefly considered staying. My father had been born in France, so I thought maybe I had some right to work there.

I went to different government offices to inquire about my options. Since I was only seventeen at the time, they told me I could apply for French citizenship, but it would come with military obligations. The official I was speaking with even joked that if I wanted, I could claim refugee status instead. That was when I really thought about what I wanted — whether I was willing to take on additional allegiances and obligations.

Ultimately, I decided not to pursue it. Later, when I spent time in Israel, I was also conscious of avoiding any commitments that might create long-term obligations, such as military service or residency that could lead to automatic citizenship. I wanted to remain a tourist, to avoid situations that might complicate my loyalties or legal status down the line.

My wife at the time was British, and we lived in Britain for a couple of years before I joined the Foreign Service. I had resident status there, I worked there, and after a while, I could have applied for citizenship. But that wasn't a complexity I wanted to take on.

I know many people who hold multiple citizenships, and while it can be an advantage in some cases, it also brings added complications — particularly when it comes to legal obligations, residency requirements, and even questions of allegiance. It forces you to think carefully about where you want to be and what responsibilities come with each nationality. For me, keeping things straightforward was the better choice.

Years later, when I was serving in Britain — actually, during the period we'll be talking about ahead — I was in charge of American Citizen Services. During that time, I saw a significant number of people renouncing their U.S. citizenship.

There was a large American community in Britain, and for some, renunciation was a practical decision. Many of them were older, settled in the UK for decades, and found that maintaining U.S. citizenship came with tax obligations that they no longer wanted to deal with. Their situation was similar to your example in Austria — where, at a certain point, they asked themselves: Where do I actually live? Where do I want my legal and financial obligations to be? For some, the answer was simply to renounce their U.S. citizenship and streamline their lives.

Actually, I'll talk more about this later, but I enjoyed having those conversations. It wasn't my role as the head of the section to personally interview everyone applying for a passport before they renounced their citizenship. However, I would occasionally hold those interviews — partly to stay familiar with the process and the workload, but also to understand people's rationale for renouncing.

Like I said, it was a good way to stay connected to the work and to get a sense of the different perspectives and motivations behind these decisions.

Back in Israel, renunciation was something we saw particularly with the Black Hebrew community. As I mentioned earlier, they had a communal structure that emphasized self-sufficiency and rejected external financial or governmental support, including U.S. citizenship. Many of them renounced their citizenship as part of that communal ideology. However, over time, individuals within the community began to return to the U.S. or seek to reclaim their citizenship. Some had never truly intended to give it up, but had gone along with the collective decision. Others found they wanted to maintain a connection to the U.S. even while remaining in Israel.

One other anecdote from my time in Israel involved an immigrant visa case I handled. I didn't process many immigrant visas, but I did handle a few. One applicant was coming from Lebanon, and at the time, our visa interviews were conducted without a partition between the officer and the applicant — we sat directly across from each other.

For some reason, this particular applicant was flagged as ineligible, with one of the "double zero" ineligibility codes.

We compiled all the relevant information about this person and sent it back to Washington, hoping they could provide further clarification. There was some back-and-forth as we tried to assess the situation. On one hand, there was a procedural question of whether the applicant was truly ineligible based on the available information. On the other hand, there was a broader issue — was what this person had done actually considered terrorist activity, or was it something else?

Navigating that discussion was delicate. I had to find a way to engage in conversation without revealing classified or sensitive information. It was a careful balancing act — asking questions that might lead the applicant to disclose relevant details while staying within the limits of what I could say.

It was also one of those moments that underscored the human aspect of consular work. Here was a person sitting across from me, in a quiet office in a modern city, while our discussion touched on serious geopolitical and security concerns. The challenge was to have a meaningful conversation — one that treated the applicant as a human being, while also fulfilling my responsibility to enforce the law and uphold security policies. It reinforced the importance of recognizing different perspectives, even in high-stakes situations.

We have to try to keep everything in perspective. Ultimately, I couldn't approve the visa, and I couldn't fully explain why. But that was the nature of the work. That conversation stayed with me — not because I was uncomfortable sitting across from the applicant, but because it underscored a fundamental aspect of consular work.

Every interaction is with a human being. The goal is to have a conversation that leads to the most accurate interpretation of the facts. Our job is to gather and assess information carefully so that we can make the appropriate decision, one that is fair, transparent, and based on the law.

That's what makes consular work unique. It's one of the few areas where entry-level officers, regardless of their career track — whether political, economic, public affairs, or something else — are immediately immersed in decision-making. It's not just about analyzing and reporting; it's about taking action. You are directly responsible for your decisions, whether it's approving or denying a visa, providing assistance to an American citizen, or determining the outcome of a case. That responsibility is something you learn to carry early on in your career.

*Q: Having to make the decision… there is… I do have a question about this particular issue, the double zero issue. And the reason I'm asking you is because in my consular work, which predated yours by about five years, when we got a double zero in what was then called the AVLOS, the automated visa lookout system. AVLOS, in the mid 80s, was a post by post, database, the database in the sky, the cloud, whatever, didn't exist or barely existed. So if you conducted an interview with someone, and you were otherwise going to grant them a visitor's visa, but in checking, they came up with a double zero, you had to check the AVLOS, the lookout system to see what the derogatory information was. It may have been a mistake, for one thing, but then if there is derogatory information, often it was not entered in its post, it was sent from Washington, and from a particular cabinet agency, it might not even have been State Department might have been DOD. And God help you if it was the CIA, because you would then have to tell the applicant. I'm sorry, we have some questions that we have to resolve with Washington and will call you when we've resolved them. That was all you can tell them. And then you had to send the cable explaining the entire case. What brought about the double zero? Often, it was an error.*

*But every once in a while when there was a double zero, it was because one of the U.S. domestic agencies might have been FBI, whatever, might not even have gotten the information themselves. They might have gotten it through consultations with other local intelligence agencies, in foreign countries and so on and in an exchange of information, and it just got incredibly difficult. And I'm wondering, to what extent was that true for you as well?*

GOODFRIEND: Right, and a couple of things come into play here. I had already mentioned my work on the Visa Waiver Pilot Program and how I handled double zero lookouts for the UK and Japan, ensuring that information was formatted in a way that could be used by INS. The issue with double zero lookouts was that they often originated from other U.S. agencies — FBI, CIA, DOD, or even from intelligence-sharing arrangements with foreign governments. If a lookout wasn't tied to a specific ineligibility under U.S. immigration law, it meant we needed to pause the application and seek clarification before proceeding.

At the time I was handling this case in Israel, each post didn't necessarily have its own database. In 1988–89, visa refusal records were still primarily kept on paper, and automated systems were limited. If a post was automated, it might have access to a teletype connection, but many posts were still relying on microfiche. This created gaps where an ineligibility recorded in one place — Cairo, for example — might not be immediately visible in Tripoli or another post without up-to-date access to the lookout system.

This was a known vulnerability. After the first attack on the World Trade Center, Congress mandated the creation of a real-time global lookout system. However, funding was not provided directly, so the U.S. government had to introduce visa application fees to cover the costs of building that network. This led to the evolution from AVLOS (Automated Visa Lookout System) to the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) — a fully integrated, real-time database ensuring that all posts had immediate access to lookout information.

For the case I was handling, there was a double zero lookout, and I can't recall whether it was flagged through a teletype message or microfiche, but it was there. My job was to gather the relevant information and report it back to Washington, which then provided enough additional details for us to follow up with the applicant. The key question became: Is this actually the same person? If so, we had to determine whether the information met the criteria for an actual ineligibility under U.S. immigration law.

That was where things got complicated. The information we had was classified, meaning I could not reveal its specifics. Instead, I had to conduct an interview in a way that encouraged the applicant to disclose any relevant details. I could ask broad questions to gather insights but could not directly reference what we knew.

And, as you know, you cannot deny a visa solely based on a double zero lookout — double zero is just a flag, not a legal ground for refusal. To legally refuse the visa, we

needed to match the case to a specific section of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). That determination had to be made at post. Washington could provide guidance, but the actual decision had to be made by the consular officer handling the case.

If it was confirmed to be the same person, and we found a clear ground for ineligibility, we had to document it carefully and issue the refusal under the appropriate legal section. If, after careful review, there was no applicable ineligibility, then the visa could be issued — but that decision had to be extremely well thought through, with coordination between the post and Washington.

*Q: Right. Exactly, you had to find out what.*

GOODFRIEND: Right, exactly. You had to determine what the issue was.

Then, once you had enough information, you had to apply it to the correct section of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to determine if there was a legal basis for ineligibility. That's where a lot of interpretation came into play.

This decision had to be made at post — Washington couldn't make the final call. They could provide additional details or guidance, but ultimately, the responsibility to issue or refuse the visa rested with the consular officer handling the case. If the double zero lookout was confirmed to be the same individual, it had to be carefully reviewed with Washington, and the refusal had to be based on a specific section of the law.

At some point, after gathering all the necessary details and ensuring that we had a legitimate basis, a decision had to be made — and it had to be legally sound.

*Q: Just to tie up the loose end, I was a consular officer in Jamaica. And the AVLOS there, to the extent it had derogatory information, was often simply clipped out of newspapers, put in a hard copy file and the local employees. If it was put in a hard copy file, and then typed into the AVLOS, as time allowed, and so when the name was put into the AVLOS and something came out, the local employees could tell you anything, any of the derogatory, criminal activity, known to avoid transporting drugs, whatever it was in the newspaper. But if it came out double zero, they had to just tell us, you have to handle it from here, because it could have been anything classified. But it just gives you an idea of how in some cases, it could be arbitrary, because the simple newspaper report might have been accurate, might not, you don't know how the case ended. And you'd still have to talk to the applicant.*

GOODFRIEND: As my career progressed, I worked on addressing these kinds of issues. I don't recall exactly when the shift happened — maybe in the late '80s or early '90s — but at some point, we were no longer supposed to enter information into the system as just a double zero.

If a person had not yet applied for a visa, but we had clear information — like a newspaper report of a drug trafficking conviction — we needed to enter it with a specific ineligibility code rather than leaving it ambiguous. Let's say, for example, we had the person's name, date of birth, and details of the crime, and we determined that it met the grounds for ineligibility under INA 212(a)(2)(C) for drug trafficking. If the person had already applied for a visa, we could formally refuse them under that section and input the denial into the system.

But if the person had not yet applied for a visa, and we simply wanted to flag the information, we would enter it with a provisional code like P2A3 — essentially a preliminary classification under 212(a)(2)(C). This way, any consular officer reviewing the case in the future would immediately see that the entry wasn't just an unverified double zero lookout; it was a specific concern flagged by a consular officer, linked to an actual ground of ineligibility, but not yet adjudicated.

That change made a big difference because double zero lookouts were too vague. They required a consular officer to go back and forth with Washington, trying to figure out what the actual issue was. By entering clear grounds for ineligibility when possible, we made the system more effective and helped ensure that the lookout information was actionable, rather than just another administrative hurdle.

*Q: Right. Fascinating. All right. If this is a good point to break, what I recommend, as we pause here, and what we can do is pick up next time with sort of the conclusion of Israel, and then move on to the next tour.*

GOODFRIEND: All right, sounds good. Yeah, we've got something coming up in about a little more than an hour.

*Q: Let me just pause the recording.*

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*Q: Okay, today is May 6, 2022, we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend, André, what year are you going out then this is your first post to Tel Aviv?*

GOODFRIEND: Right. I joined the Foreign Service in November 1987, and then arrived in Tel Aviv in July 1988.

*Q: Okay, when you get there, what are the responsibilities that you're told you're going to have?*

GOODFRIEND: It was my first tour, and I was assigned to work in the Nonimmigrant Visa Unit as an adjudicating vice consul. That was the primary responsibility I was given, and it was something I was looking forward to.

As I think I may have mentioned earlier, I didn't need to go through language training at FSI because I had already tested at the required level in Hebrew. However, Tel Aviv couldn't take me immediately after A-100 because I would have overlapped for too long with the officer I was replacing. That's when I worked on the Visa Waiver Pilot Program for a few months before my scheduled arrival in July 1988.

When I got to Tel Aviv, I had a day to settle in — meeting colleagues, registering at the embassy, and getting familiar with the office. Then, my fellow vice consuls walked me through the daily routine. Visa applicants would line up in front of the building with their application forms in hand, and we would conduct interviews at the windows, applying what we had learned in A-100 consular training.

Over the next few days, I gained confidence in the process, building up speed and becoming more comfortable with adjudicating cases. As I settled into the role, I started developing a better sense of the applicant pool and the particular challenges of adjudicating visas in Israel.

*Q: Roughly how many interviews would you do a day, as you recall?*

GOODFRIEND: At the beginning, of course, the number was lower as I was still building up confidence and getting used to the process. But generally, we aimed for about one interview every three minutes.

At that time, there was no data entry happening during the interview. Applicants would arrive with their completed forms in hand, we would conduct the interview, make a decision directly on the form, and then pass it along for processing. Given that pace, a typical rate was around 20 interviews per hour.

With five to six hours of interviewing per day, handling around 100 cases daily wouldn't have been unreasonable.

*Q: Interesting. Were most of your applicants Israeli citizens, or were non-citizens, refugees, and so one?*

GOODFRIEND: Most of the applicants were Israeli citizens, and my Hebrew was strong enough that I could conduct interviews comfortably. I actually enjoyed the interviews and tried to make them engaging rather than purely routine. If I could already see the relevant information on the application form, I didn't just repeat what was there — I used the opportunity to have a short conversation with the applicant.

There was a wide range of applicants — young people just out of the army, people from kibbutzim, professionals from different fields — which gave me a fascinating glimpse into Israeli society. I got a sense of how they viewed work, what they considered important, and what kinds of documentation they provided to prove their financial ties to Israel. Some used pay slips, others had letters from employers stating they were taking time off and would return to work, while others relied on bank statements. There was also

a significant cash economy, and some applicants were partially paid in cash without official pay stubs, meaning that portion of their income wasn't always reported to tax authorities. To them, this wasn't unusual — it was just how the system worked.

In addition to Israelis, we also had applicants from southern Lebanon. There were specific days when buses would come — usually on Tuesdays — from the Israeli-occupied security zone in southern Lebanon, bringing Lebanese applicants to Tel Aviv. Many of them applied for visas in Tel Aviv rather than Beirut because it was easier to travel south than to go north to Beirut, especially given the military and political situation at the time.

There were also Iranian emigrants and others from countries that didn't have diplomatic relations with Israel. Many of them had Israeli travel documents but not yet an Israeli passport, so we had to examine their original passports from their previous countries to process their applications.

*Q: And of course, the Consulate in Jerusalem handled any visas for Palestinians or others in —*

GOODFRIEND: It wasn't strictly broken down by ethnicity or ethnic nationality. Palestinians living within Israel proper could apply for visas in Tel Aviv, and I believe Tel Aviv also handled visa applications from Gaza. Meanwhile, the Consulate General in Jerusalem was responsible for the West Bank and Jerusalem. That meant Jerusalem handled both Israeli citizens residing in Jerusalem or the West Bank as well as Palestinians living in those areas.

This also highlighted an interesting issue regarding the concept of nationality. On the visa application form, there was a field asking for the applicant's nationality. Many applicants would write Arab or Jew in response. From an American perspective, nationality is synonymous with citizenship, so we had to clarify. If someone wrote Jew or Arab, we'd ask, "What's your nationality?" — meaning, which country are you a national of? Often, their response would still be "Arab" or "Jew." We'd then ask, "What's on your passport? What country's passport do you hold?" Then they'd say, "Oh, you mean my citizenship" — which, to them, was a separate concept.

For many applicants, nationality was more akin to ethnicity or ethnic identity rather than legal citizenship. But for the purposes of U.S. visa applications, what mattered was their country of citizenship. If they were Israeli citizens, they had Israeli passports. If they were Jordanian citizens, they had Jordanian passports. Some had Israeli travel documents rather than full citizenship, but at the time, there was no such thing as a Palestinian passport — that would come later.

This issue isn't unique to Israel. The United States is somewhat of an outlier in that it treats nationality and citizenship as synonyms, whereas in many other countries — Russia, Britain, Hungary, among others — nationality is a broader concept that isn't

necessarily tied to citizenship. It was something that required clarification in the visa process, but also offered insight into how different societies define identity.

*Q: Interesting. Now, before we go on to any other specific experiences, can you talk about the security situation in Israel, that you found as you arrived, and whether it changed significantly? Here, I don't mean so much crime, but the effects of whatever military activities were going on between Israel and its neighbors.*

GOODFRIEND: I arrived in July 1988 and stayed until 1990. This was my second time in Israel — I had previously been a student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem from 1983 to 1985. Comparing those two periods, which were only three years apart, I noticed significant differences.

As a student from 1983 to 1985, I did the things students do. I could hitchhike, traveling from the kibbutz where I had studied Hebrew in the Sharon Mountains into the West Bank or up to Nazareth. But that was as a private individual, unaffiliated with the U.S. government. As a diplomat in 1988, things were different. We didn't hitchhike, of course, and moving around required more caution. When I had been a student in Jerusalem, getting around was not an issue. But by the time I arrived for my diplomatic posting in 1988, the First Intifada had been underway since December of the previous year. The security situation in Jerusalem had become more tense.

Because I was stationed in Tel Aviv, we were required to notify the Regional Security Officer (RSO) if we wanted to go to Jerusalem for personal reasons. We couldn't simply travel there without permission. The same applied to visiting the West Bank or Gaza — going there required explicit authorization.

During my time in Israel, the security situation remained fairly consistent. There was a noticeable difference between 1985 and 1988, but once I arrived in 1988, things remained stable. However, after I left in the summer of 1990, things changed dramatically. The Gulf War began, and Israel was targeted by missile attacks. I kept in touch with colleagues who were still there, and they described sheltering procedures and the increased security concerns, but that was after my departure.

While I was there, security was a concern, but it wasn't overwhelming. One issue was the lack of setbacks around the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. At that time, some embassies were already built with significant security measures, including barriers and distance from public areas. But the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv was right on the street, separated only by the sidewalk. Visa applicants would line up outside in long queues that extended into the adjacent parking lot.

The embassy building itself sat on top of an underground public parking garage, which raised concerns about potential car bombs. However, at the time, the security assessment was that the normal parking controls were sufficient to prevent an attack. Another factor was the ongoing debate about moving the embassy to Jerusalem. This was something the Israeli government strongly supported, and the U.S. was actively searching for a suitable

site in Jerusalem. The expectation that a move might happen meant that long-term security upgrades in Tel Aviv were deprioritized.

Security procedures at the embassy were fairly standard for the time. Visitors were screened at the entrance. The embassy housed both the Consular Section and the American Library. Those applying for visas or consular services entered through one door, while those visiting the library entered through another. There was basic security screening at both entry points.

There were other security-related concerns, particularly regarding fraud and how visas were being processed. In terms of physical security, the situation remained stable during my time there. The major changes would come later, during and after the Gulf War.

*Q: Just one more question, sort of of a more general nature. You talked about the difference between nationality and citizenship. Did you notice other trends, other social trends in the discussions, however brief you had with your applicants? And was that something that you would periodically talk to the economic section or the political section about?*

GOODFRIEND: There were certainly patterns among visa applicants that reflected broader social divisions within Israeli society. We saw applicants from both religious and secular communities, and among the religious communities, there were further distinctions. For example, some applicants were part of the Hasidic community, particularly those associated with Chabad or the Lubavitch movement, traveling to the United States to visit Rabbi Schneerson in New York. Others came from Orthodox communities that did not serve in the military, either because they had a religious exemption or because their community's role in society was structured differently.

In evaluating ties to Israel, we had to consider both those who were engaged in formal employment and those who were studying full-time in religious institutions without military service or work experience. Some groups claimed religious exemptions, but in interviews, it sometimes became apparent that not all were engaged in full-time religious study. This raised broader questions about the use of religious exemptions by those who might not be as committed to religious life but were avoiding military service. These interviews provided insights into social and economic structures, including how people were paid and how they viewed their economic standing.

These were topics we discussed internally, but at the time, there weren't formal briefings between the consular section and other sections of the embassy. However, there was a structured rotation program for junior officers, so after a year, vice consuls would rotate to either the political or economic section. This allowed us to carry insights gained from visa interviews into broader diplomatic reporting and analysis. When I moved to the political section, part of my portfolio included Israel's relations with expatriate and diaspora communities, as well as its ties to Jewish communities in Syria, Eastern Europe, the United States, and Africa. Understanding migration patterns — where immigrants

were settling in Israel and how they were integrating — was valuable context for this work.

At that time, the Jewish community from Ethiopia had recently immigrated to Israel, just a couple of years before I arrived. It was interesting to observe how they were integrating into Israeli society. I don't recall seeing many, if any, Ethiopian Jewish applicants for U.S. visas, whereas a significant number of Iranian Jewish applicants were seeking visas before obtaining Israeli citizenship. These different migration patterns reflected broader differences in how communities were adjusting and their connections to the U.S.

Although there were no formal interdepartmental briefings on these topics, I came to see the importance of cross-communication between the consular section and other parts of the embassy. In later postings, I worked to ensure that consular insights were effectively integrated into embassy reporting and that the perspectives of other sections informed consular decision-making. Unlike some other posts I later served in, Tel Aviv did not have a structured briefing program for entry-level officers from different sections. Instead, the assumption was that the rotational system itself would expose officers to the full range of embassy work.

*Q: Okay, before we follow you into the political section, you have also mentioned issues related to fraud. And I wonder how serious that was.*

GOODFRIEND: In 1988, we were just starting to integrate one of the first computer systems into our consular section. The system had been installed only a month or two before I arrived. In preparation for the assignment, I read up on how the different visa systems functioned. At the time, the nonimmigrant visa system was called NIVCAPS, and the immigrant visa system was IVACS. These were primarily data storage systems rather than fully functional processing systems. They didn't generate documentation; instead, they served as a place to record decisions so they could be stored and accessed in Washington as an archival record. However, all actual visa decisions were still recorded on paper and stored in file cabinets.

Visa printing was done using Burroughs machines, named after the manufacturer, which were automated stamping machines. The consular officers would receive paper application forms — at the time, the standard form was the DS-156 — directly from visa applicants who had been waiting in line outside the embassy. The applicants approached the first available consular officer, and the first information the officer had about them came from looking at the form and seeing their face. The interview process was immediate and interactive.

*Q: That would be the beginning of the visa conversation and of the interview, the officer would make a decision.*

GOODFRIEND: Right, the decision was made on the form, and the officer would then pass it, along with their notes, to the local staff. If the application was refused, the local

staff would record it as a refusal in the new system. If it was approved, the next step was to process the visa.

For approved cases, the name check was conducted using a telex system, since we were fortunate to be at a post that had a direct line to a central database in Washington. However, if that line was down, the staff would have to rely on microfiche records to check for any prior refusals or derogatory information associated with the applicant's name. If a name check resulted in a hit, the local staff would flag the case and return the application to the officer for further review. The officer would then determine whether the new information was significant enough to warrant a re-evaluation.

If there were concerns, the officer could call the applicant back in for additional questioning. Since applicants who were approved were typically told to return later in the day to pick up their passports with the visa inside, this system allowed for a brief window in which additional issues could be resolved before finalizing the process. If the officer needed further clarification, they could conduct a follow-up interview when the applicant returned.

*Q: And if it was something that meant that the visa couldn't be issued then they would inform the applicant, or if the applicant was able to clarify and overcome any concerns, then it would go back to visa issuance and after that the information about the issued visa would be entered into that same NIVCAPS system.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, I didn't like that process. I thought the name check should have been done before an applicant saw the visa officer so that the officer wouldn't have to interview the same person twice. If the name check results were available at the time of the interview, it would have made the process much more efficient.

Additionally, entering the applicant's data into the system before the interview would have ensured that there was always a record of every application submitted. As it was, no data was entered until after the officer had made a decision. That meant there was always the risk that an application could be lost, leaving no record that it ever existed. That was a serious vulnerability. If a visa was issued improperly, or if fraudulent activity occurred, there was no initial digital trail. I felt strongly that the workflow should have been redesigned so that data entry happened at the start of the process rather than at the end.

That was the situation, though it was probably still an improvement over what existed before the computer system. Like I said, the system had only been installed two or three months before I arrived. Prior to that, there was no computerization — no digital record of issued visas at all. The only record was the paper files stored at the embassy. If you needed to check whether a visa had been issued, you had to physically go through those paper records.

The only digital records stored separately were those related to certain refusals, and even those were limited. The refusal records entered through the Telex system were typically

reserved for serious ineligibilities. Otherwise, the only real proof of a prior refusal was a stamp placed in the back of the applicant's passport.

At least now, there was some kind of electronic database that kept records of issuances and refusals, but it was not global. Each embassy only had access to its own records. In principle, someone could be refused in Tel Aviv and then apply in Cairo, and the consular officers there would have no way of knowing about the previous refusal — unless it was a more serious ineligibility that had been recorded in the central system.

For example, standard refusals under Section 214(b) or Section 221(g) would not be visible to another embassy. These were common refusals — 214(b) meaning that the applicant had not sufficiently demonstrated strong ties to their home country, making it unclear whether they would return after a short visit to the U.S. That type of refusal wasn't permanently recorded in a way that other posts could see; the only indication was the stamp in the applicant's passport.

On the other hand, more serious ineligibilities — such as those under Section 212(a), which covers criminal records and other significant grounds for denial — were entered into a central database through the Telex system. Those ineligibilities would be visible to other embassies, preventing applicants from attempting to circumvent the system by applying at a different post.

That was the situation when I arrived. What happened next was that we started hearing from the consulate in Jerusalem that they were being told — either from their contacts or from applicants themselves — that people who had been refused visas in Jerusalem were later getting visas issued in Tel Aviv. This was a serious concern because we would never knowingly overturn a refusal from Jerusalem.

If an applicant lived within Jerusalem's consular district — which included the West Bank — we would typically direct them to apply at the consulate there. We respected the jurisdictional boundaries, and unless there was a compelling reason, we would not process their application in Tel Aviv.

If someone applied in Tel Aviv and had never been refused before, we might consider their application. But if we saw that they had previously been refused in Jerusalem, our standard procedure was to tell them they needed to go back to Jerusalem and discuss it there. It wouldn't make sense for us to overturn a refusal from Jerusalem without even consulting them.

When we were first informed of this issue, our response was, "Do you have any evidence?" We understood they were hearing this from their contacts, but we needed concrete proof. A few days later, they sent us a photocopy of a visa that had been issued in Tel Aviv to an applicant whose records in Jerusalem clearly showed a prior refusal. This was alarming because the visa appeared legitimate — it had the correct Tel Aviv issuance stamp and an appropriate sequence number for the day it was supposedly issued.

The Burroughs stamping machines we used assigned sequential numbers mechanically, so it fit within the normal sequence of visas processed that day.

When issuing a visa, the process was purely mechanical, not digital. The Burroughs machine advanced the numbering system with each visa issued. If you issued visa number one, the machine would automatically advance to number two, and the next person would receive visa number two.

To maintain accountability, we recorded the first visa number at the start of the day. At the end of the day, we recorded the final number. For example, if we issued 300 visas in a day, the first visa might start at 1, and the last visa of the day would be 300. The next morning, the machine should continue from 300. If, by the start of the next day, the machine showed a number like 305 instead of 300, that would indicate that five visas had been issued after working hours. Any discrepancy like that would immediately trigger an investigation.

The visas we received from Jerusalem had the correct numbering, corresponding to visas issued during regular hours. There were no unexplained gaps overnight. If we had started the day with visa number one and ended with visa number three hundred, the questionable visa might have been numbered, say, one sixty-five — right within that expected range.

We checked our records and found no record of a visa application for that individual. There was no indication that an officer had ever reviewed or approved the application. That was troubling. It was as if the visa had been issued, but without any corresponding documentation in our system.

We responded to Jerusalem that while the visa in question had the correct numbering, there was no indication that anyone in Tel Aviv had authorized its issuance or overturned Jerusalem's refusal. It was a serious issue. At that point, I suggested that we should reconsider how we accounted for visas issued each day. Given what we were seeing, I proposed that instead of merely recording the starting and ending numbers, we should physically count the paper application forms corresponding to each visa issuance. If we issued three hundred visas in a day, we should be able to count and verify that there were three hundred corresponding forms approving those visas.

I was told that this approach would be too labor-intensive to implement as a routine practice. It was seen as unnecessary. Additionally, as I had mentioned earlier, I had suggested that every visa application received should be entered into our database before an officer adjudicated it. That way, we would at least have a record of every submission, making it easier to detect if any forms had gone missing.

That was where things stood — we had no record of issuing these visas, and it wasn't just one isolated case. There were multiple instances. By that point, I had rotated out of the Nonimmigrant Visa section and was now in American Citizen Services, so I was no longer directly involved with visa adjudications.

By the summer of 1989, about a year after I had arrived in Tel Aviv, it turned out that Diplomatic Security (DS) and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) had launched an investigation into what was happening in the consular section. The investigation had been triggered by Jerusalem's concerns. They had provided compelling evidence that visas, which appeared to be genuine and issued in Tel Aviv, had been granted to individuals from their consular district — individuals they had previously refused.

Despite this, we in Tel Aviv had been unable to pinpoint the source of the problem. We had looked at our records, checked the visa numbering sequences, and still couldn't determine how these visas were being issued without authorization. The fact that they carried valid serial numbers made it all the more perplexing. That's when DS and OIG got involved to dig deeper into what was going on.

DS and OIG had been investigating this without the knowledge of most of the staff, and they had installed hidden cameras to monitor what was happening in the consular section. This isn't classified information — it actually became part of consular training later on, and I remember seeing the footage in the early '90s.

What was happening was that visa officers, including myself when I was there, had our backs to where the visa processing was taking place. We couldn't see what was happening behind us. The investigation revealed that some of the local staff — three employees from the consular section, some guards, and even a driver from the Defense Attaché's office — were running a visa fraud scheme.

They were smuggling in the passport details of individuals who had been denied visas in Jerusalem. Sometimes it wasn't even a full application — just information written down. They would stuff these details into their socks or pockets, and when no one was looking, they would pull them out, place the passports into the Burroughs machine, stamp an unauthorized visa, then tuck the passports back into their clothing and walk out.

The passports were then handed off — likely to the Defense Attaché's office driver, who made regular trips to the West Bank. He, in turn, passed them to travel agents who were working in collusion with them.

After the investigation, five local employees were arrested for their involvement in the scheme. There was no evidence that any American personnel were complicit, but the local employees had been actively engaged in the fraud. From what I recall, there was also a political dimension to it — an underlying motive beyond just personal gain. The mentality seemed to be that if people from the West Bank, particularly Palestinians, wanted to leave and go to the United States, they should be helped to do so. It was seen as beneficial to Israel's demographics if more Palestinians emigrated.

The impact on the consular section was devastating. The arrests and subsequent dismissals left the section severely understaffed.

We lost five local employees — three from the Consular Section and two from outside. In addition to that, the two adjudicating consular officers who had been working during the investigation were found to have committed other infractions. These weren't related to the visa fraud itself but were still violations, perhaps due to a lack of awareness as first-tour officers. One issue involved abuse of the diplomatic pouch — bringing in items for friends to avoid customs duties. Another involved cohabiting with a local national without notifying Diplomatic Security, which was a requirement.

As a result, both entry-level officers were counseled and given directed assignments elsewhere. It wasn't framed as a punishment but rather as a learning experience — essentially, a way to move forward after their effectiveness had been compromised in Tel Aviv. They were reassigned to other locations, not necessarily bad posts, but places where they could start fresh with a better understanding of the expectations and responsibilities that came with the job.

The head of the visa section, however, faced a different outcome. He was recalled to Washington.

There was no designated head of the visa section, but we lost five local employees and two entry-level officers. In the aftermath, we brought in personnel from Washington to assist, as the section was severely short-staffed. I was also delayed in starting my rotation into the political section so that I could help out in the Consular Section during this period.

That experience was a major learning moment for me, particularly in terms of the importance of accountability. We needed to be able to track and account for every application received, ensuring that there was no room for uncertainty or missing records. The fact that we had been in a situation where we couldn't immediately determine whether a visa had been issued, or where we lacked the ability to definitively say that an application had even been submitted, underscored the weaknesses in our system.

This reinforced my belief that there needed to be stronger procedural safeguards — whether by counting physical application forms, improving our record-keeping processes, or changing our computer system to ensure that every step of the adjudication process was logged. That realization shaped not only my approach to consular work moving forward but also my broader perspective on ensuring accountability and transparency in any professional setting.

It also reinforced something I had mentioned previously — how computer systems should be designed to do what they are supposed to do, rather than placing the entire burden of tracking and accountability on humans. The failure here wasn't just about the fraudulent activity itself, but also about how weaknesses in our systems created opportunities for exploitation. If our systems had been designed to automatically log every application received and issued, there would have been much stronger safeguards in place.

This experience in Tel Aviv was an initial motivator for my perspective moving forward. I saw firsthand how the absence of proper oversight didn't just create inefficiencies — it compromised careers. Even employees who might have otherwise followed the rules could see that the oversight mechanisms were weak, and some gave in to the temptation. This was a major learning experience for me, both in understanding the consequences of poor accountability and in recognizing how proper system design could prevent these types of vulnerabilities in the future.

I think another significant aspect of rotating out from the non-immigrant visa unit was our interaction with visa applicants coming in from Lebanon. Earlier, you asked about whether we shared information about what we were seeing, and in many ways, the visa interview process itself provided a wealth of insight — not just about individual applicants, but about broader economic and social conditions.

For Israelis, the process often revealed perspectives on their work environment, their connections, and how they framed their reasons for returning after a short stay in the United States. But for Lebanese applicants coming from southern Lebanon — a war zone at the time — there was an entirely different dynamic. These were people who couldn't even apply for visas in their own country, so they came to Tel Aviv to do so. That in itself was an unusual situation and provided a unique window into life in southern Lebanon.

Hearing their descriptions of the conditions there, how they justified their ties to Lebanon, and why they would return to a warzone rather than overstay in the U.S. was striking. Many of their claims strained credibility. They would present what they saw as evidence of stability — bank books, property ownership records, or work documentation — but much of it was clearly manufactured. The prevalence of fraudulent documents underscored the difficulty of verifying claims from an unstable environment and showed how people adapted their narratives in an attempt to fit what they thought visa officers needed to hear.

This was also, I think, a lesson in the unreliability of printed documentation. The real question wasn't just whether an applicant had a piece of paper proving their employment or financial stability, but how well they could actually speak to it. Did they understand the job they claimed to have? Could they explain how they were financing their trip? Did their travel plans make sense in context? These details often told us more than the documents themselves.

We were seeing distinct patterns in the applications coming from southern Lebanon, and I took an interest in analyzing this — not just in terms of individual cases but in the broader sociological patterns that emerged through the visa process. Since I was one of the few officers left in the section, particularly after the fraud investigation, I took it upon myself to write up and share our observations.

I would send cables outlining what we were seeing in Tel Aviv, and soon other embassies responded, saying they were noticing similar trends. This kind of reporting helped establish a broader regional understanding of migration patterns, fraud tactics, and the

economic pressures shaping applicants' decisions. It reinforced the idea that visa work wasn't just about individual cases — it was also a tool for gathering valuable information on regional dynamics.

As a result of these cables, a regional conference was proposed in Cyprus for posts that were seeing similar patterns of Lebanese applicants applying outside of Lebanon. It was encouraging to see that by sharing information, we could identify common issues and work together across multiple posts to better understand and address them.

What was less encouraging was that, despite being the main reporting officer on these patterns, my supervisor decided that he should be the one to attend the conference. I was a first-tour officer, so I accepted it as part of the hierarchy, but it was still a reminder that contributions don't always translate into recognition. Nonetheless, the takeaway was that sharing insights from consular work could have a tangible impact beyond individual adjudications — it could shape regional policies and approaches.

I think that, ultimately, everything is a learning experience, and this was the beginning of my career. I came to emphasize the importance of sharing information and collaborating effectively. It's always better to focus on what we achieve collectively rather than just personal recognition. Of course, it would have been nice to attend the conference, but the key takeaway was that my reporting was generating a real response.

People weren't just reading it and thinking, "Well, that's interesting." They were saying, "If we all share information, we can make better decisions." That was the real accomplishment — not just individual participation, but fostering a system where collaboration led to concrete action.

That was, again, especially at that point, all part of the learning experience. And generally, they were positive ones. Even the fraud I mentioned was ultimately a learning experience — one that had solutions, steps that could be taken to address vulnerabilities. And moving forward, I continued to be part of efforts to strengthen accountability and security, applying those lessons to improve the system wherever possible.

There were a lot of learning experiences during those first eight months or so. And then, as I mentioned, I rotated into American Citizen Services, where the focus shifted to how we engaged with American citizens there. I believe we may have already discussed this — I'm getting a bit of déjà vu — but I think we talked about the Black Hebrew community and the risks of expatriating acts. I described the situation in Dimona and the approach we took to addressing it, recognizing that sometimes even actions that appear to be voluntary expatriation may be undertaken without a full understanding of the consequences. That was a key issue we had to navigate.

But afterwards, we had to take into account the possibility that the person had been under duress. That was something we dealt with in American Citizen Services, and it provided insight into why American citizens might choose to go to other countries, want to stay there, and sometimes even give up their U.S. citizenship. It also reinforced how important

U.S. citizenship could be — especially in difficult situations like legal trouble abroad. The significance of a jail visit from a consular officer to an American in distress was something that became very clear.

Another aspect was the growing prevalence of dual nationality and how it changed our role. At one point, there weren't as many dual nationals overseas. But after the ruling on Kahane, which I'm pretty sure we discussed, the nature of our interactions with American citizens abroad shifted. It affected how we handled issues of nationality, consular protection, and the complexities of obligations to two different legal systems.

Suddenly, many Israelis who had effectively given up their U.S. citizenship by acquiring Israeli citizenship — by explicitly requesting it — were now recognized again as American citizens. This also extended to their children, meaning that we had a significant number of dual nationals, both within Israel proper and in the territories.

Navigating the line between what rights and responsibilities we had as U.S. officials toward American citizens who also held another nationality became a central issue.

How we navigated that was something that wasn't just evolving during my time there — it was part of a broader policy discussion that had been ongoing for years. At my level, I wasn't involved in shaping policy, but I was able to see firsthand how these issues played out on the ground. What became clear was the value we placed on U.S. citizenship and the extent to which we went to protect it.

What emerged from this approach was essentially a kind of official blindness to other citizenships. Our stance was that if someone was a U.S. citizen, then that was the only status that mattered from our perspective. Whether they also held Israeli citizenship, how they acquired it, or what obligations it imposed on them was not something we officially acknowledged in our interactions.

It's not something we're going to acknowledge in a way that changes how we treat dual nationals. As far as we're concerned, they are American citizens, and we will treat them the same way we would any other American citizen. But we also have to recognize that we may face pushback from their other country of citizenship.

Our stance was clear — we would do everything in our power to assert our consular rights. Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, we had the right to visit and assist our citizens. However, if the host country said, "Well, this person is our citizen, and we don't recognize your claim," that created a challenge.

But again, every action, at that point in my career, was a learning experience that helped shape my perspective moving forward.

*Q: One last question about the consular section before we move on. While you were there, did you have VIP visits? And were you required to assist with any of those?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, we had visits from members of Congress who came on CODELs, and entry-level officers were often asked to assist. I assisted with some of these congressional visits. I don't believe there was a Secretary of State visit or a presidential or vice-presidential visit while I was there — if there had been, it would have been an all-hands-on-deck situation where everyone was required to assist in some way. But with congressional delegations, I was asked to help.

It was a chance not only to ensure that the visiting congressperson or senator was accommodated and got where they needed to go but also an opportunity to talk with them about the situation on the ground. What we had back in '88, '89, as I recall, was that a number of the CODELs were not necessarily funded by taxpayer money. Some of these visits were sponsored by lobbying groups that wanted members of Congress to come and see the situation in Israel and the occupied territories from a particular perspective.

We had to be aware that the group funding the visit might be trying to present a specific narrative, and we needed to ensure that the visiting congressperson received as full a picture as possible. Part of our role was to make sure they got an objective briefing on the situation in the areas they were visiting and to help put things in context.

*Q: All right. Now, you're moved to the political section, you mentioned that you had a certain area of reporting, but let's go ahead and start with that.*

GOODFRIEND: As I noted, my transfer to the political section was delayed due to the fraud issue I'd mentioned earlier and the loss of personnel. I had returned from R&R, expecting to start in the political section immediately. I had taken a summer vacation, thinking the break would align with the transition. Instead, I returned to the consular section because of the sudden staffing shortages. So I remained there until about September, as I recall, before finally shifting to the political section.

It was a completely different environment. In the consular section, my day had been structured for me — starting first thing in the morning with visa interviews, adjudications, and processing passports. In the political section, my time was far less structured. I had to learn the various portfolios, understand the ongoing work, and recognize my place as the most junior officer among seasoned mid-level and senior officers. These were people with years of experience, well-established contacts in the Knesset, and deep engagement in the peace process and domestic politics.

These were the portfolios. We had a labor attaché who worked closely with the economic section. There was an entry-level officer in the economic section as well, and we would collaborate from time to time while still maintaining our distinct responsibilities.

My portfolio included Israel's relations with its diaspora communities, its changing relationships with African states, and its engagement with international organizations and NGOs. I had to step back and consider what this actually meant — how I could contribute effectively, how to engage with my colleagues in the section, and where our

roles intersected. It was an ongoing process of learning how to partner within the section while developing my own contacts and reporting.

Another key difference from my previous work in the consular section was the shift to classified reporting. In consular work, most of the reporting was unclassified. Now, I was working in an environment where classified analysis was a routine part of the job, and I had to adapt to that as well.

The classified environment was computerized, and we used Wang computers — State Department-standard word processors at the time. They were state-of-the-art for the 1980s, but it was still a frustrating period for using computers. We drafted and processed cables, learning the different formats and ensuring that our reports provided the necessary context. Just as I had focused on contextualizing information for visiting VIPs and congressional delegations, we also needed to provide Washington with clear and nuanced analyses.

We were the people on the ground, responsible for understanding and reporting on Israel's relationships with various diaspora communities, as well as how new arrivals were being integrated into Israeli society. I examined differences in how different immigrant groups were treated — such as Ethiopian Jews compared to those arriving from Eastern or Central Europe — and tried to understand both the societal divisions and the areas where they found common ground.

My prior experience in the consular section, particularly interacting with visa applicants from diverse backgrounds, helped shape my perspective on these issues. So did my time as a student in Israel, which gave me a broader understanding of the cultural and political dynamics at play.

When I moved to the political section in September 1989, I was assigned what were initially considered lower-priority portfolios — Israel's relations with its diaspora, relations with African states, and its engagement with international organizations and NGOs. But then, within months, the Berlin Wall came down, and the landscape in Central and Eastern Europe changed dramatically. This led to a significant increase in the number of Jews emigrating from the former Eastern Bloc to Israel.

Suddenly, understanding the mechanisms behind this migration — how different countries were facilitating Jewish emigration to Israel and what role Israel itself was playing — became much more relevant. It was no longer just an abstract issue about relations with diaspora communities; it became an urgent, evolving reality that had a direct impact on Israel's demographics and politics. Russian Jews, who had been largely restricted from emigrating before, were now arriving in large numbers.

This shift elevated the importance of my portfolio, as tracking which governments were cooperating in facilitating this migration — and how Israel was managing the influx — became key to understanding broader regional developments. What had once been a

lower-profile assignment was now central to some of the biggest geopolitical changes of the time.

That became my portfolio — establishing relationships with key ministries, particularly the Ministry of Absorption, and tracking how Israel was managing the dramatic increase in immigration. Understanding where these new immigrants were being placed and how they were impacting Israeli demographics became a crucial part of my reporting.

At the time, Israel was under a Likud government, and this influx was seen as an opportunity to settle more of the Jewish population in areas that had traditionally been non-Jewish. Many of the new arrivals were being directed toward settlements in the West Bank and areas around Jerusalem, and these moves were being actively subsidized by the Israeli government.

From the U.S. policy perspective, this raised serious concerns. Our position was to support a peace process based on the facts as they were, not to enable changes on the ground that could undermine negotiations. We were clear that U.S. funds were not to be used in any way to facilitate settlement expansion.

That led to increased engagement with the economic section. We needed to examine what financial assistance Israel was receiving, what constraints were attached to those funds, and how we assessed fungibility — whether our aid, even if not directly allocated to settlement expansion, was enabling it in other ways by freeing up Israeli resources. The question then became, where should we raise our concerns, and how could we ensure our policy goals were being met?

I received feedback that my reporting on this issue was being closely read and assessed in Washington. As a first-tour officer, it was encouraging to know that the work I was doing was having an impact, that the cables I was sending were not just being filed away but were actually influencing discussions at higher levels. It reinforced the idea that even at a junior level, there were opportunities to contribute meaningfully to policy discussions.

I knew that my colleagues in the political section were working on high-profile issues, and their reporting was being closely reviewed and acted upon, helping to shape policy. But what became clear to me was that if you could put an issue into context and understand what your audience was looking for, then regardless of your level or the specific portfolio you were assigned, your work could have an impact. That was encouraging.

It was similar to what I had experienced in the consular section — reporting on Lebanese visa applicants and receiving feedback that those patterns were of interest. Knowing that the information I was providing was not just being read but was actually informing decisions gave a sense of purpose. The same was true in the political section. The demographic shifts I was reporting on were changing the situation on the ground within Israel, and policymakers wanted to understand the implications. The fact that they viewed

my reporting as credible and valuable in their determinations reinforced the responsibility I had to ensure I was providing accurate, well-contextualized information.

If people thought we were crossing any lines — because, as I mentioned, I was engaging with officials in various ministries about how they were using the money, ensuring it was allocated as intended — there would sometimes be feedback to the embassy. Questions that seemed too pointed, especially coming from an entry-level officer, could provoke a reaction. Ministries might push back, questioning why someone so junior was asking these kinds of things or whether we were accusing them of misusing funds.

That kind of response was more directed at my entry-level colleague in the economic section, with whom I worked closely. Maybe I played the "good cop" in those interactions, I don't know. I didn't personally receive much pushback, which may have been because of my approach — something I had learned from my consular experience. When interviewing people for visas, I never wanted to be intimidating. The goal was to gather information and make effective decisions through conversation rather than interrogation.

I carried that same approach into my political work. If I was talking to someone, I wanted it to feel like a discussion, an interview where they understood that they were speaking to a U.S. government representative, and that the information they provided would be part of our decision-making processes. But at the same time, I wanted them to engage openly, to share insights in a way that didn't feel confrontational. That was the balance we struck in these conversations.

*Q: Yeah, no, excellent. During that time, what were any of the issues or the topics that stand out most in your mind as the ones that mattered most to either the embassy or?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, like I mentioned, the global environment was shifting dramatically, and the fall of the Berlin Wall was a major turning point. The primary effects weren't necessarily felt in Israel, but it fundamentally changed relationships between the United States and many other countries, and it certainly altered Israel's relationships as well. This new dynamic — first with the fall of the Wall, and then the collapse of other governments in Romania, Hungary, and beyond — reshaped diplomatic priorities and strategies. It affected U.S. perspectives, the ability to engage with emerging governments, and the policies we were shaping.

For the embassy in Israel, however, the peace process remained paramount. That was the core focus. No matter what else was happening in the world, our role was still to monitor, report, and provide analysis on developments that could impact U.S. policy in the region.

*Q: Although, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the changes, I imagine there was an increase in Immigration to Israel from at least some of those former communist countries*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, that's exactly what I was referring to with the large increase in immigration. A significant portion of that was coming from the former communist

countries. I was tracking how countries that had previously maintained a more distant or even standoffish relationship with Israel were now shifting their policies. One of the indicators was the emergence of new transit routes — Hungarian airlines, for example, became a major conduit for Jewish emigration from Russia and the broader Soviet Union. Even while the Soviet Union still existed, we could see shifts in which countries were facilitating movement, and that served as a tangible indicator of changing diplomatic postures.

There were other significant developments happening at the same time. The Syrian-Jewish community was also leaving, and questions arose about how many were actually immigrating to Israel versus how many were choosing to go to the United States. As barriers fell and more Jewish communities had the opportunity to emigrate, these patterns became more pronounced.

I saw this issue more closely later in my career, particularly when I was assigned to Russia. At that time, Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate needed an invitation letter from Israel. Declaring an intention to move to Israel provided a way to secure exit permission from the Soviet authorities. But once they left, many opted to go elsewhere — often the United States — rather than continuing to Israel. That dynamic created diplomatic sensitivities both with Israel and within the U.S. refugee and immigration framework.

But a number of those who had left the Soviet Union and now found themselves in transit would change their destination when they reached Vienna. This wasn't necessarily happening in 1989 at the immediate outset, but as the political situation in Central and Eastern Europe evolved and more people were able to leave, this pattern became more common.

There were many who were leaving with Israel as their purported destination but changed their plans en route, opting instead to go to the United States. This led to a large encampment, I believe in Italy, of people who had initially declared their intention to immigrate to Israel but, upon reaching Vienna, sought refugee status in the U.S. rather than continuing to Israel. The growing number of cases led to changes in policy, which we'll discuss further as we move forward.

As far as other issues during that time — 1988, 1989, and early 1990 — within Israel, there was a shift with the transition to President George H.W. Bush's administration. The 1988 election brought in a new administration, and part of our work at the embassy was understanding how these changes in U.S. policy were being conveyed and received in Israel.

But the peace process was the top priority. That was the overarching focus of the embassy's work. While I wasn't directly involved in the high-level negotiations, my role in tracking how U.S. funds were being used — particularly concerning immigrant populations — played into the broader policy discussions. Understanding where these new arrivals were settling and how Israeli government incentives were shaping those decisions was important. Others in the political section were focused on labor relations,

internal Israeli politics, and other issues, but everything was ultimately viewed through the lens of how it affected the peace process.

There was also a strong focus on the question of the embassy's location — whether it would remain in Tel Aviv or if a suitable site could be found in Jerusalem. There were ongoing discussions with the Israelis about identifying an appropriate location, but it remained an open issue.

However, if there was one issue that truly dominated everything, it was the peace process. That was the central concern, shaping so much of what we did. A key question was how to involve the Palestinian community more effectively in the process.

What I do remember, going back to consular work, was a particular case during my brief rotation in Jerusalem — maybe a week or two — that stood out. By chance, while I was there, a member of the PLO, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, applied for a visa to the United States. Under U.S. law at the time, simple membership in the PLO, by name and definition, was grounds for exclusion from the U.S.

However, this case was handled with more nuance. I remember that we actually went out to his house to speak with him directly. The key issue was determining the nature of his involvement — was he engaged in activities that would be considered paramilitary or terrorist in nature, or was his role primarily political? This was significant because, at the time, there were ongoing discussions about distinguishing between political engagement and violent activities, much like the evolving conversations surrounding members of the IRA.

The broader effort was to facilitate dialogue and progress toward peace by recognizing and engaging with individuals who were focused on political advocacy rather than violence. There was an emerging sense that enabling such discussions could be a constructive step. It was an interesting moment, highlighting the complexities of engagement with groups that had both political and militant wings, and the challenge of applying U.S. immigration law in a way that balanced security concerns with diplomatic and political objectives.

At that time, we were actively looking for ways to distinguish between individuals within the Palestinian Liberation Organization — those who were primarily engaged in terrorist activity and those who were playing a role in shaping a political solution. It was part of the broader effort to facilitate dialogue and move the peace process forward.

This was an ongoing discussion, not just within our embassy but also in Washington. The challenge was determining where to draw the line. Membership in the PLO, by definition, had been grounds for exclusion from the U.S., but as political realities evolved, there was a growing recognition that engaging with certain figures could be beneficial. The question was how to identify those whose involvement was primarily political — people who could contribute to negotiations — while maintaining restrictions on those actively engaged in violence.

*Q: Yeah. The only other question I have about politics at that time, was it still relatively early in the migrations to Israel from the former communist countries? But were you already beginning to see changes in the political spectrum or the political scene in Israel as a result of these immigrations?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, the migration from former communist countries was already beginning to have an impact on Israel's political landscape, even in its early stages. I had mentioned earlier the arrival of the Ethiopian Jewish community, which was visibly changing Israel's demographic composition. Their integration process was marked by challenges — there were doubts raised about their Jewishness, despite their long-standing traditions, and many were expected to undergo conversion as a kind of compromise. This was met with frustration, particularly since many Ethiopian Jews viewed themselves as more religiously observant than a significant portion of Israel's secular Jewish population.

In contrast, the large influx of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was welcomed with fewer such concerns. Their arrival was seen as a major demographic boost, particularly for the Ashkenazi Jewish community.

Already within Israel, there were established demographic divisions. The Ashkenazi Jewish community, which had roots in Eastern Europe and even the United States, was one major group, while the Sephardic Jewish community, primarily from North Africa and the Middle East, was the other. Sometimes the Sephardic Jews were also referred to as the Oriental Jewish community. These two broad categories — Ashkenazi and Sephardi — encompassed various subgroups. For example, Jews from Yemen and Syria were considered part of the Sephardic community, as were Jews from Tunisia and Morocco. Each group had its own traditions, and even within religious leadership, there were separate Chief Rabbis for the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities.

There were long-standing tensions between these communities, in part due to the perception that the Ashkenazi Jewish community viewed the Sephardic Jewish community as socially or culturally inferior. However, demographics were shifting, as the Sephardic Jewish community generally had larger families and was growing at a faster rate. This, in turn, was creating political and social changes.

The influx of Jews from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s was viewed as a major demographic boost, particularly by the Ashkenazi Jewish community. Unlike the Ethiopian Jewish community, whose Jewishness was questioned and who were sometimes required to undergo conversion as a kind of safeguard, this wave of immigrants was welcomed with relatively few concerns. There was a perception that they would strengthen the Ashkenazi presence in Israel, both in numbers and influence, and so there was little scrutiny about their backgrounds or level of religious observance.

That disparity in how different Jewish immigrant communities were treated led to significant tensions, particularly between the Ethiopian Jewish community, the Sephardic Jewish community, and the Ashkenazi establishment. The question arose: Why was Israel welcoming light-skinned immigrants from the former Soviet Union with minimal scrutiny, while at the same time requiring Ethiopian Jews, who had long practiced Judaism, to undergo conversion? This discrepancy did not go unnoticed, particularly with the large influx of immigrants from the Soviet Union, and it became a major point of discussion within Israeli society.

Yes, by that time, Natan Sharansky had already immigrated to Israel and was seen as a significant leader and spokesperson for the incoming Russian Jewish community. He represented not just the struggle for Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, but also the broader aspirations of these new arrivals, many of whom saw him as a guiding figure in their integration into Israeli society.

However, while Sharansky was a prominent symbol, the larger influx of Soviet Jews was only beginning to take shape in 1989. The initial reception was overwhelmingly positive. This wave of immigration was viewed as a demographic and political boost, particularly for those who saw it as a way to strengthen Israel's Jewish majority. At that time, it was widely believed that the Soviet Jewish immigrants would fit well within the existing political framework.

One notable trend was that these new immigrants from the Soviet Union tended to be more conservative in their political outlook compared to the earlier waves of Ashkenazi Jewish immigration to Israel. Those earlier immigrants — who had come in the 1920s, 1930s, and post-World War II — were often deeply influenced by socialist ideals. Many had aligned with the Labor Party and played a role in shaping Israel's early political and economic structure, which had strong socialist tendencies, particularly in its early kibbutz movement and collectivist policies.

Now, people were coming from countries that had been under socialist and communist rule, and they strongly opposed those systems, which they saw as oppressive dictatorships. As a result, they tended to align more with the conservative side of politics — not necessarily for religious reasons, but in terms of broader political ideology. However, in 1989, this was still early in the process, so it was too soon to predict how this wave of immigration would shape Israeli politics. Looking back now, in 2022, we can see that the Russian immigrant community has become a significant political force in Israel.

*Q: Those are all the questions that I have for you. But if there are other experiences or insights from that first tour, please go right on.*

GOODFRIEND: I think we've covered a lot about how we worked as a team within the embassy, as well as my professional role. One thing I really appreciated was the recognition of my perspective as an entry-level officer, which was encouraging. There was also a strong sense of camaraderie, especially during the fraud investigation. A

number of people had to be interviewed by security, and one of my colleagues mentioned to me, “They’re asking about your involvement with the Lebanese community, probably because you’re the one who talks to Lebanese visa applicants the most. Just so you know.” I thought it was good that we had that kind of relationship, where we looked out for each other and shared information.

As for the investigation itself, I saw it as an interesting sociological study. I knew there was nothing they would find linking me to any wrongdoing, but it was eye-opening to see how these things unfolded — how investigations were conducted, how security concerns were addressed, and how vulnerabilities in the system were exploited. It reinforced the importance of accountability and systematic oversight.

Coincidentally, many years later, I was contacted by a colleague I got to know well, who was working on Freedom of Information Act requests and declassification of old cables. He reached out and said, “I was reading through a cable from when you were in Israel, and just so you know, they were very interested in what you were doing with the Lebanese.” It was an interesting moment, realizing that even long after the fact, those reports and interactions were still being examined. It reinforced the idea that the work we do, even as junior officers, can have a lasting impact and remain relevant in different ways over time.

It reinforced this idea that within an organization like ours, human relationships matter. There needs to be a sense of connection, not just decisions made in secrecy that can have profound effects on people’s lives. I contrast that with what happened to the visa section chief, who was suddenly told to leave within a few days. I don’t know if anyone ever really spoke with him beforehand, if anyone provided guidance or counsel. I know that I had spoken with him at one point, suggesting ways we might improve our accountability. But I don’t know if anyone from Washington reached out to say, “Hey, we’re concerned about accountability here. You should be looking out for this.” Instead, it seemed like, because of the way the section was managed, he was just gone.

It really has me thinking about the nature of our organization and the importance of fostering human relationships — where friends, mentors, and colleagues treat you as a colleague, offering guidance rather than just judgment. There’s real value in having someone say, “Let’s talk about what’s going on here,” and giving you advice. Like I mentioned, my friend was upset when he was told his interview approach was too sharp. But even in that, there was a necessary element of human counseling — something that should come from supervisors and colleagues alike. It’s about working as a team, supporting each other, and ultimately improving the effectiveness of the entire team.

Being in Israel, we were able to travel quite a bit — it was easy to get around. We had a car that we had bought in the United States, but we had to remove the catalytic converter so it could run on leaded fuel in Israel. Even after removing it, though, the car started stalling, and no one could figure out why. We took it to the service center, and they tried swapping out different parts — the spark plugs and various other components that might

have been causing the issue — but nothing worked. It took over a year before they finally resolved the problem.

In the meantime, we were expecting our third child and had to decide where to give birth in Israel. A couple of considerations came into play. One was finding a place where we felt comfortable. My wife at the time wanted as natural a childbirth as possible, with a midwife. Looking around in Tel Aviv, we found that no hospitals allowed us to choose our own midwife, and some didn't allow midwives at all. The hospitals tended to be very interventionist, which was not what she wanted, so she wasn't happy with the available options.

There was a hospital in Jerusalem primarily focused on childbirth, and they allowed expectant mothers to choose and bring their own midwives. From the standpoint of the type of birth experience we were looking for, this was the best option.

Then there was the question of where our child would be born and what would be listed on the passport. If the child was born in Tel Aviv, the passport would state "Israel" as the place of birth. However, U.S. policy at the time dictated that Jerusalem was simply listed as "Jerusalem" on the passport, without a country designation. Given the perspectives of certain countries with anti-Israel policies, having "Israel" on a passport could create complications when traveling to places like Syria or Saudi Arabia. By choosing Jerusalem, our child would have the option to decide later whether they wanted Israel listed on their passport. So for both practical and logistical reasons, giving birth in Jerusalem made the most sense.

Our car had trouble making the trip from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which added some complexity to the situation. I was at the embassy when my wife at the time called and said, "I think it's going to be now." I had to get back home quickly, and we contacted the midwife to let her know. She said she would meet us there.

Arranging everything and then making the drive — over an hour to Jerusalem — was already stressful, but the car kept stalling on the freeway. We had to stop and restart multiple times. Somehow, we made it just in time. Within half an hour of arriving, she gave birth.

*Q: That's cutting it awfully close.*

GOODFRIEND: But that's part of Foreign Service life — figuring things out as you go.

*Q: And yeah there is a momentary, hopefully, freeze here… Hopefully we'll get over this momentary glitch. André, your screen's frozen right now, if you can hear me. We lost it. Alright, I'm going to pause the recording.*

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*Q: Okay, you had just gotten to Jerusalem, barely for the birth.*

GOODFRIEND: Okay, and everything worked out well. We did get there in time, and it was the type of birth we had wanted.

These are, I think, some of the issues that any first-tour officer — or really anyone in the Foreign Service — has to navigate when living in a different country. You have to figure out how to handle major life events, like the birth of a child, and understand how the local hospital system works. For that reason, some people might choose to go back to the United States or to another country they are more familiar with, especially if they aren't comfortable with the local medical system or don't feel confident navigating the language.

In this case, we found what we were looking for and were able to make everything work. But that was the only major event where we really had to engage with the local system to such a great extent. Otherwise, the Embassy did a lot to create a sense of community among Americans, organizing activities and fostering a cohesive environment. In Israel, because there was so much to see and do, many people felt comfortable going out on their own, and there was also a sense of independence.

We didn't really have a strong sense of an embassy community. There was no dedicated embassy community center or club where people could gather, so it felt somewhat disjointed in that regard. Around the time we were leaving, an American community center was being built in a neighborhood where many of the embassy families with children lived, near Kfar Shmaryahu. That was also where the school was located, so it made sense to have a gathering place there.

The families tended to live about fifteen miles outside of Tel Aviv in a satellite town, while most of the single officers lived in apartments within the city itself. These differences in lifestyle and physical location meant that, without a real effort to create a broader embassy-wide social community, people could easily go through their tours without really knowing colleagues outside of their immediate circles, particularly if they weren't in the same family status.

Our oldest was in preschool at the time, and we found a nice preschool that helped us connect with others in the international community who had children of the same age. I think many people in the Foreign Service naturally gravitate toward those who are at a similar stage in their family life. Singles tended to socialize with other singles, parents with young children connected with others in the same boat, and families with teenagers formed their own circles. That was our experience as well — we mostly engaged with other families who had young children, which shaped our social interactions during our time in Israel.

Our oldest child was in preschool, so we often had preschoolers and their families over to our house. Our middle son had been born just before we left for our first assignment, and finding doctors for our children was another learning experience. We had to find out

whether the doctors spoke English, what kinds of medical concerns they could address, and how to navigate the healthcare system in general. Families arriving at a new post really need to learn about schools, preschools, and medical care options for their children. Our youngest, as I mentioned, was born in Israel, and we had to do our research to ensure we could have the type of childbirth experience we wanted. Overall, though, the support from the embassy for a first-tour officer and family was great.

In 1988, when we arrived, we were met right at the plane by our sponsors, which I'm not sure would happen in today's security environment. Still on the plane — Pan Am or TWA, I forget which — the flight attendant called out our names, asking us to identify ourselves. We were then able to walk down the stairs to the tarmac, where our sponsors were waiting to greet us. That kind of direct welcome, right there on the tarmac, is not something you see as often these days.

That kind of collegiality and camaraderie was really valuable. Having sponsors we could turn to for help made a big difference, and the embassy made an effort to match sponsors with incoming officers in similar life situations. In our case, our sponsors had a child about a year older than our oldest, which was helpful in getting settled, especially with young children.

When it came time for us to leave, we decided to sell the car we had brought rather than take it with us. By 1990, regulations had changed, so the old stories of diplomats buying high-end cars, tax-free, and bringing them back home were no longer relevant. In any case, we were heading to India next, where we would need a different type of car with the steering wheel on the opposite side.

We entrusted the sale to a colleague, giving them power of attorney to handle it for us. It was a friend we trusted, and while we were understandably concerned for our friends when the Gulf War broke out, they were concerned about getting our car sold. It was one of those moments that really reinforced the sense of community in the Foreign Service. You rely on each other, you build friendships that extend beyond just work, and it's those relationships that make this career unique.

*Q: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, this sounds like a good place to break because we're at the end of a tour, and you're going next to India.*

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*Q: Today is May 9, 2022, and we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend, André, you're spending your last weeks now in Israel. But before that you were concentrating, like every foreign service officer, on where you're going next.*

GOODFRIEND: That's right. This was my first time bidding for my next assignment as an entry-level officer. Unlike the A-100 process, where there wasn't a structured bidding system, this time I had to submit my bids like everyone else. I discussed it with my wife at the time, and we each had different preferences, but our top choices overlapped. She

wanted to go to India, while I wanted to go to Moscow. Both were high on our list, and in the end, we got India — we were assigned to Delhi.

After receiving the Delhi assignment, I heard from Consular Affairs that they had been impressed with the work I had done in Tel Aviv. Apparently, they had advocated for me to go to India, which was a good feeling. Even though I had initially preferred Moscow, it was encouraging to know that my work had been noticed and that someone had specifically pushed for me to be assigned to a particular post.

So, Delhi it was. We packed up our things in Tel Aviv at the end of the tour. Everything felt like a first for us — our first time leaving a post, our first time navigating the process of transitioning to a new assignment. This also meant figuring out how to go on home leave, now with three small children. Managing a long flight with them was a new challenge, especially since it was long enough to qualify for a rest stop along the way. My home leave destination was Arizona.

Traveling from Tel Aviv to Arizona via New York gave us the opportunity for a rest stop in New York. This was the first time we had enough money — or rather, that our lodging for the stopover was covered — which made a real difference. It was great to have a chance to get out, stretch our legs, and experience a bit of New York City for the day before continuing our journey.

Much of this was new to us, as this was my first real career — the first real job for me. Just before joining the Foreign Service, we had bought a very small house outside of London, from where I had been hired. While we were in Tel Aviv, we often joked that the house we had bought could easily fit inside the garage of the residence we had been assigned there.

Many of us had a strong sense that this was the path we wanted to take, and at the same time, we felt that the State Department was taking care of us. However, we also had to clearly communicate our needs to ensure they were met.

I think I mentioned in a previous conversation the challenges of making sure our children were safe in a house with unprotected stairs. If we were able to articulate our needs effectively, they were usually addressed. The same applied to travel arrangements — understanding the rules about rest stops for long-haul flights and advocating for what we needed. With three small children, we knew the length of the trip entitled us to a break, so we made sure to request it. As a result, we got that stopover, and after a brief stay in New York, we arrived in Phoenix for home leave.

Again, this was one of those firsts — the first time we had a long block of time where we would essentially be staying with my mother, something we hadn’t done before, now with three small children. We simply couldn’t afford to stay in a hotel for such an extended period.

This was the beginning of Foreign Service life — moving from one post to another, with some things taken care of and others left to us to figure out. Home leave was one of those required transitions, but during that time, lodging arrangements were our own responsibility.

After home leave, we returned to Arlington and stayed in the same apartment complex we had lived in when I first joined the Foreign Service. It was just outside of D.C., conveniently located with easy access to the Metro. But this time, things were different — we were now managing life with three small children.

It was time for me to start studying Hindi. Since I hadn't needed to study Hebrew before going to Tel Aviv, I still had language training available to me. This was something I really appreciated — I enjoyed learning a language before heading to a new post.

If I had needed to take language training before going to Tel Aviv as an entry-level — or untenured — officer, I wouldn't have been eligible to take another language while I was still untenured. So in that sense, it worked out in my favor. I was able to enroll in the full six months of Hindi training, which was the maximum allowed for an untenured officer.

The classes were very small — there simply weren't many Hindi students at the time. For most of the course, it was just me and the teacher; I was the only student in the class.

I began my studies, and as they progressed, it was now the summer of 1990. My classes started in September, and by January 1991, the Gulf War had begun — I believe it started around late December 1990 or early January 1991.

We were deeply concerned for our friends who were still in Tel Aviv. At the same time, we were also preparing for our own move to Delhi, making plans to transition there together.

Delhi became a post where voluntary departure was implemented, meaning families were not allowed to join. If you were already at the post with your family, they had the option to leave voluntarily. But if you hadn't yet arrived, your family couldn't come with you.

I was still scheduled to go to Delhi and had reached the required proficiency score for conducting visa interviews in India, which was a relief. However, since my family couldn't join me, we had to figure out how to manage the situation and what the process would be for me to go to Delhi on my own.

My wife at the time was British, and we knew no one in D.C. — this was really only our second time living there. Leaving her alone in Washington with three small children and no real support network would have been extremely challenging, even with the funding provided for an apartment.

We looked into the regulations and found that we needed to justify having her receive an involuntary separate maintenance allowance at a designated safehaven point outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS).

*Q: Separate maintenance.*

GOODFRIEND: Right, but not just separate maintenance. Something that allowed for support outside the United States. It was called a designated safe haven OCONUS. Normally, the standard process would have been to provide housing assistance within the U.S., but since we had no support network there and her family was in England, we had to figure out how to request an exception.

We navigated the process, and I believe the request was approved shortly before I had to leave for Delhi and she had to relocate as well.

Again, figuring out how to make a request and work within existing regulations generally got us what we needed, but the process wasn't always clear.

During that time — late 1990 into early 1991 — computers were becoming more common in households, though the Internet as we know it didn't yet exist for the public. It was still primarily for academic institutions. However, the concept of networked computers was starting to emerge for general use.

I had bought a desktop computer and connected it to an online community — though these early networks didn't yet link together the way the Internet eventually would. Exploring what kind of information was available online became something I was really interested in. One of the things I started looking into was airline routes — figuring out the best way to travel from D.C. to Delhi. Was there a better route through London? What were the different options? These were the kinds of things I was beginning to explore in this new digital space.

Knowing where flights went and having information readily available became essential when navigating the State Department's system. My sense was that if you made a request blindly — just asking, "Can you do this for me?" — you would simply get whatever they could arrange, without consideration for your preferences. Understanding the regulations and coming prepared with specific options was key.

For example, the initial routing they offered would have had me arrive in Delhi at around 2 a.m. — a highly inconvenient time for both the post and for me. However, by searching online, I found alternative routes that would get me there at a more reasonable hour. But to get those changes made, I had to come with that information in hand.

Having access to online information — even in its early, pre-Internet form — allowed me to work more effectively with the department, ensuring that my travel and transition were handled in a way that worked best for me.

In this case, I was able to get the routing I wanted, but I had to spell it out clearly. Meanwhile, my family was able to go to my in-laws' house and wait out the Gulf War and the voluntary departure period.

I arrived in Delhi in February 1991. I was assigned to a house within walking distance of the embassy, which I thought was great — I enjoy walking. The neighborhood had a few other diplomatic personnel, but it wasn't a dedicated diplomatic enclave.

In contrast, there was a separate area in Delhi specifically designated for embassy housing. It was a walled neighborhood with an embassy club, a swimming pool, and a distinctly enclosed environment for embassy personnel. However, my housing was outside of that enclave, which gave me a different experience of the city.

But I actually liked being outside of that kind of enclave. I enjoyed being able to walk around, explore the local economy, and figure out how to get from point A to B on my own.

That being said, the house wasn't really ideal for children. The front of the house opened directly onto the street, with no yard or safe outdoor space for kids to play.

When my family arrived — about two and a half to three months later — we requested to move to a different residence. The post understood the challenges of having young children in a house that opened directly onto the street, and they accommodated our request.

We were relocated to a much smaller enclave, with about twelve American residences behind a wall. This provided a safe environment where the kids could play outside without the risk of running into traffic. It wasn't the large diplomatic enclave, which might have felt isolating from life in Delhi, but a more modest one, slightly farther from the embassy. The location struck a good balance — when I stepped out of the gate, I was in the heart of the city, free to explore.

That experience reinforced the importance of making requests in a way that was well-justified and aligned with existing regulations, which ultimately made it possible to get the accommodations we needed.

When I arrived in Delhi and started work, my role was to head the Immigrant Visa (IV) Unit. The contrast with Tel Aviv was striking. In Israel — a much smaller country with a population of around three million at the time — the consular section had just two or three officers handling nonimmigrant visas, along with a nonimmigrant visa chief, one immigrant visa officer, and a visa section chief.

In Delhi, on the other hand, the sheer scale was entirely different. India's population was vast, and the city itself was so large that all of Israel could have fit into a single neighborhood. Yet, despite the demand, the section I was working in was smaller than the section in Tel Aviv.

When I said I was the head of the Immigrant Visa (IV) Unit, that meant I was the only American officer handling immigrant visas, supported by a local staff who processed the applications. The Nonimmigrant Visa (NIV) Unit was also staffed by just one American officer, and the American Citizen Services (ACS) section had only one officer as well.

In contrast, in Tel Aviv, despite serving a much smaller population, the consular section had more American officers: a Deputy Consul General, a Consul General, and a slightly larger team handling the workload.

So in Delhi, we were a much smaller section providing services to a vastly larger population. But this, like everything else, was a learning experience.

India had multiple U.S. consulates across the country, whereas in Israel, there were only the embassy in Tel Aviv and the consulate in Jerusalem. Despite the presence of these additional consulates, Delhi itself had a population of over ten million — if I recall correctly — which was larger than the entire population of Israel at the time.

As head of the Immigrant Visa (IV) Unit, I managed a steady stream of immigration cases to the United States. Many of the applicants were Indian citizens who had traveled to the U.S., obtained resident alien status, and were now petitioning for their spouses and children to join them.

For me, this meant more than just processing paperwork — it required an understanding of the local culture. What constitutes a valid marriage? How did people meet and establish relationships within Indian society? What were the differences between Sikh, Hindu, and Christian marriages? And what were the various legal frameworks governing these different traditions?

*Q: Or a Muslim marriage.*

GOODFRIEND: — or a Muslim marriage. Each religion had its own set of laws governing family practices, so it was important to understand what was legally recognized. What constituted a valid divorce under these different legal systems? How did relationships function across societal groups and castes?

In India, arranged marriages were particularly common within Sikh and Hindu communities, and understanding their role in society was crucial. What did an arranged marriage mean in practical terms? How did it affect the nature of marriage and family dynamics?

For me, this was fascinating work — learning about the society and its customs while ensuring that I could ask relevant, informed questions during visa interviews.

There was also employment-based immigration, which required evaluating the applicant's qualifications and job prospects. This was very different from a tourist visa

interview, where the primary concern was whether the applicant had strong enough ties outside the United States to ensure they would return. Tourist visas could be denied quickly if the applicant failed to establish those ties.

In contrast, with immigrant visas, the assumption was that the applicant was eligible — as long as they had the appropriate relationship or job qualifications. If a family member or employer in the U.S. had filed a petition that was approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) at the time, then the default position was that the applicant qualified. The only reasons to deny the visa would be if there was something seriously disqualifying in their background or if they were not the person described in the petition, that is to say, for example, that they did not have the qualifications described for the job that was offered, or that they did not actually have the described family relationship.

And, that being said, there was a great deal of suspicion in the section regarding the authenticity of many relationships. There were concerns that some marriages were fraudulently arranged solely to facilitate immigration. One common suspicion was that an applicant had married someone in the U.S. without any real intention of staying with them — only to obtain legal status. The assumption was that, once in the U.S., they would divorce their petitioner and then marry the person they truly wanted to be with, who, for some reason, was not eligible to sponsor them for a visa.

Another frequent concern involved cases where Indian men had gone to the United States while already married but had concealed that fact. They would marry an American citizen to obtain a green card, then divorce the American, return to India, and claim to have "remarried" their original spouse — who, in reality, they had never legally divorced. This allowed them to then sponsor their actual family for immigration. These types of cases required careful scrutiny to determine whether the relationships were legitimate or if they were part of an immigration scheme.

This issue wasn't unique to India — it was a widespread concern that led to changes in U.S. immigration laws. While I was there, the laws were evolving to address these types of fraudulent marriages.

Previously, in the 1980s, if someone married a U.S. citizen, they would immediately receive a permanent, unconditional green card. This meant that even if they divorced soon after, they could still retain their immigrant status. Because this loophole was being widely exploited, Congress changed the law to make green cards conditional for two years. Now, a person had to remain married for at least two years before their immigrant status would become permanent.

This legislative change was an attempt to deter fraudulent marriages by ensuring that relationships were genuine before granting permanent residency.

There were other significant changes taking place as well. Another major issue stemmed from the large number of undocumented immigrants in the United States, which had prompted President Reagan's administration to enact an amnesty program. This allowed

individuals who were in the U.S. without proper documentation to legalize their status if they could prove they had been residing there during the period specified by the amnesty.

A substantial number of those who benefited from this program were from India. Many had arrived in the U.S. without proper visas, overstayed, or otherwise become undocumented, but through the amnesty, they were able to gain legal status. This created a new wave of immigration cases, as those who had been legalized under the program now sought to bring their family members to the United States.

There was also a market for people who, after the amnesty, would attempt to fabricate or "back-document" proof of their presence in the U.S. during the required period in order to qualify for its benefits. If they could successfully establish a false record of having been in the U.S. before the deadline, they could then legalize their status and subsequently petition for their spouse or other family members to immigrate.

At the same time, in the early 1990s, the overall volume of immigration to the United States was increasing significantly. This surge in applications led to longer waiting periods for immigrant visas.

In the past — perhaps in the early 1980s, and certainly in the 1970s — a U.S. resident alien (green card holder) who married someone outside the United States could typically bring their spouse over without a long wait. However, by the early 1990s, the surge in immigration had significantly extended these waiting periods.

What had once been a relatively short process was now taking years. This created strain not only on the immigration system but also on families, forcing many couples to live apart for extended periods while waiting for visa approvals.

At the time, there were ongoing discussions within Indian society about marriage, particularly arranged marriages. One aspect of this was the question of what a prospective spouse had to offer.

I found it fascinating to look at the marriage ads in Indian newspapers — these were extensive columns filled with listings from people searching for a spouse. Certain qualities were frequently highlighted, such as skin complexion, with a strong emphasis on fairness. Another common attribute advertised was U.S. residency status, specifically mentioning if someone was a green card holder.

However, as immigrant visa waiting periods grew longer, having a green card became less of an advantage in the marriage market. Since marrying a green card holder now meant waiting several years for a visa, it was no longer as attractive a prospect as it once had been.

The focus began to shift toward individuals who held work visas in the United States, particularly those on H-1B visas. Unlike green card holders, whose spouses faced years-long waiting periods for an immigrant visa, an H-1B visa holder could sponsor

their spouse for an H-4 dependent visa, allowing them to join them in the U.S. almost immediately.

These were the kinds of issues circulating when I arrived in Delhi — understanding the local social dynamics, the factors influencing marriage and migration decisions, and the evolving immigration landscape. At the same time, there were growing concerns about fraudulent practices, as some individuals sought to exploit legal pathways to gain entry to the United States through misrepresentation or fabricated relationships.

There were also personnel-driven dynamics within the consular section that shaped my experience.

When I arrived in Delhi, I took on the role of Immigrant Visa Chief. Above me was the Deputy Consul General, who also served as the overall Visa Chief, overseeing both the Nonimmigrant and Immigrant Visa Units. However, within about two weeks of my arrival, that officer had to return to the United States due to a medical issue, leaving the position vacant.

Since this was a relatively small consular section for such a large post, the absence of the Deputy Consul General created a gap in leadership. Despite being on only my second tour and having just arrived, I suddenly found myself taking on many of the responsibilities of both the Visa Chief and, at least temporarily, the Deputy Consul General.

It was a good stretch opportunity, giving me the chance to take on more responsibility early in my career. However, I constantly found myself reflecting on my role — what exactly was I bringing to this position, and how could I contribute effectively?

This question was particularly relevant because I felt that some of the existing approaches within the section were problematic. I had to navigate not just the technical aspects of the job but also assess and, where necessary, rethink certain practices to ensure the work was being handled efficiently and fairly.

For example, we had a significant backlog in immigrant visa processing. A major factor contributing to this was the widespread suspicion of fraud. Because of this, many applications were set aside for field investigations rather than being processed immediately.

The prevailing approach was that if there were concerns about a marriage's legitimacy, we needed to send a team — typically our local fraud investigator along with a consular officer — out into the countryside to visit the applicant’s or petitioner’s home. The goal was to verify whether the marriage was genuine or fraudulent.

While this method was sometimes necessary, it was also highly resource-intensive. Conducting these investigations took time, required staff to travel long distances, and further delayed visa processing for everyone.

If you set aside a large number of cases for investigation but only had the resources to conduct six or seven cases per quarter, the backlog could grow rapidly. The approach essentially deferred decision-making, sometimes for months or even years, based on circumstantial evidence that, in many cases, wouldn't even hold up with INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service).

Often, the investigations involved speaking with neighbors or community members who might say, "Oh, we thought they were still married" or "We never heard about a divorce." But INS frequently dismissed such statements as hearsay, arguing that these individuals weren't directly involved in the marriage or divorce proceedings. INS policies gave preference to official documentation and statements from the petitioner and beneficiary themselves — those closest to the case.

This approach contributed to a significant backlog, putting immense pressure on visa applicants who were left waiting for months, if not years, for a decision on their cases. The delays led to increasing frustration among applicants, many of whom had legitimate claims but were stuck in an administrative limbo.

At the same time, there were also challenges on the nonimmigrant visa side. The volume of applicants was overwhelming, with long queues of people waiting for interviews each day. The lone nonimmigrant visa officer often had to continue interviewing well past the embassy's official closing time, just to keep up with the demand.

In Tel Aviv, we had discussed that an officer was expected to interview around a hundred applicants per day, but at least there were two or three colleagues sharing the workload. In Delhi, however, we had just one officer handling the massive caseload of nonimmigrant visa applications.

There was some part-time assistance — an officer from another section would help out for half-days — but it wasn't enough to alleviate the strain. This meant that an officer could start interviewing at 8:00 in the morning and still be at their desk conducting interviews until 6:00 in the evening. The relentless pace was unsustainable and was bound to lead to burnout.

With that kind of workload, other officers in the section helped where they could, but everyone had their own responsibilities to manage. The sheer volume of applications, coupled with limited staffing, made it difficult to keep up.

These were some of the key challenges we faced in the consular section — balancing efficiency with thoroughness, managing backlogs, and trying to prevent burnout while still providing essential services to a growing number of applicants.

We were also operating in a time of rapid change — not just in immigration laws but also in technology. As I had mentioned earlier, in Tel Aviv, we had just implemented the new IVACS (Immigrant Visa Automated Computer System) and NIVCAPS (Nonimmigrant

Visa Computer-Assisted Processing System) for processing visas. Delhi had these systems as well, allowing for more streamlined processing.

However, due to global concerns about visa fraud — not specific to India, but a broader issue — new security measures were being introduced. In the past, visas were produced using a Burroughs machine, which stamped the visa directly onto the passport in three-color ink, along with the consul's signature.

Now, technology was advancing to the point where visas could incorporate a photo of the applicant and be machine-readable. This was a major improvement in security.

The new visas had a coded strip at the bottom, which meant that if someone tried to create a fraudulent visa without understanding how the code worked, it would fail to scan properly. This provided a more reliable way to detect fraudulent documents.

Previously, identifying fake visas relied heavily on consular officers visually inspecting them — checking if the letters were formed correctly, if the ink looked right, or if the stamp appeared authentic. Now, instead of relying solely on human judgment, the new system used a foil visa sticker pasted into the passport, complete with the applicant's photo and a machine-readable code. This made it much harder for counterfeit visas to pass undetected, strengthening the integrity of the process.

We were one of the earliest posts to implement this new visa technology in the consular section, but its introduction brought another layer of disruption to an already overstretched team. The system required additional data entry, which, if not properly streamlined, could lead to delays in issuing visas. These delays, in turn, contributed to longer working hours, further exacerbating the risk of burnout among officers and staff.

Within my first two or three months in Delhi, I was trying to assess how the section operated — was our workflow effective? Were we realistically able to handle the workload? How could we improve efficiency without compromising the safeguards in place to prevent fraud? At the same time, I was concerned about the pressure on staff — ensuring that people weren't working under such relentless strain that it ultimately diminished their ability to do their jobs effectively.

*Q: The other question I had — taking on the Deputy Consul General job, or the deputy head of the Consular Section job — you moved into a management position where you would be writing evaluations.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, though it all happened very quickly. I had just arrived, and it wasn't in a formal capacity. The section was small, so the only officer I might have been in a supervisory role over was the nonimmigrant visa officer. The American Citizen Services (ACS) section was separate from the visa side, so I wasn't responsible for that. However, stepping into this role meant engaging more closely with the Consul General to

ensure that both the immigrant and nonimmigrant visa processes were running smoothly — especially given that we were short-staffed.

I arrived in February, and by September, we had a new Deputy Consul General. So while I did take on those responsibilities for several months, it wasn't a long-term role. Since evaluations were typically due in April, and the new officer arrived in September, I didn't actually end up reviewing any other officers during that period.

However, I did take the opportunity to explore new approaches to streamline both the nonimmigrant and immigrant visa processes, particularly in light of the transition to machine-readable visas. In Tel Aviv, I had previously suggested that we enter applicant data before the adjudication process, but at the time, I was told that wasn't possible under NIVCAPS. With the new machine-readable visa system, it was possible. I proposed that we shift our workflow so that applications were received, and the data entered before the adjudicating officer reviewed them. This helped smooth the process and reduced the risk of applications getting lost — something I had seen happen in Tel Aviv.

We worked on refining the process, identifying the best way to enter data efficiently while ensuring applications were readily available for adjudicating officers. Later in my assignment, I even managed to get a computer terminal installed directly at the visa interview window. This was in 1991 or 1992, so it meant squeezing a bulky cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor into the interview window. Fortunately, the windows were large enough to accommodate it. With the monitor in place, a keyboard on the counter, and the computer itself on the floor, officers could now review applicant data in real-time while conducting visa interviews

*Q: Fascinating because at that moment if I recall right you were using Wangs?*

GOODFRIEND: Right. By then, we were using Wang PCs. This was 1991, and the shift to machine-readable visas required a system that functioned with a PC. While we still weren't using standard, off-the-shelf personal computers, the Wang models had evolved — they now had their own CPU separate from a mainframe, along with a dedicated monitor.

Around the middle to the last third of my tour, we installed a monitor at the visa interview window. I think I was the only one who was both comfortable and patient enough to use it for real-time adjudication. This allowed me to enter the decision immediately during the interview, so the visa was ready for printing as soon as I finished adjudicating.

The standard process at the time was less efficient. Normally, an officer would write the decision on paper during the interview. After finishing all the interviews for the day, they would then manually enter those decisions into the computer system. Only after that step was completed could the staff begin printing the visas. This extra step — first making the decision on paper and then inputting it later — often caused delays, since staff couldn't

proceed with printing until the data was officially entered. This inefficiency contributed to the overtime workload we had been struggling with.

By entering decisions directly at the window, we eliminated that delay. However, it did come with challenges. The monitor took up space in an already tight work area, and using the system in real-time required adapting to a new workflow.

For immigrant visas, I saw that we had a significant backlog — many cases were pending investigation, often for an extended period. I had gone on some of these field investigation trips myself and, as I mentioned earlier, questioned the actual benefit of the information we were gathering. The investigations didn't definitively tell us whether a marriage was legal or not. I agreed with those who argued that talking to neighbors might confirm or raise suspicions, but it wasn't solid enough evidence to sustain a petition revocation or visa denial on legal grounds.

The approach at the time, when there was suspicion about an immigrant visa case, was essentially to put it on hold. Applicants were told, "We are not able to issue a visa at this time. We will contact you when the processing is finished." This gave them no concrete information, no guidance on what additional evidence they could provide, and no timeline — sometimes leaving them in limbo indefinitely. This led to considerable dissatisfaction among applicants while not necessarily improving security. Meanwhile, the backlog continued to grow, and we faced pressure to justify why so many cases were pending for so long.

I started asking myself: What exactly are we looking for? What evidence would actually address our concerns about the legality of a marriage or the authenticity of a relationship? How do we determine who is a legitimate child and who is not? Rather than just delaying cases indefinitely, I focused on understanding how relationships were legally established in India.

Instead of treating our decision-making process as a black box, I advocated for transparency — clearly explaining to visa applicants what we needed from them to process their cases. Rather than waiting for an investigation to uncover information, we could ask applicants to provide specific documents or evidence to support their case. This approach not only gave applicants a clearer path forward but also helped us assess cases more efficiently, using information that was legally sustainable rather than just circumstantial.

I began researching the legal framework for marriages in different communities — Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Christian. Under what law would a particular marriage be registered? Did the marriage conform to that law? If there had been a divorce, was it legally valid under the relevant legal system?

One of the key questions we had to consider was: What would we expect a legitimate divorce to look like? Many visa applicants, particularly those presenting marriages under

the Hindu Marriage Act, were providing documentation that raised concerns about whether a valid marriage ceremony had actually taken place.

Hindu and Sikh marriages both fell under the Hindu Marriage Act, but a crucial aspect of the law was that a marriage wasn't created by a document — it was established through the performance of a religious ceremony. The official document simply served as a record that such a ceremony had occurred.

However, in many cases, applicants would go to a marriage registration office and claim that a ceremony had taken place. With the testimony of a witness, the marriage would be recorded as having occurred on a specific date, and a document would be issued based on that attestation. But in reality, no such ceremony had taken place.

The reason? In the eyes of the community, the couple was already married — there had never been a legal divorce from a prior marriage. Because of this, they couldn't actually perform a second marriage ceremony, even though they claimed to have done so.

To verify the legitimacy of these marriages, we began asking for evidence of the second ceremony — documentation that it had actually taken place according to Hindu or Sikh customs.

Or, rather than using the Hindu Marriage Act, some applicants could have opted for marriage under the Civil Marriage Act. This law allowed couples to marry without a religious ceremony, with the legal registration itself creating the marriage.

However, the Civil Marriage Act required much more documentation and stricter legal formalities compared to the Hindu Marriage Act. The process was more complex, involving a formal registration, notice periods, and additional legal requirements. Because of these complexities, many applicants chose not to pursue a civil marriage.

The reasons for avoiding the Civil Marriage Act were often legal in nature. Many applicants who had not legally dissolved a prior marriage would not have been able to meet the legal requirements for a civil marriage. Instead, they would attempt to claim a marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act — even though they had never actually performed the required religious ceremony — relying on registration documents that didn't necessarily reflect reality.

Divorce presented another challenge. Many applicants would come to us claiming they were divorced, but instead of providing a court-issued divorce decree, they would submit an affidavit of divorce — a self-declared document stating that the marriage had ended.

They would argue that, "In our tradition, we don't need a court divorce. This affidavit is sufficient." However, according to Indian law, a legal divorce required a court order, particularly for marriages governed by the Hindu Marriage Act or Civil Marriage Act. Despite this, applicants would insist that their traditional practice took precedence over formal legal proceedings.

Some even had lawyers provide written statements pointing to sections of Indian law that, in their interpretation, suggested that civil law did not override traditional practices. They would claim that their community's customs allowed them to dissolve a marriage informally, without court involvement.

This put us in a difficult position. Rather than acting as arbiters of Indian law, we had to determine whether a claimed divorce met U.S. immigration requirements. Since U.S. law required that a divorce be legally valid in the country where it was obtained, affidavits without a court ruling were often insufficient for visa purposes. If the claimed divorce had no legal standing in India, then under U.S. law, the person was still legally married — meaning any subsequent marriage might not be valid for immigration purposes.

Here again, it was important that we could clearly specify to applicants: "Here's what you need to bring to us." We were not going to put ourselves in the position of interpreting Indian law or acting as a courtroom.

Instead, our approach was straightforward: If you claim to be divorced but only have an affidavit, take it to a court. If the court rules that your divorce is valid under Indian law and issues an official decree, then we can accept it. But an affidavit alone is not enough.

This way, we placed the responsibility on the appropriate legal authorities in India rather than making subjective determinations ourselves. By requiring an official ruling, we ensured that the divorce met the legal standards of India — which, in turn, made it valid under U.S. immigration law.

By providing visa applicants with clear, actionable steps, we gave them a way to support their claims rather than leaving them in indefinite limbo. Instead of relying on field investigations that gathered hearsay from neighbors, we asked applicants to provide official records that were generally difficult to forge.

For example, we might ask them to bring a voter's list, which was publicly available and showed who was registered to vote in a given household. If an applicant claimed to be divorced but the voter's list still showed them living at the same address as their purported ex-spouse, that raised questions they would need to address.

Similarly, they could provide a ration book, another widely available document that recorded household members eligible for subsidized food rations. If the ration book listed both the husband and wife as part of the same family unit, despite their claim of having lived apart, that was another inconsistency they would have to explain.

By using existing local records, we avoided the need for resource-intensive field investigations, which were slow, costly, and often inconclusive. Unlike witness testimony, which could be unreliable or manipulated, documents like voter lists and ration books were harder to forge, especially because they contained multiple names and were regularly updated. Ration books, in particular, often showed signs of use, much like a

bank passbook, making it more difficult to create a fake version solely for a visa application.

By giving applicants an active role in the process, we allowed them to bring us the information we needed to make a decision — one that we could justify based on concrete evidence and that they could understand.

Instead of relying on unpredictable neighbor testimony — which often led to responses like, “We never told the neighbors,” or “If we had known you were coming, we could have provided the right documents” — we made it clear from the outset what evidence they needed to provide. This shifted the burden away from unreliable field investigations and toward a more structured, document-based approach that applicants themselves could contribute to.

With this system, we were able to compile better, more structured analyses and assessments that could be sent to INS for review in a much shorter time, using fewer resources. It significantly reduced the backlog while still maintaining the necessary scrutiny to ensure that visa applications met legal requirements.

This approach also eliminated a key vulnerability that had existed within the system — one that could be exploited by staff.

While staff could no longer forge adjudications or issue fraudulent visas, as had been possible under the pre-computerized system in Tel Aviv, they still had a way to manipulate the backlog.

Some staff members, whether intentionally or not, played into the prevailing suspicions about fraud in visa applications. We had a fraud investigator whose job was, quite rightly, to flag potential fraud. If they found indications of fraud, they would say, “There are signs of fraud here — we should investigate.” That, in itself, was a legitimate concern.

However, the problem was how cases were assigned for investigation. The pile of pending investigations was already enormous, and placing a case into that backlog often meant an indefinite delay. Instead of being a targeted tool for handling truly suspicious cases, the backlog had become an obstacle for nearly every applicant, slowing down visa issuance even for those who had legitimate claims.

A few months after my arrival, something unexpected happened. Washington invited the INS fraud investigator to a conference. While there, they arrested the INS fraud investigator.

What had been happening was far more serious than we had initially realized. The consular section’s fraud investigator had been working in collusion with the INS fraud investigator to exploit visa petitions for personal gain.

Since the INS fraud investigator had access to the petitions when they were filed, they could identify cases where the petitioner had sufficient financial resources — essentially flagging individuals who might be in a position to pay a bribe or be extorted. These cases were then manipulated under the guise of fraud investigations, creating unnecessary delays and pressure on petitioners who were desperate to get their family members' visas approved.

Many of the cases flagged by the fraud investigator were set aside for investigation — even when there was nothing actually wrong with the application. The fraud investigator would say, “Something’s not right here. Let’s put this case under investigation.”

In reality, the investigation backlog was being used as leverage for extortion. If the petitioner paid a bribe, their case was moved to the top of the queue for investigation. Once it was reviewed, no fraud was found, and the visa was processed. The petitioner was led to believe that it was the Consul who was demanding money to approve the case, when in fact, the scheme was being orchestrated by the fraud investigator in collusion with the INS fraud investigator.

The deeper we looked, the more we realized that the network extended beyond Delhi. The former senior Foreign Service National (FSN) from the Consular Section — what we would now call Locally Employed Staff (LES) — had already immigrated to the U.S. on a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), a visa category granted to long-serving local staff who had worked faithfully for the U.S. government for fifteen or more years. In this case, he had likely served for over twenty years before leaving for the U.S.

Similarly, the fraud investigator in the Consular Section had also immigrated to the U.S. on an SIV shortly after I arrived — within a month or two.

That left the INS fraud investigator, who was still actively working. Washington invited him back to the U.S. for a conference, and when he arrived, he was arrested, along with the two former FSNs who had already emigrated on Special Immigrant Visas.

With their arrests, the scheme collapsed.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Office of Diplomatic Security (DS) became aware of the scheme through petitioners who had written in with specific complaints about extortion. These individuals, recognizing that something was wrong, did exactly what they should have done — they reported the extortion attempts directly to the State Department.

In turn, the State Department did what it needed to do — it launched an investigation, which ultimately confirmed that the allegations were valid. The key issue being manipulated was the backlog, which had been used as a pressure point to extract bribes from petitioners desperate to move their cases forward.

Fortunately, by the time the investigation took place, we had already addressed the backlog issue in Delhi. The approach I had advocated for — which moved away from automatically setting cases aside for investigation and instead focused on clearly identifying what was needed — had already been implemented.

By shifting the burden to applicants to provide specific, verifiable information upfront, we had removed the opportunity for internal staff to manipulate cases.

The investigators arrived around September 1991, turning the consular section upside down as they combed through records, cross-referenced files, and worked to confirm the allegations. By that time, the arrests had already been made in the United States, but the investigation in Delhi continued to uncover additional issues.

During their review, the investigators found that one of the senior FSNs in the Nonimmigrant Visa (NIV) section had a working relationship with a travel agent. Further scrutiny revealed that the FSN's spouse had a fraudulent green card — raising serious concerns about collusion and potential visa fraud within the section itself. As a result, this trusted staff member was dismissed, adding yet another layer of disruption to the already overburdened section.

This revelation led to a crisis of confidence for the NIV supervisor, who was already feeling overwhelmed by the workload. Losing a key staff member — the very person they had relied on — shook their ability to manage an already strained system.

At the same time, the Nonimmigrant Visa Officer also left the post on medical leave, reportedly following a nervous breakdown. I'm not a doctor, so I can't diagnose the situation, but the stress was clearly overwhelming.

With the new computer system in place, Diplomatic Security (DS) also began analyzing computer records as part of their investigation. They identified gaps in the records, which raised concerns about possible system manipulation. This added even more pressure on the already struggling Nonimmigrant Visa Officer, as DS questioned whether they had been tampering with visa records.

Personally, I found it hard to believe that anyone understood the computer system well enough to manipulate it in the way they suspected. While the transition to machine-readable visas had improved security, not many officers had the technical knowledge to exploit the system — at least not in the way DS seemed to fear. But with so much already going on, these suspicions only added to the stress and uncertainty in the section.

At the same time, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being followed by turmoil. I had left Tel Aviv, where the consular section had been deeply impacted by fraud and corruption scandals, only to arrive in New Delhi, where yet another crisis was unfolding. The entire section was demoralized — staff members were removed, others resigned under suspicion, and an officer had left under a cloud of investigation and stress.

It was a major challenge, but one thing worked in our favor — we had already recognized some of the systemic issues and had begun implementing reforms before the investigation escalated.

*Q: Well, what happened to the officer that had been actively engaged in the fraudulent activity?*

GOODFRIEND: There wasn't actually an officer actively involved in fraudulent activity. However, there was an officer who was suspected of manipulating computer records.

*Q: Oh, I see. Okay.*

GOODFRIEND: In addition, there was another individual — a senior Locally Employed Staff (LES) — who was found to have coordinated improperly with a travel agent. That staff member was dismissed, which led to a crisis of trust within the section. Also, if I recall correctly, the officer mentioned earlier had contacted a visa applicant whose application had been refused, to ask that person out on a date — which was, of course, inappropriate. Despite that incident, the officer remained employed and eventually recovered professionally, continuing to have a successful career at the State Department. Typically, entry-level officers in situations like this — as was the case in Tel Aviv — would be removed from the immediate environment but still could rehabilitate their careers afterward. Nonetheless, it was certainly a challenging situation, especially for the Consular Section.

We brought in staff from Mumbai — Bombay at the time — to assist us and help the section get back on its feet. That said, we had already begun implementing new approaches to address some of the problems uncovered earlier. Specifically, we revised several procedures related to processing immigrant visas, notably discontinuing the practice of routinely setting aside cases for field investigations, which had previously created opportunities for extortion. These changes significantly improved our workflow, enabling us to process cases more efficiently and within regular working hours.

By shifting to document-based verification, we were able to make decisions that could better withstand challenges. Previously, INS had rejected many of the fraud cases we sent back for revocation, arguing that the evidence was hearsay — based on neighbors' opinions rather than solid evidence. But with our new approach, we built cases on official or legal documentation, and as a result, we saw a higher number of petitions successfully revoked due to fraud supported by verifiable evidence.

We also worked to eliminate bias in decision-making. Local prejudices, particularly those surrounding caste-based marriages, were influencing fraud determinations. Some staff members claimed, "A couple from different castes could never have a legitimate marriage," but we had to step back and take a broader perspective. In the U.S., people from different backgrounds meet and marry regularly — whether at universities,

workplaces, or social events — so we couldn’t base fraud findings on assumptions rooted in local social norms.

In many ways, our new approach and perspective brought a breath of fresh air to the section. Our reporting back to Washington clearly described the methods we were adopting, the actual types of fraud we encountered, and — equally important — the types we weren't seeing. Washington responded positively, frequently sending back kudos and acknowledgment of our efforts. This became a recurring theme: receiving feedback affirming that our reporting was valuable, carefully reviewed, widely shared, and highly regarded. Consular Affairs was particularly effective in communicating to us at the Embassy that our work and reporting were appreciated, and this positive, supportive interaction was consistently evident in our experience in Delhi.

Also, during that period — as I mentioned earlier — immigration laws were undergoing significant changes. One key issue we had to consider at the time involved the H-1B visa, a nonimmigrant category for temporary workers going to the United States, as well as the L visa, for intra-company transferees. Previously, individuals applying for an H-1B or L visa had to demonstrate strong ties outside the United States — ties that would compel them to return upon completing their assignment, much like other nonimmigrant visas. But realistically, if someone was going to work in the U.S. for several years — for example, a five-year contract — demonstrating those strong ties to their home country could be challenging. After all, it's hard to predict what might happen over a five-year period working abroad.

At that time, Congress removed the requirement for demonstrating strong ties from the H-1B visa category. This legislative change required consular officers to adjust their mindset significantly. It meant officers could no longer deny H-1B visas based on the applicant's lack of strong ties to their home country. Instead, visa denials, if necessary, would now have to focus strictly on job-related concerns, such as whether the applicant's qualifications matched the position and the legitimacy of the job itself.

In India, this policy shift was particularly impactful, as India was a major source of H-1B visa applicants — many of whom were employed in the rapidly expanding computer and technology sectors. Our officers had to gain a better understanding of the nature of this employment and carefully assess whether applicants were genuinely qualified for the specific jobs offered. A common issue at the time involved verifying whether applicants would actually perform the promised job duties, or if they were simply being sponsored to sit "on the bench" at an employment agency, waiting to be subcontracted out to other companies as needed — which was not permissible under the H-1B program. We had to scrutinize carefully the specifics of each job and the qualifications of each applicant. All of this required significant adjustment and refocusing, placing additional demands on an already stressed consular environment.

Another significant issue at that time, in which I was directly involved, concerned immigrant visas under a special program for displaced Tibetans. Around 1990, Congress authorized a program enabling displaced Tibetans to immigrate to the United States. This

was a unique and unusual immigration program. The Tibetan community, of course, originates from Tibet — an area considered by the United States as part of China. Due to Chinese oppression and persecution, many Tibetans had fled their homeland, seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Bhutan, Nepal, and India.

*Q: Just a very quick question, do you have a sense for how large that diaspora community was?*

GOODFRIEND: Not off the top of my head. The program itself authorized exactly 1,000 visas, regardless of how large or small the diaspora community actually was. Congress had specifically limited the program numerically, authorizing issuance of these visas by the end of fiscal year 1993 — by the end of September 1993, if I recall correctly.

Importantly, this was not a refugee program, and visa recipients would not be eligible for refugee-related benefits. The official name was the Displaced Tibetan Immigrant Visa Program. To qualify, individuals had to be displaced Tibetans who were living outside of Tibet — effectively refugees — but they also had to demonstrate they had not successfully integrated into the communities where they currently lived. At the same time, they needed to prove that they would be able to integrate successfully into American society.

Specifically, applicants had to demonstrate they could support themselves upon arrival in the United States, which usually required having employment already arranged. They would not be eligible for public assistance and would be denied a visa if it appeared likely they would become "public charges" or require welfare. As I mentioned, it was distinct from a refugee visa — they had to clearly show their ability to start working and supporting themselves immediately in the United States.

I was directly involved in developing the process we used in Delhi to identify qualified candidates and move them through the immigrant visa application process. I worked closely with representatives from the Tibetan government-in-exile, based in Dharamshala, India. They would travel to Delhi, and we coordinated carefully to ensure applicants met the criteria and addressed any issues that came up during processing.

One of the challenges we faced was the numerical limit itself — 1,000 visas total. Naturally, the Tibetan community wanted to make the most of this limited opportunity. The question they faced was how best to use these 1,000 visas. For example, if entire families emigrated together, a family of five would require five visas, which would significantly reduce the total number of families able to immigrate — perhaps only two or three hundred families could benefit, as opposed to a larger number.

To address this, many applicants volunteered to go to the United States alone initially, leaving their family members behind. After their arrival and receiving green cards, they would then petition to bring their families over under regular immigrant visa categories, such as spouses or children of lawful permanent residents. This process could take several additional years due to backlogs. Thus, there was a tacit understanding that

individuals — often a mother or father — would establish themselves first, get settled, secure employment and housing, and then petition for family immigration later. In this way, the 1,000 available visas could eventually result in many more people benefiting — perhaps four or five thousand, once family members were eventually able to immigrate.

However, we had a ticking clock. By the time we finalized the criteria and clearly understood how applicants would be identified and processed, it was already around 1992. We had little over a year remaining to process all 1,000 visas. Given that timeline, we calculated that we needed to process between fifty to a hundred displaced Tibetans every week to achieve our goal.

This created substantial logistical challenges. At the time, I was the only immigrant visa officer available. We had to figure out how to structure our workflow so that we could effectively process all these additional applicants without disadvantaging other immigrant visa applicants. To manage this, we designated one day each week specifically for displaced Tibetan applicants. On that one day, I'd often have fifty, sixty, or even seventy applicants to process.

To expedite the process, we streamlined certain formalities. Normally, each applicant individually takes an oath affirming that everything stated on their application is true. Since administering this oath individually would take significant time, I would instead have them stand together as a group, raise their right hands, and take the oath collectively. This saved valuable minutes from the day.

After this group oath, I met individually with each applicant to discuss important personal details: their intended employment in the U.S., their understanding of the job, whether they fully comprehended and accepted the implications of leaving family members behind, and critically, whether their decision to emigrate alone was voluntary. It was important to assess if each applicant was making a free and informed decision and to confirm their qualifications for the jobs awaiting them. Volunteer organizations in the United States played a vital role, actively arranging employment and community support for these displaced Tibetans in various American cities.

Overall, this was a grassroots effort within the United States aimed at assisting the Tibetan community and raising American awareness about the plight of Tibet. During this period, I also had the opportunity to discuss the program with the Dalai Lama.

*Q: Let me just ask here, based on the ones that you approved, who did go to the U.S? What was the typical profile?*

GOODFRIEND: There was no single typical profile among the applicants. Some were university-educated and qualified for skilled professions, while others were heading to the U.S. for menial jobs, such as cleaning houses or working in shops — where they would have support from someone to help with the language if needed.

There was also diversity in family structure — some applicants were single, while others were representing larger family groups. The selection process was managed internally by the Tibetan community, which used a lottery system to determine who could apply, ensuring fairness and demographic diversity among the participants.

There was significant interest in the program among the Tibetan community, with many people eager to apply. To ensure fairness and to maintain a diverse demographic, the community managed the selection process through an internal lottery, determining who would have the opportunity to participate.

The profiles of the applicants varied widely. While most met the program's minimal requirements, I did have to deny a few applicants, primarily because they would not have been able to perform the work they were assigned in the U.S. The most common issue was English proficiency — if the job required English skills and the applicant did not speak English, that could be grounds for refusal.

The key criteria, however, were straightforward: Did the applicant have a place to integrate into a community in the U.S.? and Were they not fully settled into Indian society?

The second requirement was generally satisfied by the fact that most applicants lived in Tibetan communities that had not fully integrated into Indian society. They were not Indian passport holders and resided in Tibetan enclaves governed by a semi-autonomous council, which further distinguished their status from the broader Indian population.

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, and the grassroots organizations in the United States played a key role in helping Tibetan immigrants integrate effectively into American society. From that perspective, we were able to meet the goals of the program and implement it successfully.

That said, applicants still had to meet all the standard visa requirements. They needed to provide the same documentation as any other immigrant, including records of any arrests or criminal convictions. They also had to undergo a medical examination to ensure they did not have any communicable diseases of public health concern. In those respects, everything followed standard immigration procedures.

However, the key criteria for eligibility were that they could not be fully settled in India, Bhutan, or Nepal, and they had to be deemed successfully resettleable in the United States. That was the core purpose of the program — to assist displaced Tibetans who had not been able to integrate into their host countries and to provide them with a path to stability in the U.S.

And there were several cities where they were going to be settling. Jumping ahead to the present, there is now a large Tibetan community outside Washington, DC, which I have visited a couple of times. It’s encouraging to see that they are now in their next

generation, because this was 1992, 1993, and here we are thirty years later. You can still meet those who came over and hear how they found their life in the United States. Their children, who may be thirty years old now, and even their grandchildren, are part of that story.

It's interesting to see how they have kept their communal traditions alive while adapting to life in the United States. The questions now are about what aspects of their culture they have preserved, how they continue their traditions, and how they navigate their identity within American society. Looking back, I think it was a successful program, and it's rewarding to have seen it from the start and to witness where they are now.

I don't know that it has had the impact they might have hoped for in terms of creating a Tibetan diaspora that would significantly raise global awareness of the situation in Tibet, but I think it has done so to some extent.

And again, to highlight both technology and their deep commitment to their identity, we had an interesting situation when processing the applications for the first group under this program. Everything had gone smoothly, and after completing the process, a large group — maybe fifty to seventy people — had their visas ready. Someone came to pick them up, and it seemed like everything was set.

But a couple of days later, they brought all the visas back and said they couldn't use them. When we asked why, the answer was simple: because the visas stated that they were born in China. They insisted that they were not born in China; they were born in Tibet. The issue arose because U.S. visas indicate the applicant's place of birth, and in the system, because the U.S. government considers Tibet to be part of China, Tibet was listed as part of China.

Now, this is not an unknown issue for Americans. For people who have American passports, the way that we can address this is if you are not comfortable with having the country where you were born on your passport — maybe you fled that country, maybe you don't want to be associated with that country, you just want to identify with the city — you can choose to just have the city on your passport and not have the country on your passport.

That's a choice that an American citizen can make if they choose. If, for example, an American citizen doesn't want to have "Soviet Union" on their passport, they could list "Kyiv," which, of course, would now be Ukraine, but at the time of their birth might have been the Soviet Union. Or maybe the borders have changed, and when they were born, it was one country, but now it's another, and they don't want that new country listed on their passport. They can choose to put just the city. But that option wasn't available to immigrant visa holders.

The immigrant visa has a field for the country of birth. There was no legal basis for leaving that field blank, and the computer system required that something be entered. The Tibetans who returned their visas refused to use them because the visas stated that they

were born in China. Their position was clear: If it says China, if it states that we were born in China, then we are not going to use these visas to go to the United States.

What I managed to do was talk with the systems office and the legal office within Consular Affairs to determine whether this was a legal requirement or simply a system constraint. We established that it was not actually a legal requirement to list the country of birth, but rather that the computer system required something to be entered in that field.

For refugees, the system allowed "XXX" to be entered in place of a country, but since this was not a refugee program, that designation was already reserved and couldn't be used. I asked if we could use another letter instead. After testing different options, we settled on "CCC" — it didn't say "China," but it still met the system's requirement of having something in the country field.

The system accepted it, and that solved the problem. It was another example of working within the constraints of the system, much like figuring out flight routing, securing shelter for my family, or understanding what was possible within existing regulations. By knowing what the system required and what flexibility we had, we found a way to meet both the technical requirements and the concerns of the Tibetan applicants.

We gave the visas back to them with Triple C, and they were happy — it no longer said "China." With that issue resolved, the program moved forward, and every other visa applicant was able to use their visa to go to the United States and fulfill the intent of the program.

*Q: Well, now, so a separate question. Of course, the Tibetans who left Tibet as the Communist Chinese took over, were refugees. Separately, were you processing any Tibetan refugees?*

GOODFRIEND: Consular sections don't process refugees. That falls under UNHCR and DHS, not the consular section. Refugee claims and resettlement are handled through separate channels, so the answer is no — we were not processing Tibetan refugees.

And I don't even know if, at the time, there was a specific U.S. refugee program for Tibetans. Generally, with refugee programs, the U.S. government designates a quota for specific national or ethnic groups, deciding how many refugees will be accepted from a particular country or situation. I don't recall whether such a program existed for Tibetans then.

At the time, actually, there were a lot of Afghan refugees in India. But Tibetans were not coming to the United States as refugees, because in essence, India, Bhutan, and Nepal had already taken them in. They were living in Tibetan settlements, where they received social services and had a degree of semi-autonomy.

Many years later, in the same context of visiting the Tibetan community in the United States, I had a conversation with a Tibetan colleague who had worked with me on this program in 1991 or 1992. We were reflecting on how things had developed over time.

There was growing concern within the Tibetan community in India that the Indian government was starting to pressure Tibetans to become Indian citizens. After so many years of living in India, rather than continuing to issue travel documents that recognized them as stateless, India was increasingly documenting them as Indian citizens. This shift raised questions about how Tibetans in India would navigate their national identity and what it meant for their status as a distinct community.

And my Tibetan colleague was saying this was a real problem because they were Tibetans, and they did not want to be Indians. They wanted to maintain their identity, and accepting Indian citizenship felt like a loss of that.

But I asked, "Why is it different when they choose to become Americans? Isn't it the same issue?" These Tibetans were coming to the United States, and ultimately, many were becoming American citizens. Were they not also losing their Tibetan identity when they became American citizens?

And my colleague was saying, "Well, no, that's different." It brought us back to the distinction between nationality and citizenship.

There was a sense that being Indian was a nationality, not just a citizenship. If Tibetans in India were officially classified as Indian, it meant they were not Tibetan — because in their view, one could only have one nationality, one ethnicity. To be Indian meant not being Tibetan, and that was the core of their concern.

But in the U.S. context, citizenship was understood differently. Becoming an American citizen did not mean giving up one's Tibetan identity. They could retain their culture, language, and traditions while being legally American. They saw themselves as Tibetan Americans, just as there were Irish Americans, French Americans, or any other hyphenated identities in the U.S.

For them, the idea of being Tibetan Indian was different — it didn't make sense, just like calling someone French German would seem contradictory. It wasn't just about legal status but about how identity was defined and recognized.

This idea of identity — who you are — and what it means to take on the citizenship of another country was something that was very much on their minds. In talking with them, I was curious how much of their Tibetan identity they had retained after two generations. It was an ongoing question: How does identity persist, and what changes over time?

This was also part of a conversation I had with the Dalai Lama at the time. He had been a driving force behind creating a Tibetan diaspora, recognizing the strategic advantages that a widely dispersed, politically engaged community could offer. He had observed the

role that the Jewish diaspora played in shaping global perceptions of Israel and saw a similar potential for Tibetans. By fostering a Tibetan community abroad, he believed they could build international awareness and advocacy for Tibet's cause, much in the way the Jewish diaspora had done in influencing attitudes toward the need for a Jewish state.

Perhaps having a Tibetan diaspora that could influence global perspectives and keep the issue alive in people's minds would help advance the goal of a separate, independent Tibetan state. This was part of the thinking behind fostering a Tibetan presence abroad — creating a community that could advocate for Tibet and maintain its cultural identity in exile.

But another part of our conversation was about how identity inevitably evolves over generations. The next generation of Tibetan Americans — those born in the United States — would not be the same as Tibetans who had grown up in India, just as those in India were different from their parents who had originally fled Tibet. And their grandchildren would be even more different still.

The diaspora community would change over time, gradually reflecting the characteristics of the country they were now part of. Even with a strong cultural identity, adaptation was inevitable. The question wasn't just about preserving Tibetan identity, but also about how it would transform in new environments.

And again, fascinating issues — these are the kinds of questions that have always interested me within Consular Affairs, within immigration, and within the broader movement of people. The genealogies of migration, what it means to become a citizen of another country, and whether one acquires ethnicity, nationality, or something else entirely — these were all questions we explored through this program.

But the program itself continued successfully. I think I managed to interview over nine hundred applicants before I left India in the summer of 1993. As I mentioned, the program ran until the end of the fiscal year, September 1993. There were a few applicants I did not manage to interview before leaving, but I was glad to have played a major role in the program and to have helped ensure its success.

*Q: Just out of curiosity, have you been able to sort of follow up a bit on what happened to them once they arrived?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, like I said, with the community in Washington, DC, I've stayed in contact. They have a vibrant community, coming together for various events — Losar, the New Year's celebration, and other gatherings. They've maintained their connections, and in general, the program worked. They benefited from the jobs available to them, and they were able to settle successfully.

One of the harder aspects might have been waiting for their families to arrive. There were cases where some couldn't wait, and family members tried to get visas to join them before their immigrant visa was available. That raised concerns about whether some in

the Tibetan community were engaging in visa fraud, similar to what happens in other communities seeking family reunification.

But for the most part, they've established community centers, and the Tibetan American community is now in its third generation.

Those who immigrated in 1992, their children would be around thirty years old now. If they had a child right when they arrived, that child would now be an adult, and in many cases, there may be another generation already born in the U.S. So at this point, there are at least three generations of Tibetans flourishing in the United States.

At one of the events I attended, I visited a Tibetan Buddhist cultural center, which also functioned as a monastery and a school. I spoke with someone responsible for the facility and asked whether they had noticed any differences between the older generation who immigrated from India and the new generation born in the United States.

They observed that there was indeed a cultural shift that reflected the influence of living in America. The older generation, who had come from India, tended to be more reverential in religious settings, displaying a deep respect for rituals and authority figures. The younger generation, born in the U.S., was more questioning — not in a way that suggested rejection, but rather a curiosity and willingness to engage more actively.

Unlike their parents, they were less deferential to the formalities of rituals or the presence of religious figures. Instead, they approached their tradition with an egalitarian mindset, feeling comfortable asking questions and seeking deeper understanding. It wasn't about challenging belief, but rather about embracing a more interactive, exploratory approach — a reflection of the cultural norms they had grown up with in the U.S.

In that respect, I think this community has taken root in the United States and has spread throughout the country. There are numbers available on the size of the community now, though I don't recall them offhand. The type of events they organize, the way they stay connected, and the communication between them and other communities in the U.S. is ongoing. The current generation is different from the generation that entered, and that's true of any group of immigrants.

*Q: Sure. Yeah. This topic I had never heard of, well, it's a relatively small program, but it's a fascinating one. Now, you are in Delhi, typically a second junior officer assignments two years. But you were there at a very turbulent time. You mentioned the first Gulf War, was your family finally permitted while you were in Delhi to join you?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, yes. I mentioned that after a couple of months, they were able to join me. When they arrived, we moved from the house where I had initially been placed, which wasn't suitable for children, to a small compound where the kids had space to play outside and learn to ride bicycles. It was a very nice environment for them.

When we wanted access to more recreational activities, we could go to a larger compound that had a swimming pool. Our oldest son learned to swim at the school there. This would have been 1991, and he was five years old, attending preschool and then kindergarten. The school in New Delhi was very good, and in some ways, I think it would have been even better if our children had been older, as it provided a strong education.

Our middle son was about two years old when he arrived, and he attended an Indian preschool, rather than an international one. There was a mix of students — some were from Indian families, and a small number were from the international community.

Our youngest was under a year old when they arrived. He was born in January 1990, and they joined me in late spring of 1991. I'm trying to place exactly when, but it was likely April 1991, whenever the hostilities ended in the Gulf War and the voluntary departure was lifted, allowing families to return.

For our oldest son, there were T-ball games he could participate in, and overall, it was a good place for kids. Like I said, there was space for them to learn to ride bicycles. One concern among parents was the school bus. Driving in Delhi could be hazardous, and there were questions about how safe the bus was and how well it was being driven. I think the decision was made to have a parent ride on the school bus at times to ensure everything was okay.

We made friends with families who had children of similar ages, and they would have families over. Children naturally found their own social circles, and as I mentioned earlier, family structure tended to create bonds between people — those who were single would spend time with other single people, and those with young children would build relationships with other families in the same situation. It was similar to how things worked in the United States.

*Q: Now, the other large issue within India around that time was the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and political turmoil that eventually calmed itself down but did that affect you?*

GOODFRIEND: It did to some extent. It was always there in the background, shaping the political climate and influencing U.S.-India relations. Kashmir was a major issue, as were ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan.

We were never able to visit Kashmir ourselves. By that time, it had been closed off to embassy personnel, so travel there was not permitted. I had mentioned earlier going on investigative field trips, and while I was able to visit Punjab, where a large number of our visa applicants came from, Kashmir was off-limits. I wasn't able to see the situation there firsthand.

One of the interesting aspects of consular work is that it provides opportunities to get out and explore the environment. Understanding the society, its political climate, and regional

differences is part of making informed visa adjudications. Sometimes these visits happened as part of an investigation, but other times, they were simply a way to gain a broader sense of the country. The tensions and political shifts in India were reflected differently across different social and economic groups, and seeing that firsthand helped in understanding the broader context.

Apart from the real political issues in Kashmir, there were also asylum claims from Punjabis, particularly Sikhs, who were seeking refuge in the United States. Many cited Indira Gandhi's government's attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar as evidence of hostility toward Sikhs and repression against their community. Some were aligned with the movement for an independent Khalistan, while others simply sought to escape the political instability.

After Indira Gandhi's assassination, the antagonism toward Sikhs intensified, and many asylum seekers claimed that the situation had become significantly worse. This led to large numbers of Sikhs seeking asylum in the U.S. and Canada, which directly impacted visa adjudications and border processing. The backlog of asylum claims in the U.S. grew significantly, leading to procedural changes in how these cases were handled.

At the same time, India was making efforts to improve its struggling economy. The country had been relatively closed off to foreign investment, but there was now a push to attract Western companies. This required the introduction of better safeguards for intellectual property and stronger protections for foreign investments.

Another major shift involved Indian emigrants who had moved abroad and acquired foreign citizenship. Previously, Indian law restricted non-citizens from owning property or making investments in India, which affected members of the Indian diaspora in the U.S. and elsewhere. Those laws were eventually changed, opening up new economic opportunities for Indians living abroad who wanted to maintain financial ties to their country of origin.

Now, more Indians were able to retain financial and legal ties to India while holding foreign citizenship. The changes in the law allowed them to maintain property and investments in India without jeopardizing their holdings, which had previously been restricted. This shift was aimed at encouraging the Indian diaspora to invest more in India, and they were often referred to as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).

At the same time, satellite and cable television became available in India, which marked a major cultural shift. There was some cultural backlash, particularly regarding Star TV, which was now broadcasting Western content into Indian households. This was part of a broader global transformation in media during the early 1990s, as cable and satellite television began to reshape access to information and entertainment worldwide.

I think I may have mentioned that, at a very early stage, my academic studies focused on the impact of new media, specifically cable and satellite television. Seeing this unfold in India was fascinating, as concerns were raised that Western programming would

overshadow local content, creating a cultural competition between Indian and Western influences. This debate about media influence and cultural identity was happening in many places, but in India, around 1992, it became especially pronounced.

We also didn't have an Ambassador for part of that time. The Ambassador who was there when I arrived left shortly after, and for quite some time, Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Ken Brill served as the Chargé d'Affaires.

Then, coincidentally, the Ambassador I had served under in Israel, Thomas Pickering, was assigned to India. So, twice in a row, I could say that my Ambassador was Thomas Pickering. If I recall correctly, he left India earlier than expected, possibly even before I did, to take up his new role at the United Nations.

More on that later when we talk about my assignment to Moscow, where, once again, Pickering was the Ambassador.

That being said, during this period, the Indian government expressed some dissatisfaction over the fact that for a significant time, the U.S. did not have an appointed Ambassador in India. There was a perception that this signaled a lack of prioritization in the relationship, and that the U.S. was not valuing India highly enough. Some things don't change over time.

But you had asked about the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and to me, that was more a symptom of the unrest and the tensions within Indian society rather than something that fundamentally changed the society itself. There were already ongoing tensions, and the event reflected deeper political and social fractures.

There was also a perception that the Gandhi family's leadership of the Congress Party was almost hereditary, rather than being based on policies or governance. Indira Gandhi had led, then Rajiv Gandhi, and after his assassination, the question arose: Should it now be Sonia Gandhi? The political dynamics in India were shifting, and there was an increasing debate about what it meant for India to be the world's largest democracy.

But was it the same kind of liberal democracy that people think of in the United States, with checks and balances and institutional constraints? Or was it more of a majoritarian system, where political leaders could mobilize large vote banks to dominate a region's politics without the same legal safeguards? There was more space for demagogues to consolidate power in ways that didn't always align with the traditional Western concept of democracy.

The way the term democracy is often used as a catch-all for any system where people vote can sometimes be misleading. There are different models of democracy, and the mere presence of elections does not necessarily indicate the full extent of citizen participation in governance. That's not to say that one system is better than another or that some are not democracies at all — but rather that the way democracies function varies significantly, even within a community of democracies.

At the local level, there was still a lot of oppression for those who were not part of the elite, especially in rural areas. Issues like dowry disputes and familial control over marriage were still significant. In cases where a family disapproved of their son's wife, there were reported incidents — though likely a small number — of wife burnings, where women were said to have died in accidental oven fires. It became a tragic running commentary in the media, with cases of women's clothing catching fire from stoves frequently reported.

Another major issue at the time was prenatal gender selection. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, medical tests to determine a child's sex before birth were becoming more widely available. While this is commonplace today, at the time it was still relatively new. The preference for male children led to a rise in abortions of female fetuses, sparking deep societal concerns.

These broader societal issues intersected with consular work in various ways. For example, DNA testing was not yet widely available, but there was an alternative paternity test that could be used to verify biological relationships. These scientific advancements were becoming more accessible, shifting parentage verification from a theoretical legal issue to something that could actually be used in adjudications.

If there were serious doubts about whether a child was the biological offspring of the claimed parents, these tests could be requested. This reflected a broader shift in how visa cases were evaluated — moving away from subjective community-based inquiries (such as asking neighbors for confirmation) and toward objective, verifiable evidence.

It tied back to the broader approach I had taken: What can we ask applicants to provide that would help move their case forward? What scientific or legal tools are available that remove unnecessary subjectivity from decision-making? Many of these questions in the early 1990s were about coming to grips with evolving legal standards and scientific advancements, both in the U.S. legal system and in international immigration practices.

One of the things we had for the first time while I was in Delhi was the advent of email. Before then, communication was far more limited. I think we got internal email sometime around 1992, but at that point, it was still entirely within the State Department — we couldn't send or receive external emails. The Internet, as we think of it today, didn't really exist for private citizens.

Before going to India, I had bought my first desktop computer, and at the time, the only real online interactions available were through early online communities, not email as we know it today. But email was coming.

When the State Department rolled out its internal email system, it was a real sea change for posts like India, where the time difference with Washington had always been a challenge. Before email, if you needed to communicate with someone back in Washington, the standard practice was to wait until after hours to make a phone call,

trying to coordinate across time zones. Now, for the first time, we could send a message and get a response the next day.

It wasn't rolled out universally at first. I remember when it was introduced, there was a sense of experimentation — people checking who was online, sending test messages, trying to see how it worked. The first emails were simple, almost like the classic "Hello, world!" message that programmers use to test a system. But the implications were enormous.

Email also changed the hierarchy of communication. Before, if you needed to communicate with another section or office, you generally had to write a memo. That memo would go up through a supervisor, then across to another section, and finally down to the intended recipient. There was no easy way to reach out laterally and engage directly with a colleague in another post or back in Washington. Even within the embassy, communication had to follow formal channels.

Now, suddenly, email allowed for direct engagement. You could bypass layers of bureaucracy and communicate in a way that was much faster and more efficient. Of course, this raised questions — who was authorized to send what? Could an email be considered an official informal message? These were just the beginnings of changes that would reshape how diplomacy was conducted.

Looking back, 1991 and 1992 were years of significant change, not just in global events but in the very systems we used to operate. The Gulf War, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and other tensions in India defined the political environment, but underneath that, there was also a technological transformation taking place. The world of instant communication that we take for granted today was just beginning, and while it would lead to upheavals in the way people worked and connected, in that moment, it was just getting started.

*Q: Now, another question. Given all of the misunderstandings that always occur about how visas are issued by the United States, did you go out and do outreach discussions with groups? Did you travel within your consular district to try to explain, again, what it takes to get a visa?*

GOODFRIEND: Looking back, I don't think we did outreach to the same extent that I recall doing in other posts. We worked with travel agents to help them understand the visa process, since they were often the intermediaries between applicants and the embassy. But at the same time, we were also sorting out our own processes, especially with the introduction of the machine-readable visa and other procedural changes.

One of the main things we tried to communicate was the prevalence of fraud. Many applicants were paying large sums of money to agents who falsely promised them visas. Part of our outreach was to warn people that they were being exploited, that paying a fee didn't guarantee a visa, and that these fraudulent agents were harming Indian citizens themselves.

I don’t recall us doing much direct outreach to businesses or local organizations to explain the visa process step by step. In part, this was because the system itself was changing, making it difficult to give consistent guidance. People still had to line up at the embassy, submit their photographs and information, and go through the standard application process.

There were also legal changes we had to understand ourselves. I mentioned earlier the shift in H-1B visa rules — we had to adapt to the fact that 214(b), which required evidence of ties outside the U.S., could no longer be used as a reason to deny H visas. At the same time, the H-1B category had a numerical cap, and some applicants tried to use B-1 visas for work in cases where it might have been permitted under certain conditions. We had to clarify what was legally possible in those cases before we could effectively communicate that to the public.

Beyond that, outreach was limited by our own strained resources. It was a very small section, and we had lost personnel during that period. Given the workload, we didn’t have the capacity for a significant outreach effort.

I also mentioned an experiment I had tried — placing a computer monitor in the visa window so that an officer could review and enter case information in real-time, eliminating duplicate work. But after I left, they removed the monitor and went back to the old system, finding it too cumbersome. The computer speed at the time made working that way frustrating, and not all officers were comfortable adjusting to the system.

Still, by the time I left in 1993, the section was back on its feet again and functioning more smoothly than it had during the more turbulent periods of my tenure.

*Q: Do you have any recollection besides the ones you've mentioned with Tibetans and the fraud of other unusual cases that you had to deal with?*

GOODFRIEND: There were numerous ones. I remember a case involving a man trying to bring over laborers to carve stone for a Jain temple in the United States. He applied for B-1 visas for the workers, but since the work was to be done in the U.S., I had to explain that U.S. labor laws — especially those concerning unions and skilled trades — would not permit them to do that kind of work unless they qualified as highly skilled craftsmen under an H visa. I had to walk them through the process, explaining that they needed to apply with a petition outlining their specific skills and qualifications.

This delay complicated their ability to build the temple, but because I took the time to explain the rationale behind the decision, it actually led to a rapport between me and the Jain community in India. I got to know both the organizer of the temple project and the guru they revered. While they didn’t get the visas they initially applied for, they appreciated the transparency, and it gave me a deeper understanding of how their community functioned in India.

On the immigrant visa side, there were cases where fraud became apparent during interviews. One case involved a woman applying for a visa to join her husband in the U.S. They already had a child together, but she claimed that at the time the child was conceived, they weren't married. It was an unusual but not impossible situation, so I kept an open mind.

She didn't speak English, so her friend from the U.S. acted as a translator. As we talked, I asked her where she had lived at the time, and she said she had been in one city with her parents, while her boyfriend — now her husband — had been in another city entirely. I asked how they had met to conceive the child, and through her friend, she explained that he used to visit her secretly at her parents' home. But when I checked the child's birth certificate, it showed the child had been born in her husband's city, a place she claimed never to have visited. When I pointed this out, she simply said, Yes.

It was clear something didn't add up, and as I kept probing, it appeared that they were masking an earlier marriage, possibly because the husband had not actually divorced his first wife.

Another case involved a woman whose first husband had died. She had children from that marriage but was now applying for an immigrant visa to join her new husband in the U.S. When I asked how they had met, she matter-of-factly told me that they had met at the funeral of her first husband.

What caught my attention was that one of her children seemed to have been conceived soon after her first husband had supposedly died. When I asked about this, she explained that her new husband had been consoling her after the funeral, and one thing led to another. Again, it wasn't impossible. But when we conducted a blood test, the results revealed something unexpected: the biological father of the child was her first husband. That meant he was still alive somewhere.

Then there was the case of a woman applying for a visa based on her marriage. In reviewing her paperwork, we saw that she had written that it was her husband's first marriage. But we knew that he had already been married in the U.S. and had obtained his green card through that marriage. When I pointed this out, she simply dismissed it, saying, That one doesn't count. That wasn't to an Indian.

These cases stood out because they highlighted the mindsets people brought to the immigration process. The key was listening carefully, letting applicants explain their stories in their own words, and then asking the right questions to see if everything made sense.

Apart from individual cases, a larger focus of my work was shifting the approach to fraud prevention. Rather than simply reacting to fraud after it happened, I was pushing for methods that would help prevent fraud from occurring in the first place. This meant understanding the social and legal environment in which applicants lived, recognizing patterns, and identifying indicators that could help us assess cases more effectively.

So much was changing at the time — not just in visa policies and procedures, but in technology, legal frameworks, and the ways societies themselves were evolving. The intersection of these shifts made consular work during that period particularly dynamic, and in many ways, consular officers were dealing with these changes even more directly than those working in other areas of diplomacy.

*Q: Interesting, interesting. Now, also a relatively new officer is going to end up being the duty officer and sometimes those can lead to very interesting and unusual responsibilities. Did any of that affect you?*

GOODFRIEND: The duty officer role often involved after-hours consular matters, and at that time, this was before the Internet and cell phones. There was a real duty book, an actual suitcase with the duty log and key information, which the duty officer would carry.

I took my turn when it came around, but since visa fraud prevention was my responsibility, I was often called after hours anyway, even when I wasn't officially on duty. Many of these calls involved fraudulent visas detected at the airport.

One of my responsibilities was to go to the airport and assess whether a visa was genuine or not. The newer machine-readable visas allowed for some verification remotely — if I had the visa number, I could check the embassy computer system to confirm whether it was issued and who it was issued to. But with older visas, which were still stamped manually, I had to physically go to the airport and inspect them. That required knowing the characteristics of genuine visas and working closely with airport police to determine the next steps.

It could be a very sad situation. Often, it was a young man in his twenties, who had likely paid a significant amount of money for a forged visa, only to be caught at the airport. These individuals were usually sent back home, broke and in debt, having lost everything they had put into their attempt to go to the U.S. It was difficult to witness, knowing what it meant for them and their families.

Aside from those cases, duty officer calls were mostly routine and generally manageable. If something came up outside consular matters — something for the political or economic sections — it was usually a matter of knowing who to contact. But those situations were relatively rare.

*Q: As now, as you were speaking, the only other question that I had was, did you use your Hindi? I imagine you were trained in Hindi? Did you become at all satisfied with the level of fluency you had?*

GOODFRIEND: For straightforward cases, I could use Hindi. We've talked a lot about exceptional cases — fraudulent or complex ones — but many interviews were routine. If

a person was genuinely married and in a legitimate relationship, my Hindi was sufficient for conducting the interview, as long as I didn't have to explain complicated matters.

That worked well enough, but a large number of visa applicants came from Punjab, where they spoke Punjabi rather than Hindi. Some spoke a more rural dialect, and we had staff members who spoke Punjabi to assist when needed. Most of our local staff were multilingual, fluent in English, Hindi, and at least one regional language, whether it was Punjabi, Malayalam, or another language depending on their background.

Hindi training didn't fully prepare us for the linguistic diversity in India. Some of my colleagues argued that officers posted to Delhi should be taught Punjabi instead of Hindi, given the large number of applicants from Punjab.

For me, in an interview, I could handle basic conversation in Hindi. I still remember certain phrases, like asking someone to raise their right hand for an oath (*aapka da'i haath oopar kijiye*). I would also try to piece together simple questions, like Why do you want to go to America? — something along the lines of *Amerika kyon ja rehate he*? If the response was simple enough, I could understand it. Questions like Where did you meet your husband or wife? were within my range, and many applicants also spoke English.

I felt that my language competence was just at the minimum level to be adequate for basic interviews. But I also had a hair-trigger instinct for calling in assistance if needed.

*Q: Now, you mentioned that your family more or less integrated into embassy life, did your wife work?*

GOODFRIEND: At that time — defining work broadly — she wasn't working outside the home. When we arrived in Delhi, we had a one-year-old, a nearly three-year-old, and a four-going-on-five-year-old. In the long run, she wanted to work outside the home, but in the short term, while the children were so young, she wanted to be with them.

India offered more household help than we might have had elsewhere. She could have entrusted the children to a full-time nanny, but she wasn't comfortable doing that. Instead, she had help with the house and children, but remained the primary caregiver.

We hired a cook and a housekeeper, and the housekeeper also assisted with the children. There was a gardener, who maintained multiple gardens in the compound, with each household contributing to his pay. We also had a driver who handled shopping and transportation.

Managing household staff came with its own challenges. She sometimes found it frustrating, especially if staff deferred to me rather than her, which occasionally led to tension. But overall, she wasn't looking for work outside the home at that stage.

Within the Consular Section, there were positions available for spouses. Two family members worked in the section, and there may have been other roles, like the Community

Liaison Officer, filled by spouses. However, given the ages of our children, she wasn't seeking work at the time.

That changed in our next assignment, in Moscow. By then, the children were older, and she actively sought work outside the home. I don't want to give the impression that she always intended to be a stay-at-home parent — while the children were young, she wanted to be with them, but once they were all in school, she was ready to pursue other opportunities.

*Q: Now that concludes all of the questions that I have. But that doesn't necessarily end the story. Is there something I've overlooked?*

GOODFRIEND: We're now in the summer of 1993, and at this point, I was tenured as a Foreign Service officer, which opened up new opportunities for me. Before leaving India, I could now bid on my next assignment and receive language training. While I had already studied Hindi as an untenured officer, now that I was tenured, I was eligible for a full year of Russian language training. Moscow was my top choice, and I was selected for it.

At the same time, we started thinking about settling in the United States. The children were growing quickly and becoming more aware of their surroundings. While in India, we began looking at different locations in the U.S., outside of Washington, D.C., where we could settle and give them a sense of home. We were focused on finding a place with good schools and an overall environment that suited our family. The question was also: Is there a synagogue there?

After considering several options, we ultimately decided on Fredericksburg, Virginia. It had a train to D.C., which seemed convenient, and we liked the feel of the town. This decision marked a new phase for us: first-time homebuyers in the U.S. The children were becoming school-aged, and we needed to choose schools, while also managing the transition from Delhi to Moscow.

Regarding my time in Delhi, I felt that my work was appreciated by the chargé, Ken Brill, especially given the challenges we had faced with the staff changes, arrests, and issues in the consular section. Despite these difficulties, we received positive feedback from Washington, including from the Assistant Secretary of Consular Affairs, Mary Ryan. My work was recognized, particularly with the focus on understanding the local environment and fraud prevention. The fact that we were able to manage the workload despite these challenges spoke highly of the work the team was doing, and it was great to receive feedback and kudos from higher-ups.

As a second-tour officer, I felt supported and valued. While I didn't have formal mentors, I did feel like I was part of a close-knit group, moving forward together in a collaborative and supportive environment.

Another aspect of my role that I hadn't anticipated was my work with computer systems. From the start of my career in the State Department, I had focused on ensuring that systems worked effectively. This continued in Tel Aviv, and even more in Delhi, where I handled Tibetan visa issues and worked on streamlining adjudication processes with technology. In fact, I developed a reputation for being very "system-friendly" — almost like a "computer whisperer". I was able to get technology to work for me, even when some of my colleagues were less comfortable with it. This became a defining part of my career, as I wasn't afraid to embrace technology to improve processes.

*Q: Interesting. Interesting. All right. So you do get assigned to Moscow, but in what-*

GOODFRIEND: I was assigned as the deputy in the non-immigrant visa (NIV) unit. When I arrived in Moscow in 1994, it had been a time of transition for the embassy. Under Reagan, there had been an expulsion of Russian diplomats from the U.S., and in reciprocation, the Russians had prohibited Russian citizens from working for the embassy. That ban had ended a year and a half before I arrived, and in the time since, the embassy had quickly hired local employees. However, they had all been hired under the same generic job description, which was more of a flexible position than a specific, defined role.

Before this, the embassy had relied heavily on contractors, particularly with companies like PA&E (Pacific Architects and Engineers), to carry out tasks that local employees would normally have done. This created a transitional phase where local employees were starting to replace contractors, but many of the contractors were still present.

The staffing situation in the Consular Section was still in flux, and a lot of the local employees were working under a generic position description, which meant there was no promotion path. Everyone was hired at the same grade, and their responsibilities were spread across various parts of the section.

When I arrived as deputy in the NIV unit, we began to take a step back and reassess how things were working in the section. Who was doing what? Were certain tasks being handled by people who might not need to be doing them? Were there better ways to organize the work so that people could be doing tasks that were more in line with their abilities? This reminded me a lot of my earlier experience, when I was asked to copy over data from one system to another and questioned whether that was the most efficient use of my time and talents.

As I looked at how our staffing was structured, I realized that we might face problems soon. Local employees would soon become proficient in their roles, but with no promotion opportunities, they might resign or become dissatisfied. I recognized that there was a need to create career progression opportunities within the section, and I began to consider how we could structure the roles to allow for that.

One of the key positions I thought could be handled by a senior FSN (Foreign Service National) was essentially the role I had as deputy in the NIV unit. This role involved

overseeing the operations within the NIV unit, ensuring that work was being produced effectively. It wasn't as much about decision-making as it was about making sure operations ran smoothly. In my mind, this was a role suited for a senior FSN, someone who could ensure that the day-to-day work of other FSNs was being carried out effectively.

So, I took it upon myself, working closely with the Consul General, to rework the job descriptions for all the FSN positions in the Consular Section. My goal was to review and regrade the NIV (Non-Immigrant Visa) positions, followed by a review of the positions for ACS (American Citizen Services) and IV (Immigrant Visa) to address the evolving needs of the section.

I wanted to ensure that we could create a promotion path for staff, including defining entry-level positions. This process helped me develop a deeper understanding of what factors led to higher grades for positions. For example, decision-making authority played a significant role, but I had to think carefully about how to assign responsibility for decisions — whether it was simply identifying the type of visa being applied for (tourist, work, student exchange) or whether staff would be making more complex decisions about visa eligibility.

I also looked at the question of supervision and how we could define supervisory responsibilities in a meaningful way. This led me to essentially rewrite my own position out of a job, as I restructured the responsibilities of many positions to be handled by local staff.

But I also realized something important was missing: outreach. As you mentioned, were we going out to explain to people in the community what we do in the Consular Section? In Moscow, this hadn't been happening when I arrived, and it was causing some issues. I decided to create a Public Liaison Unit to address this gap, ensuring that we could reach out and better communicate with the public about the work we were doing.

Many of the officers were also frustrated by what they perceived as fraud, especially considering the high levels of fraud I had dealt with in Delhi. I wanted to bring the same level of attention to these issues and ensure we were addressing them systematically. This was part of the broader effort to improve the operational structure and adapt to new challenges in the Moscow consular section.

The nature of fraud in Russia was distinctly different from what we had seen in Delhi or Tel Aviv. The fraud in Russia was much more related to organized crime and the transition period the country was undergoing. In 1994, Russia was experiencing significant change. The Soviet Union was no longer, and the rise of oligarchs was beginning. Large state industries had been sold off at bargain basement prices, and there was a rise in an entrepreneurial class — a nuanced term for what was essentially a group of individuals whose financial sources were often difficult to trace.

This new class of business people was increasingly involved in illicit activities. Unlike the older Mafia-style crime rings in the Soviet Union, these were ad hoc groups that came together opportunistically and then dissipated. The members of these new rings, unlike their predecessors, the visibly tattooed "thieves-in-law," didn't want to separate themselves from society; they wanted to integrate into the new business climate of post-Soviet Russia. To do so, they created front companies, using them as cover for moving illegally obtained money — whether from arms sales, drug trafficking, or other forms of criminal activity — through these pseudo-legitimate businesses.

As consular officers, we were facing a huge challenge. These were people with significant financial resources, but traditional tools for handling fraud, like Section 214(b) (the visa applicant's failure to demonstrate sufficient ties to their home country) or Section 221(g) (requesting additional information), were not effective in these cases. The connections these individuals had, both socially and financially, made refusals difficult to sustain, and this left us struggling to find the right way to address these cases. The information we were looking for was not easy to define.

By the time I arrived in Moscow as a mid-level officer, I had some experience, and I wanted to help the officers there define the nature of fraud in Russia in a way that we could actually address. There had been an effort to tackle this issue before I arrived, but it was clear that Russia was dealing with a new environment and types of fraud that had not been seen in previous decades. The country had split into multiple new states, and while the embassies in these new states were small, they were all dealing with similar issues.

To address this, a mechanism called the Russian Business Investigation Initiative (RBI) had been created before I arrived. It was a centralized tasking mechanism coordinated by the Office of Fraud Prevention Programs (CA/FPP) within Consular Affairs, in partnership with the FBI and Diplomatic Security (DS). If a consular officer suspected that a visa applicant was involved in organized crime, they could request an investigation through CA/FPP that would be routed to either the FBI or DS. There was a memorandum of understanding between these agencies, so they would work together on the investigation.

However, when I arrived, I found that the process was broken. Consular officers, whether in Moscow or other posts in the former Soviet Union, had begun writing formal requests for investigations under the RBII system, but there were no responses. Officers would deny the applications under 221(g), pending the completion of an investigation, but there was no follow-up or resolution. These cases could be left in limbo for months or even over a year, and by the time I arrived, there were cases that had been pending for well over a year. This lack of closure was frustrating for the adjudicating officers, and it was clear that we needed to find a way to fix this broken system.

I created a role for myself that combined Fraud Prevention and Public Liaison, seeing them as intertwined. I believed that if we could implement more effective outreach, it would help people understand what we were really looking for in the visa process. This would, in turn, alleviate some of the burden of traditional fraud. Many people were being

sold false promises by agents, who convinced them that certain documents were needed when, in fact, they weren't. If we could communicate clearly with applicants, explaining that the process was straightforward — and provide guidance on how to apply for things like tourist visas — that would prevent a lot of unnecessary confusion. By educating people about the process, we could free up our resources to focus on the more complex issues, like organized crime.

When I arrived at post, the embassy had printed a one-page leaflet explaining the application process, which was a useful start. The Internet was still in its early stages. In India, we had just started using email, and in Moscow, by 1994, the Internet was becoming more widely known. I had witnessed the rise of online communities while I was between posts . In 1993, while in the U.S., I was subscribing to a service called Delphi. This was one of the first services that provided a direct connection to the Internet, which was still not widely accessible.

At the time, AOL and CompuServe were examples of closed, proprietary online communities. These systems were isolated, meaning they didn't communicate with one another. But the Internet was beginning to connect these communities. It was a game-changer, offering a vast amount of information — though it wasn't as easily accessible as it is today. There were no modern websites as we know them now, but rather news groups and listservs, where people would post questions or engage in discussions. The only way to find information was to know where to look or use books that listed IP addresses for various online resources.

However, between 1993 and 1994, this all began to change with the introduction of web browsers like Mosaic and Netscape Navigator. Suddenly, the Internet was becoming a more user-friendly space, opening up a new era of information-sharing and communication. This was a turning point in how I thought about technology and its potential to help streamline outreach efforts in visa processing and fraud prevention.

The mail address that I still use today is at netscape.net, which I keep as a token of those times. Netscape Navigator's predecessor, Mosaic, was an early browser, providing a graphical interface to the Internet, and I had used it while studying Russian before I arrived at post. By the time I reached Moscow, I had gained some familiarity with the Internet. One of the changes in post-Soviet Russia was the increasing availability of Internet access, with George Soros — who is still active, albeit much older — funding Internet access in the former Soviet Union.

For a monthly fee, we were able to subscribe to Glasnet, which was the name given to the Soros-funded Internet service in Russia. It was a service available to the general public, not just diplomats. I could pay my fee in cash at their office and get browser-based access to the Internet, specifically using Netscape Navigator. With this access, I had the idea to enhance our outreach by creating a Consular Section website for the Embassy. While I can't claim it was the first consular website, it was certainly one of the early ones, and I took pride in being part of that effort.

One of the first changes I made was to rework how we described the visa process. Prior to that, the handout we gave people started with: "The U.S. visa process is very complicated." To me, that was the wrong approach. I felt that starting with that phrase made the process seem inaccessible, and it would push people to seek help from self-proclaimed pseudo-experts rather than coming to us. Instead, I wanted to make it clear that the process was straightforward, and if we as the embassy couldn't explain it simply, then how could we expect applicants to understand it? So, I revised the language, changing the opening line to, "The U.S. visa process is fairly straightforward."

I wanted applicants to feel like they could easily navigate the process by following a simple explanation. The core message was: If you know your purpose for traveling to the United States, then you can identify your visa category, fill out the necessary form, provide the required information, and show evidence that you have ties outside the United States, which would compel you to return after your visit. I retyped the guidelines, had them approved and posted them online, making sure the process was now framed in an accessible, easy-to-understand manner.

In addition to creating the website, I stayed active in some of the newsgroups online, where I was known under the username “agoodfriend” which had the benefit of both being my real initial and surname while also sounding like I was trying to be a helpful good friend. These were helpful forums for answering questions and engaging with people, allowing us to further communicate directly and simplify the visa application process. The ability to use technology to bridge gaps and offer better outreach was a key part of my time in Moscow.

By posting the text of our printed handout in those groups, I shared the official U.S. Embassy information about the visa application process. This approach worked well because, even if it wasn't always coming directly from us, it was being circulated by others seen as credible. This helped to amplify the message and ensure that more people were getting accurate information about the process, rather than relying on misleading advice or fraudulent services. It became a way to directly engage with the community and clarify misconceptions.

It helped address a real problem that we were also having with the Russian government.

I arrived in July 1994, and maybe a week or so before I arrived, or maybe two weeks, a Russian journalist had applied for a tourist visa and was not satisfied with the process or with the way that she was treated. She seemed to have stayed around the waiting room listening to interviews, feeling that the applicants were not being treated with the respect that was due to them. And so she wrote an article about how the U.S. visa process was disrespectful, which appeared in one of the major Russian newspapers. I think it might have been *Izvestia*, though I’m not completely sure; it was a major newspaper at the time. The article was then picked up by other newspapers, and there were so many newspapers in Russia that the same story, or a variation of it, could spread across the media. This would sometimes resurface two weeks later with slight modifications, creating a recurring cycle in the press.

There was now this regular drumbeat in the Russian media about how the Consular Section was refusing visas to grandmothers wanting to see their grandchildren, to businesspeople traveling on legitimate business to the United States, and there seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the refusals. The media painted the process as disrespectful, particularly to people who were simply trying to travel for tourism.

One person who was a regular contact of mine in Moscow told me, "Do you know what the current joke is?" They said, "In the Soviet Union, if you wanted to stop Ivan from going to the United States, you told the KGB that Ivan is planning to go to the United States, and they would stop him. Now, if you want to stop Ivan from moving to the United States, you tell the American Consul that Ivan is planning to move to the United States, and he won't get the visa." This reflected the change in mindset taking place, as now people had the freedom to travel — supposedly. They thought it should be like the Soviet era, where if they presented an invitation letter, they should get a visa. They felt they had a right not just to leave Russia, but to enter the United States as well. And why were we stopping them with this visa process?

So, people were buying invitation letters that Russians were happy to sell them. They were buying the type of documentation that might have worked within the Soviet Union, when a document like that might help you get exit permission from the Soviet government and you could leave as a refugee. But now, they were applying for visas like citizens of other countries. At one point, we even received correspondence from the Russian Consulate in New York saying, "We understand that people are applying with invitation letters. Some of these letters are fraudulent. Let us verify them. It would be useful if you would accept only invitation letters that have been approved by the Russian Consulate in New York." We thought this was a bit out of hand. We didn't want invitation letters — particularly ones where even a genuine family member or friend had to go to the trouble of paying for a notarized document to show the consular officer that they were inviting someone to the United States. We didn't need documents that were specifically prepared to support a visa application. If a person has correspondence from their friend or family from years past, that's fine. Let them show it. We weren't going to demand it.

We wanted to change the mindset. We communicated in online fora, telling people not to bring invitation letters. We did not require these documents. We just wanted them to come prepared to explain what they were planning to do in the United States and why they would return. That was part of our outreach efforts, trying to shift away from spending resources on unintentional fraud. People were paying money because they thought these documents were necessary, as someone told them they were. But we just wanted the truth.

We shifted focus to organized crime, and my role involved both public liaison and fraud prevention. This also helped us to adjust officer perspectives, so we were no longer denying visas to grandmothers wanting to see their grandchildren or frequent travelers who were applying because they traveled too much. We had to adjust our approach so that what should be easy issuances, like a student returning to continue their studies, were

not being unnecessarily denied. People with strong family ties and those over 65, who had the resources to travel, should be easy to issue visas to. If they had traveled to the United States several times in the past two years, we would pre-screen those applications, eliminating the need for an interview.

This was all before 9/11, but the goal was to streamline the process and make the decision process more consistent. If these applicants met the criteria, we would just have a mid-level review their application without the need for an interview and issue the visa, unless there was a clear ineligibility.

The changes in the visa issuance process freed up time for interviewing officers to focus on more complicated cases, such as first-time travelers or individuals whose travel purposes were unclear. At the same time, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing highlighted a new concern: terrorism. The attack was connected to the "Blind Sheikh," Omar Abdel-Rahman, who had managed to obtain a visa despite being flagged in some posts' lookout systems. This raised concerns over whether consular posts had access to current information regarding potential terrorist ties.

Before 1993, consular posts were often using outdated systems such as microfiche or CDs, which could be weeks or months behind the latest data. This lag meant that some critical information, such as terrorist connections, could be unavailable at the time of visa issuance. Following the bombing, Congress demanded that the State Department improve its vetting processes and implement real-time access to lookout systems. Previously, posts relied on the Automated Visa Lookout System (AVLOS), which was transitioning to the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS). This change ensured that posts had immediate access to the most up-to-date information, so if someone like Abdel-Rahman applied for a visa at a different post, the lookout would be immediately available.

The shift also ensured that consular officers left an audit trail when checking these systems. If an officer chose to override a lookout, they had to justify their decision within the computer system. If a consular officer overrode a terrorism lookout without justification, and that person subsequently engaged in terrorist activities in the U.S., the officer could be held personally liable for the consequences. To help address these issues, the State Department also pushed for the ability to charge for visa applications, as a means of funding the enhanced security measures. This marked a significant shift from the previous stance, where the goal had been to keep visas accessible without fees. However, with this new system in place, the focus was on improving the ability to vet applicants thoroughly and ensuring that consular officers were held accountable for their decisions.

*Q: Just one thing here, André, because I've got another interview shortly. I think what we're going to need to do is pause here and pick up again at our next session. I hate to interrupt because I know you're in the middle of describing these changes, but because-*

GOODFRIEND: There might be some duplication, or maybe not. I'll just remember that we're talking about the impact of the attack on the World Trade Center and how it

affected visa processing. The point I was eventually going to get to was that we began to charge for the application. The benefit of that additional step in visa processing in Moscow was that charging people before they apply, rather than after they were issued, imposed a particular step that gave us a gateway to control the applications more effectively. But we can pause there.

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*Q: Today is May 13, 2022, we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend. André, you were talking about the changes in the U.S. consular system after the first attack on the Twin Towers 1993.*

GOODFRIEND: In 1993 I believe it was. Yes, right.

*Q: Please, please continue.*

GOODFRIEND: To meet the congressional requirement that consular posts have real-time access to information on visa applicants — ensuring an audit trail to verify whether a consular officer had referenced that information when making an adjudication — the Department of State needed to build a global telecommunications infrastructure. This infrastructure would connect every embassy and consulate, making real-time information accessible.

However, Congress did not allocate financial resources for this initiative. Instead, they argued that since visas were a service provided to non-U.S. citizens, it should be non-U.S. citizens who bear the cost. The Bureau of Consular Affairs was authorized to impose a fee — not just for visa issuance, but for the application itself. It was no longer a reciprocal fee but a unilateral application fee, as the service provided was the consideration of the application and the review of relevant information.

We began charging $25 per visa application, and those funds were used to build the global infrastructure necessary for real-time name checks. However, this added an additional step in the process: before an applicant's case could be reviewed by a consular officer, they first had to pay the fee to the cashier. Only then would their application be processed.

Previously, there had been resistance to introducing data entry before an officer reviewed an application. The prevailing mindset at the time was that efficiency would be better served if applicants simply walked up to a consular officer with their paper applications, much like a bank teller system where people lined up for the first available officer. Delaying that process with preliminary data entry was met with resistance.

Now, with the mandatory fee payment step, we in Moscow found a practical solution: the cashier would take the application form and not return it to the visa applicant. This

prevented applicants from bypassing the system and approaching a consular officer directly. It also allowed us to manage our workflow more effectively.

However, this change created a time gap. Officers, eager to start their interviews and move through the day's cases, had to wait — perhaps 30 to 40 minutes — before they could begin, as data entry had to be completed and name checks received. Previously, we had attempted to introduce data entry first, as I mentioned in Delhi, but once I left, the computer was removed from the window. Now, with this new procedure, we were finally able to enforce that step.

This also provided another advantage: the opportunity to pre-screen visa applications. At the time, Russian media was highly critical of the consular process, reporting on difficulties faced by grandparents, frequent travelers, and students being denied visas. Whether or not those reports were entirely accurate, we used the fee payment step as an intermediary screening point.

We established criteria to waive interviews for certain applicants, such as those over 65 who had the financial means to afford travel. Generally, such individuals had strong social and cultural ties outside the U.S., and at that stage of life, relocation was unlikely. Likewise, frequent travelers to the U.S. had already demonstrated a pattern of returning home after short visits, making concerns about their ties less relevant. Students returning to the same course of study or exchange students continuing their programs also had clear justifications for their visas.

We publicized that these groups no longer needed to appear for an interview — they could simply submit their application to the cashier. This freed up consular officers' time to focus on a more pressing issue in Russia: the abuse of the visa system by organized crime.

I previously mentioned the Russian Business Investigation Initiative, which had been launched in collaboration with Diplomatic Security and the FBI. If a consular officer in Moscow — or in any of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union — encountered questionable applications with possible links to organized crime, they could refer them for deeper investigation. Many of these new embassies were minimally staffed, making it difficult for a single consular officer to assess cases that crossed borders or had transnational elements. The initiative was designed to centralize and facilitate that process.

However, a challenge emerged. Each participant in the process — the consular officers, Diplomatic Security, the FBI — had its own role and priorities. Consular officers would refer applications for investigation to the Fraud Prevention Programs Office in Washington and deny them under Section 221(g), pending further information. But the results of those investigations rarely came back.

As a result, cases — often involving well-connected individuals — remained in limbo indefinitely. Eventually, pressure would mount to either issue or deny the visa on more substantive grounds.

We would call and inquire, “What’s the holdup?” Some of these cases had been pending for over a year. The response from the FBI was that the information we were requesting involved potential organized criminal activity. However, because consular officers are not law enforcement officers, if an investigation was initiated into organized crime, it would become a law enforcement matter, and they could not share details with us while the investigation was ongoing.

If there was no organized crime involved, then the FBI would not investigate at all, as it was outside the purview of the agreement. This created a paradox: if an investigation was underway, we couldn’t be informed of its results, and if there was no organized crime involvement, there would be no investigation — meaning we also received no information. From my understanding, this was one of the main obstacles to getting responses from the FBI. In fact, there was a directive asking posts to stop sending so many investigation requests unless the cases were clearly linked to organized crime. But, in a kind of “Catch-22, in cases where organized crime was suspected, the FBI could not share their findings with us.

With regard to Diplomatic Security (DS), I informally learned — never through any official communication — that their investigative resources were extremely limited. Their primary focus was on apprehending individuals already in the United States who were engaged in criminal activity. What we were asking — information to prevent certain individuals from entering the U.S. in the first place — was not their priority. Their funding and resources were allocated based on criminal activity occurring within the U.S., such as visa or passport fraud involving individuals already present in the country. Preventative investigations outside the U.S. were not something they had the capacity to take on. Instead, that type of investigation was expected to be handled by DS resources at post, such as the Regional Security Officer (RSO) and consular sections.

Even though we had a memorandum of understanding on how different agencies were supposed to collaborate, the reality was that each entity had its own priorities and constraints. As a result, we weren’t getting the information we needed to move forward with adjudications.

In Moscow, we decided to reexamine our role as consular officers. Why were we suspending action on these cases? Could we take a more proactive approach in making adjudications rather than relying on external agencies for answers that weren’t coming? We recognized that the responsibility for adjudicating visa applications lay with the post — not with domestic U.S. agencies. We couldn’t simply defer to them and wait for a decision; our job was to gather the necessary information to make that decision ourselves.

By streamlining the consular process, we had freed up officers’ time to conduct more in-depth interviews, particularly in complex cases. We also focused on strengthening our

own analytical capabilities to build more comprehensive cases. Rather than seeking broad, open-ended investigations — essentially asking agencies to "check out this guy because we're suspicious" — we took a more structured approach.

We started compiling detailed recommendations for visa ineligibility under Section 212(a)(3)(A)(ii) — which applies to individuals seeking to enter the U.S. with the intent to engage in unlawful activity. Instead of vague suspicion, we documented why we believed an applicant was linked to organized crime and intended to use their visa for criminal purposes. We based these findings on interview notes, submitted documents, and patterns we identified in their applications.

We then sent these cases to the Visa Office (VO) in Washington for concurrence. This was a well-established process: when a post suspects an applicant of fraud, they can request the Visa Office's concurrence in making an official fraud determination. We applied the same mechanism to cases involving criminal intent. If the Visa Office concurred, we could formally find the applicant ineligible under 212(a)(3)(A)(ii) and deny their visa application. This process finally began yielding results because we were working with the appropriate office — one that had a direct role in visa adjudication, just as we did.

As the Fraud Prevention Officer in Moscow, I also recognized the need to improve communication among interviewing officers. Often, officers would encounter individual cases that hinted at broader patterns, but without a way to systematically share observations, those patterns remained fragmented.

To address this, I began synthesizing and circulating key findings from visa interviews. Each week, I compiled notable observations and trends into an internal email for the interviewing officers. This allowed them to see not only what they had personally encountered but also what their colleagues were observing. It reinforced their individual experiences, helped them recognize broader trends, and encouraged a more coordinated approach.

Initially, this email was kept internal to our visa section. But as we began to recognize that the information we were gathering had significance beyond our consular operations — particularly given the growing concern about organized crime from the former Soviet Union — we started expanding the circulation of this intelligence.

It wasn't just within Moscow's consular section that we shared this information. We also provided it to the Regional Security Officer, since we had already been working with Diplomatic Security on these issues. The RSO was DS's representative at post. We also shared it with the Legal Attaché, the FBI's representative at post, as well as the INS Officer in Charge, since these issues had implications for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the United States.

Additionally, we sent it to our Fraud Prevention Programs contact in Washington as well as to other sections in the embassy. And we soon expanded the circulation to include U.S.

embassies in the newly independent states, many of which were small posts with limited staffing. The idea was that what we were seeing in Moscow could provide valuable insights for these other posts as well.

Every week, we compiled and sent out a circular summarizing our observations. I took it upon myself to draft these reports, weaving together different threads of intelligence and analysis. The circular covered trends in banking and financial transactions in Russia, the characteristics of legitimate businesses versus those operating in the gray or black markets, the mechanisms individuals were using to bypass regulations or navigate Russia's economic system, patterns in visa applications from individuals linked to organized crime, companies that appeared to be connected to criminal networks, their offices or operational bases outside Russia, and their destinations in the United States.

Since these reports touched on broader economic trends, we shared them with the Economic Section in Moscow. Because they also had political implications, we looped in the Political Section as well. Rather than relying on a rigid tasking system where we sent open-ended requests for information to other agencies and waited for answers, we shifted to a more collaborative approach. We essentially "pulled up our chair" to a shared table, bringing our findings and saying: here's what we're seeing. We believe we all have shared objectives as members of the U.S. government, each with our respective roles. We know our responsibilities, and you know yours. We're happy to share this information — what you choose to do with it is up to you. If it's useful, great. If not, that's fine too. Either way, we'll continue sharing it.

This approach fostered greater cooperation across agencies and ensured that critical insights were being disseminated where they could have the most impact.

*Q: What kind of feedback did you get from taking this initiative?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, in the past, as I mentioned, the FBI wouldn't share information about its investigations with us. But after we started this initiative, we began to get questions. It wasn't necessarily feedback in the sense of a pat on the back, but rather inquiries like, "Could you give us more information on this? We're seeing something that looks related." They would share what they were seeing and ask if we were seeing the same thing. It was a shift from silence to a dialogue, and it came from different FBI offices in the United States — from Florida, Pennsylvania, and other locations. Because we weren't directly sharing with all domestic FBI offices, the legal attaché at post acted as the conduit, and that's how we started hearing back.

Neighboring posts in the former Soviet Union also began to report that they were seeing the same groups operating in their countries. We exchanged information, filling in gaps and gaining a fuller picture. Other posts with large Russian-speaking communities also wanted to be part of the effort. We heard from Toronto, Tel Aviv, and several other locations, and we added them to the collective. The information exchange was proving useful, helping us support our visa ineligibility cases with solid evidence.

With this collaboration, we were able to strengthen our cases when referring them to the Visa Office in Washington, specifically for ineligibility under Section 212(a)(3)(A)(ii), which was a permanent ineligibility. This was a significant shift. Previously, cases had been held under 221(g), which simply meant additional information was needed — something easily overcome. Now, we had the information to clearly demonstrate that certain individuals were seeking to enter the United States for criminal activity. By drawing on our interviews and intelligence from our partners, who were now actively sharing information, we were able to make a strong case. Washington saw the evidence, concurred with our findings, and ruled that these individuals were permanently ineligible under 212(a)(3)(A)(ii).

I remember one incident in particular because of the irony involved. A contact in Washington reached out to me and said, "These weekly messages you're sending — are you also sending them to the FBI, INS, and DS?" I confirmed that we were, since these agencies were represented at post and we believed the information was relevant to them. He then responded, "I don't know if that's such a good idea." He explained that a situation had just unfolded where DS had gone to investigate a location we had mentioned, only to find that both the FBI and INS were also investigating it — without realizing that all three were working on the same case.

To me, that was exactly the point. I told him, "It's great that they were all there together. We're going to keep sharing this information because they're doing their jobs — it's just that they're not talking to each other. The problem isn't that we're providing too much information; it's that they need to coordinate. If they worked together the way we were doing at post, they'd see the same benefits."

*Q: And that would be a major source of criticism in the 9/11 report, the stove piping and the turf battles among the national security organizations.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, exactly. This was before 9/11, but we were dealing with the same issues — different agencies not sharing information, working in silos rather than as part of a collaborative effort. As I mentioned, the Russian Business Investigation Initiative wasn't giving us the information we needed because of the existing firewalls preventing interagency sharing.

We took the initiative because we believed collaboration and information-sharing led to better outcomes. There's a strong thread through all of this: the idea that it's always better when agencies work together effectively. It shouldn't be a tit-for-tat arrangement — "We'll give you this if you give us that" — or a case of withholding information because the other side isn't sharing enough. Instead, we took the approach of transparency. We made it clear what we were doing and what we were seeing, and we left the door open for others to provide input if they wanted their insights to inform our decisions.

As a result, we moved from having a backlog of cases pending indefinitely under 221(g) — a relatively weak ineligibility ground based on lack of information — to securing an average of one permanent ineligibility per week under 212(a)(3)(A)(ii). And when I say

an average, I mean that because this was organized activity, some weeks we might have five or six individuals working together who were all found ineligible for the same reason, while other weeks there might be none. But over the course of a year, it averaged out to around fifty-two permanent ineligibilities — a significant shift from where we had started.

*Q: Just a quick question. The ineligibility would be based on the-*

GOODFRIEND: Seeking to enter the United States in order to engage in criminal activity.

*Q: Right. Okay, and usually, well, I guess what I'm hoping for is, without naming names, can you give an example?*

GOODFRIEND: Of what?.

*Q: A typical 212(a)(3)(A)(ii) case*

GOODFRIEND: There are numerous examples. I'll try to describe them without naming names, though in some cases, even without the name, it might be fairly obvious who I'm referring to, as some of these cases were public. One that stands out involved a well-known Russian entertainer, often referred to as the "Frank Sinatra of Russia." Like Sinatra, he was famous as a performer, but there were also persistent rumors of ties to organized crime. The information we had, linked him to two groups involved in drug smuggling and arms trafficking. The intelligence in this case didn't come directly from our consular interviews but from other sources. We had to piece it together, connect it to other findings, and build a case to justify his ineligibility.

At the time, he already had a valid U.S. visa. We sent him a letter requesting that he come in for an interview. He did, arriving with his daughter, who acted as his translator. I explained the grounds for our concerns. He denied any involvement, but the information we had was compelling. He later protested publicly, but the general reaction was more of a knowing acknowledgment — an attitude of, "Well, of course, everyone knows what he's involved in." Later, he was elected to the Russian Duma, seemingly in part to gain diplomatic immunity or otherwise facilitate his ability to travel. He did manage to enter the U.S. at least once, but he veered from his stated travel itinerary, and after that, he was no longer allowed entry. It was a high-profile case, one that generated significant diplomatic pressure, but the evidence was strong, and the decision held.

Another case involved an individual planning to attend a major event in the United States. I won't specify the nature of the event to keep it vague, but it was high-profile. This person was identified as an enforcer for an organized crime group, with credible intelligence linking him to multiple assassinations. We discussed the case with the Legal Attaché because, given his history, we knew we would deny his visa if he applied. However, he had traveled to the U.S. before, and that raised an interesting discussion

with the FBI. The Legal Attaché suggested letting him enter the U.S. and tracking his movements to see whom he met and what he did.

That was not a decision we could make on our own. If the FBI genuinely wanted him admitted for intelligence-gathering purposes, there was an official process for obtaining a waiver. They needed to coordinate with their domestic offices and request a waiver through the Visa Office. After discussing the matter, the FBI ultimately decided not to pursue the waiver. They concluded that while following him could yield some intelligence, it would be operationally difficult to track him effectively in a large U.S. city, and they didn't have the necessary resources to do it properly. In the end, the decision was made to deny the visa, preventing his travel entirely.

There were also numerous cases involving individuals working for shell companies. Often, these companies didn't appear to be legitimate businesses at all. We visited the office of one such company in Moscow, spoke with a bookkeeper, and found that she couldn't even name the individuals on the payroll — people who were supposedly applying for visas to travel to the U.S. to meet with a "partner company." This particular case turned out to be significant because, as we later discovered, multiple U.S. agencies were investigating the same organization, albeit without coordinating with one another. It was the case where DS, FBI, and INS all ended up converging on the same target without realizing it.

Some of these investigations remain relevant even today. Many of the criminal enterprises operating in the 1990s are still active, and their key figures have continued to wield influence. One of the individuals whose visa I denied in the mid-90s later became a well-known Russian oligarch. His name has appeared frequently in recent years in connection with U.S. sanctions related to Ukraine. Initially denied a visa due to his criminal ties, that decision was upheld for some time, though he eventually managed to enter the U.S. later under different circumstances.

During the chaotic post-Soviet period of the 1990s, a number of individuals amassed enormous wealth by violently seizing control of natural resource enterprises. We were able to document cases where their activities crossed into criminal territory, allowing us to argue that their U.S.-bound financial transactions constituted money laundering. That became another basis for ineligibility — if illicitly gained funds were being transferred to the U.S. to support family members, it constituted money laundering, even if the stated purpose of travel seemed innocuous.

The cases varied. Some involved individuals directly planning violent acts in the U.S. Others were connected to criminal networks in ways that strongly suggested illicit activity, even if their specific role was unclear. In many cases, our work wasn't just about processing visas — it was about collecting, synthesizing, and sharing intelligence to build a clearer picture of organized crime networks and their reach. Our efforts turned the consular section into a key player in addressing the issue of transnational crime from Russia and the former Soviet Union.

For that work, I received commendations from multiple agencies, and after I left Russia, I was awarded a Superior Honor Award for our contributions to combating organized crime through visa policy enforcement.

It continued to reinforce for me the importance of a collaborative approach rather than working in isolation or seeking individual credit. Everything we did was a group effort. I was simply synthesizing, analyzing, and sharing information while mentoring and working with consular officers to help them assess cases effectively. Part of that work involved guiding officers in distinguishing between frivolous applications and serious cases and countering the idea that addressing serious cases was too difficult or that Washington would never concur with our findings.

One of the most significant outcomes was shifting the focus of media criticism. Initially, there was considerable pressure on us, with accusations that we were denying visas to grandmothers and legitimate businesspeople. But by streamlining the process, we were able to publicly demonstrate that those groups were actually getting visas fairly easily. We even waived interviews for them. Families who wanted to visit their grandchildren could now do so without unnecessary obstacles, and we made it clear that we welcomed them. At the same time, we were permanently barring members of criminal organizations — quietly, with little public attention. Aside from the one high-profile case where the individual took his complaints to the media, there was almost no reporting on these visa denials. That was fine with us.

Beneath the surface, however, there was clear frustration within the Russian government. At senior-level meetings, certain cases were raised, but we had done our due diligence. Our refusals were well-documented, and when challenged, we could firmly stand behind our decisions — something that wouldn't have been possible under a 221(g) refusal.

Another shift was in how the Russian Foreign Ministry attempted to influence visa decisions. Previously, they had been using diplomatic notes to advocate for visas for private citizens, something we put a stop to. We clarified that diplomatic notes should only be used for diplomatic visas — when the Foreign Ministry took direct responsibility for sending someone on an official assignment. If a person was going to the U.S. in a private capacity, a diplomatic note was not an appropriate endorsement, no matter how well-connected that person was. It became clear to us that some individuals were likely paying the Foreign Ministry for these notes as a way to facilitate visa approvals. We rejected that practice outright.

Instead, we emphasized that our process was based on verifying legitimate business activity. There was an established referral system for individuals known to the embassy or other U.S. diplomatic officers, but that process was strictly for American diplomats to initiate. The Russian Foreign Ministry — or any foreign ministry — could not participate in that referral process. If an applicant wanted to schedule an appointment and leverage an embassy contact to help, there was a process for that as well, but it had to be through proper diplomatic channels.

Understandably, this was a major frustration for the Russian Foreign Ministry. A long-standing informal channel for visa applications was suddenly cut off. Certain well-connected individuals — some prominent but also tied to criminal activity — were now being denied entry to the U.S., with no way to overturn the decisions.

After I left post, I understand that there was a review of those visa refusals. The Russian government continued to press for explanations, but since every denial had been made with Washington's concurrence and was supported by well-documented evidence, the refusals held. Some of these cases caused political friction, which is why we kept the political section informed. We wanted them to be aware of whom we were denying and what role these individuals played in the broader Russian political landscape.

Through it all, our guiding principle was safeguarding U.S. security and interests. By maintaining transparency within our own government and sharing intelligence effectively, we created a sense of teamwork among agencies. The decisions we made weren't arbitrary; they were backed by evidence and justified in the interest of U.S. security. That collaborative approach strengthened our ability to take meaningful action rather than just talk about the issue.

When I arrived in Moscow in 1994, the Consular Section operated in a much more fragmented way, but by 1995 and into mid-1996, we saw a real shift. We had evolved into an integral partner within the embassy, not just processing visas in isolation but working collaboratively with other U.S. government agencies, with posts across the region, and with a growing network of partners. The ability to share information more effectively laterally — thanks to the relatively new tool of email, which we had only been using for a couple of years — enabled us to coordinate in ways that hadn't been possible before. That shift allowed us to address security threats in a more meaningful and systematic way.

I could provide numerous other anecdotes, but the larger point is that collaboration and information sharing — without insisting on a tit-for-tat exchange or trying to position ourselves as the dominant player — actually produced real benefits. People were more willing to engage with us, to share intelligence, and to work together toward common goals. That cooperative approach not only enhanced security efforts but also improved morale within the Consular Section.

Previously, we had been a frequent target of media criticism. The narrative had been that we were unfairly denying visas to grandmothers, students, and legitimate businesspeople. But once we streamlined the process, those applicants could get visas more easily, and much of the public frustration faded. That, in turn, allowed the leadership within the section to focus on training officers — helping them understand which cases presented real risks and which could be handled quickly and efficiently. As a result, the section became much smoother-running overall.

We also took advantage of data entry improvements. At the time, officers still relied on bulky CRT monitors, which were too large to fit effectively within the consular windows.

Before I left, we were exploring ways to integrate monitors into the workstations, such as embedding them under a glass desktop where officers could reference them easily while adjudicating cases. Officers were open to this idea because they saw the value in having immediate access to information during interviews rather than relying on paper applications and notes.

Another major improvement was reducing the risk of lost applications. Before this shift, visa data was often entered after the fact, sometimes as much as one or two weeks later. The priority had always been on issuing visas first — since those required immediate data entry — whereas refusals could wait. That meant backlogs built up, and there was always the risk that some refusals might not get recorded properly. By restructuring the process so that data entry happened before adjudication, we eliminated that backlog and ensured that every refusal was logged correctly and in real-time.

This change also helped stop exploitation of the visa queue. Previously, there had been individuals outside the embassy who made money by selling advice to visa applicants, claiming they could improve their chances. Their tactics included advising applicants to wait for specific officers whom they believed were more lenient or to avoid officers who had a reputation for being stricter. Whether or not there was any truth to these claims, these so-called “visa consultants” were profiting off misinformation and creating a false sense that the process could be manipulated.

By restructuring how applicants were called for interviews, we eliminated that vulnerability. Instead of allowing applicants to approach the officer of their choosing, officers now called up applicants from the queue themselves. This put control back in the hands of the consular officers rather than the applicants or external intermediaries. It ended the practice of individuals trying to game the system and reinforced the integrity of the process.

Overall, the shift was transformative. What had once been a reactive consular process — overwhelmed by backlogs, inconsistent workflows, and external pressure — became a proactive, well-coordinated system where officers could focus on real risks, work collaboratively with other agencies, and ensure that security concerns were being addressed effectively.

*Q: Well, now, I'm curious, though, you have now explained how you were in contact with other U.S. government administration of justice and legal entities. Was there ever any cooperation with Russian legal entities where there was truly a need for cooperation in stopping some kinds of illegal activity? Here I'm thinking about maybe human trafficking or drugs or something like that, that maybe both governments really wanted to stop.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, there was. One of our fraud investigators, a local employee, had previously worked with the Russian police, so he had connections that we could sometimes draw on when it came to verifying crime histories or getting relevant information.

One case that stands out involved a group of Russians who came to the embassy after realizing they had been victims of a visa scam. They had paid a significant sum of money to what they believed was a legitimate agency, thinking their applications had been approved and that visas had already been issued. When they showed up expecting to travel, they were desperate to understand what had happened.

We spoke with the group's designated representative and examined the documents they had received. In tracing where their money had gone, we discovered that payments were being sent to an organization in Britain that was running the fraud scheme. We alerted both the Russian authorities and the British authorities, who worked together to track the account where the funds had been deposited. Ultimately, they were able to shut down the operation, and I believe some of the defrauded individuals even recovered part of their money. I distinctly remember receiving a letter of thanks from the Thames Police, acknowledging that the information we had provided was instrumental in identifying the scheme and dismantling it.

In cases where average Russian citizens — not necessarily organized crime figures — were being targeted by fraudulent travel agencies or brokers, we found opportunities to collaborate with local law enforcement. These scams often involved selling unnecessary documents or charging people for visa applications that were never actually submitted. We worked with the authorities to address these cases and also used Russian media to warn the public against falling victim to such fraud.

We emphasized that Russians did not need to pay intermediaries to obtain a visa and urged them to be wary of anyone claiming they could guarantee approval. As I mentioned in our last conversation, we tried to shift the perception away from the idea that the U.S. visa process was deliberately opaque or difficult. Instead, we sought to make it clear that the process was transparent and straightforward, provided that applicants understood their purpose of travel and could demonstrate ties to their home country.

So, in short, yes — we did cooperate with Russian authorities, particularly in cases where everyday citizens were being deceived and financially exploited. While this wasn't at the level of high-profile criminal figures, it was still important in protecting people from fraud and reinforcing the integrity of the visa process.

*Q: Right. Now, as this was going on, did you stay exclusively in the Consular Section, or were there opportunities to work elsewhere in the embassy as you had an earlier assignment?*

GOODFRIEND: By that point, I was no longer an entry-level officer. The kind of rotation I described in Tel Aviv was primarily designed for entry-level officers, giving them broad exposure to different embassy functions. Mid-level officers generally don't rotate in the same way.

From my perspective, the real value wasn't in moving outside the Consular Section just for the sake of a different assignment, but rather in ensuring that the Consular Section

itself was fully integrated into the broader work of the embassy. Consular work is often treated as something separate from what is considered "real diplomacy," but in reality, it plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of the embassy and the U.S. government as a whole. We were directly engaging with the public, understanding the local environment, and making decisions that had tangible impacts. That work was just as substantive and meaningful as any other section's, and rather than stepping away from it, I focused on ensuring that we had a seat at the table alongside other key embassy sections.

That shift in approach led to a significant change: the Consular Section was brought into the Law Enforcement Working Group within the embassy. This was a multi-agency group that included different embassy sections focused on legal and security issues. Previously, I don't think the Consular Section had been seen as a relevant player in that space — there wasn't an understanding that we could contribute to discussions about the legal and criminal environment in Russia. But as we began sharing intelligence and analysis with other sections, it became clear that we had valuable insights to offer.

The result was that we weren't just benefiting from the information shared within that group — we were also actively contributing to it, enhancing collaboration between the Consular Section and other key embassy functions. That, to me, was far more impactful than simply rotating into a different section. Instead of stepping away from consular work, we elevated its role within the broader mission of the embassy.

*Q: Then did you travel in your consular district? And were there any insights from that?*

GOODFRIEND: I did travel, though not necessarily for fraud investigations. On one occasion, I went to Saransk, a more distant town in Russia, to assist an American in distress. That case had some political sensitivities, so the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) traveled with me by train. It was an opportunity not only to support the American citizen but also to engage with local authorities and better understand the situation on the ground.

In another instance, I spent a couple of weeks in Vladivostok when their Consul General — or rather, their Consular Section Chief — was away, managing operations there in the interim. I also went to St. Petersburg to assist in their Consular Section for a short period. These temporary assignments reinforced the network of collaboration we had built among consular posts, particularly through the newsletter and intelligence-sharing efforts. By the time I visited these posts, we had already been in frequent correspondence, so the discussions were productive — we were able to compare trends and coordinate our approaches.

The only major post in the region that I didn't visit was Yekaterinburg, but otherwise, I traveled to various cities across Russia. That said, I had learned from my experience in India that simply visiting an area provides insight but not necessarily the deeper context needed to drive action. While these trips were useful for broadening my understanding,

the most substantive investigative work was still done from Moscow, where most of the key players were based.

Within Moscow, I had a particularly close partnership with the RSO (Regional Security Officer). Rather than traveling extensively outside the capital, we often visited businesses in Moscow, where many of the key fraud and criminal activity cases were concentrated. Since Diplomatic Security (DS) in Washington had indicated that investigative work was best handled outside the U.S. through local embassy resources, this approach allowed us to gather intelligence first-hand. The RSO and I would meet with businesses, assess their legitimacy, and share our findings with our respective bureaus.

This collaboration directly strengthened the cases for permanent visa ineligibilities based on criminal activity. By combining the RSO's security insights with the patterns we observed in visa applications, we built stronger, more actionable cases. It also reinforced the value of inter-agency cooperation at post, demonstrating that consular work wasn't just about issuing visas but also about contributing to the broader security and law enforcement priorities of the U.S. government.

*Q: Were there other issues aside from this kind of criminality that you had to deal with in terms of fraud?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, though some of these issues blurred the line between fraud and broader social dynamics. One example was mail-order brides.

At the time — perhaps even still today — there was a pattern of middle-aged, often previously married men from the United States looking for spouses in the former Soviet Union. Various websites and agencies were facilitating these relationships, allowing men to communicate, first through letters and later through email, with women in Russia and Ukraine. This wasn't necessarily fraud, but it did raise questions and concerns.

Since Kyiv was not processing certain visa categories at that time, we handled fiancé visas and some immigrant visas for Ukrainian applicants as well. We would frequently see men in their 40s or 50s, often of middle income, applying for fiancée or spousal visas for women in their 20s or 30s, who were often more educated than their petitioners. This naturally led to scrutiny — not just in terms of immigration fraud but also in terms of social perceptions.

A key challenge was making sure consular officers didn't impose their personal judgments on these relationships. There was an instinct to question whether something was wrong when a much older man was petitioning for a younger woman. But then we had to ask: Would we react the same way if the roles were reversed? Would an older woman petitioning for a younger man be seen as more suspicious? In one specific case, an officer was convinced that such a scenario was even more fraudulent than the typical older-man-younger-woman pattern, simply because it was rarer. But was rarity alone a sign of fraud?

During interviews, we tried to assess expectations on both sides. Sometimes officers would call the American petitioner to get a sense of the relationship — what they saw in each other, what their plans were. In many cases, the relationships weren't necessarily fraudulent, but they sometimes had a transactional nature to them, where both parties might have different motivations. If a relationship was expected to last only a few years, was that inherently fraud, or was it simply a pragmatic arrangement?

Ultimately, unless we had clear evidence of deception, such as the woman secretly being married to someone else and using the visa as a way to reunite with that person in the U.S., we couldn't label the cases as fraudulent. This was somewhat different from the marriage fraud patterns we saw in India, which I had mentioned previously, but the underlying question remained the same: where do you draw the line between fraud and unconventional social arrangements?

*Q: Yes.*

GOODFRIEND: One of the things we also had to be concerned about was whether the woman was at risk of abuse or trafficking. I remember one case involving an American citizen who was filing one fiancée petition after another. That kind of pattern raised serious concerns, and we had to assess whether these were failed relationships or something more exploitative.

*Q: Petitions were filed for a different woman?*

GOODFRIEND: For different women. Each time, the woman would get the visa, travel to the U.S., and stay with him for a short period. Since a fiancée visa allows 90 days to marry, he would never actually marry them — he would send them back.

One of the women later wrote to the embassy, saying that while she was there, he had abused her, they had not married, and now she was back in Russia. At that point, we realized this was at least the third woman he had petitioned for. Then he filed another petition, and we were faced with a dilemma. As an American citizen, he had the right to file, but the pattern was troubling. We ultimately decided that we could not, in good faith, issue another fiancée visa under these circumstances.

The woman he was petitioning for was genuine — her intentions weren't in question — but his pattern of bringing women over, refusing to marry them, and sending them back raised serious concerns. Eventually, he married one of the women in Russia, filed an immigrant visa petition for her, and she was issued a visa. Then, not long after, he wrote to us again, saying he no longer wanted her and asking how to send her back.

This was another example of the complexities of human relationships that consular officers had to navigate. There was an entire industry facilitating these international marriages, from mail-order bride agencies to organized trips where American men would meet potential partners in Russia and Ukraine. Some relationships were legitimate, but others were transactional, exploitative, or outright fraudulent.

The challenge was to remain objective and not allow personal biases to influence adjudications. In India, for example, arranged marriages were considered more legitimate than love marriages, with the belief that family-arranged unions were based on logic, not fleeting emotions. Meanwhile, in the former Soviet Union, agencies were using computer algorithms to match partners — a modern, data-driven approach. Each system had its own logic, yet we had to assess whether a relationship was genuine or merely a financial arrangement.

This often led to some cynicism within the consular section, but we had to balance that with an understanding of human relationships and the variety of ways people seek companionship.

Another area where similar challenges arose was orphans and adoptions — another category where fraud and genuine human emotion often intersected.

*Q: Was it becoming harder and harder as Americans tried to adopt Russian children until it became completely forbidden. But where were you in that process?*

GOODFRIEND: At various times, I was involved in the immigrant visa unit, though only temporarily until a new immigrant visa officer arrived. Orphan adoptions were generally handled by the immigrant visa unit, but when there were concerns about the legitimacy of an adoption, the fraud prevention office — where I was assigned — would get involved.

Our role was to verify whether there were discrepancies in the adoption process. Was the agency legitimate? Were the country's adoption practices safeguarding against child-selling? While I was in Moscow, we saw a number of adoptions from Georgia, and there were concerns about whether some children were being adopted directly from their biological parents, rather than first being placed in an orphanage.

The issue was that for an adoption to be truly unconditional, parents who could not raise a child were expected to give up all claims by placing the child in an orphanage, from where adoptions would follow legal guidelines. However, if parents handed a child directly to adoptive parents without that intermediate step, it raised concerns about financial transactions — essentially, whether money was being exchanged for the child. This was something we had to investigate carefully.

Because Tbilisi did not process immigrant visas, Moscow handled the immigrant visa applications for adopted Georgian children. We coordinated with our Consulate in Tbilisi to verify that adoptions met legal requirements — tracking cases from birth to orphanage placement to final adoption. One of the key concerns was whether biological parents were receiving payments, which would amount to baby-selling.

At the same time, Russian authorities had their own concerns about adoptions by American parents. They wanted a way to track the welfare of adopted Russian children in

the U.S., fearing that some were not receiving proper care. One case heightened those concerns — an American couple adopted two Russian children but, at the airport, decided to take only one and left the other behind. This case alarmed Russian officials and contributed to their push for stronger oversight.

To address these concerns, Russian child welfare officials conducted post-adoption visits, traveling to the U.S. to check on adopted Russian children. The issue of child welfare was a shared concern — Americans adopting children wanted to ensure they were providing a better future, while countries allowing adoptions wanted assurances that children were safe and well cared for.

For consular officers handling adoptions, these cases were deeply significant. Beyond fraud prevention, we wanted to ensure that adoptions were truly in the child's best interest and that birth parents understood the process fully. The goal was to protect the child — both from potential exploitation and from any legal or procedural flaws that could disrupt their adoption. This was another area where fraud prevention played a critical role in ensuring that the process remained ethical and transparent.

It was clear that the Consular Section in Moscow evolved significantly during my time there. One of the challenges we faced was the large-scale hiring of local staff after phasing out American contractors who had been filling roles that were essentially local positions. This required us to restructure the staffing system, ensuring there was a clear promotion path while also recognizing the higher level of analytical work that local employees were now performing.

A key example of this was the decision to process applications through the cashier before officer adjudication. Previously, local staff had been only entering data after an officer had already made a decision. But now, because they received unreviewed applications first, they had to analyze the case, determine the visa category, and enter it into the system correctly before it ever reached an officer. This meant that when we wrote new position descriptions, we could justify higher starting levels for staff because their work now required more decision-making and analytical skills. This approach also helped define a clearer career trajectory, where those with supervisory responsibilities could advance beyond the base level.

At the same time, taking applications through the cashier allowed us to move some cases forward without an interview, freeing up officers to focus on complex cases — particularly those involving fraud and criminal activity. This shift not only improved workflow efficiency but also strengthened collaboration with other embassy sections and U.S. agencies, positioning the Consular Section as a key player in embassy-wide security efforts.

Beyond the structural changes, the value of information-sharing became clear. The reports we sent from Moscow — whether to other posts, Washington, or interagency partners — were recognized and valued. Washington frequently sent congratulatory messages acknowledging the quality and impact of our reporting. The Fraud Prevention

Unit, which I created, played a central role in this by ensuring that officers could distinguish between genuine fraud and cases that simply fell outside their expectations. This built confidence within the section, reinforcing that consular work was meaningful and impactful rather than just routine visa processing.

We also adapted to new communication technologies, particularly the Internet, which was still in its early stages. While many Russians did not yet have widespread access, Americans did, and they often relayed our online information to visa applicants. Recognizing how information flowed, we ensured that applicants had clearer guidance on the visa process, which in turn helped change the media narrative.

At the start of my tour, the Consular Section faced significant media pressure, but within a year, we had shifted from being a target of criticism to establishing a more balanced relationship with the media. This transformation was not just about public relations — it reflected real improvements in efficiency, transparency, and interagency coordination.

Ultimately, my time in Moscow allowed me to assess and refine the role of the Consular Section, identifying best practices for collaboration, reporting, and workflow improvements. It also reinforced the importance of plugging into Washington effectively, ensuring that we were part of a broader, results-driven effort rather than working in isolation. That was my tour there.

*Q: Now, as you begin to approach the end of this tour, what were the considerations you had in bidding for your follow on.*

GOODFRIEND: This would be my third consecutive overseas tour — Tel Aviv, New Delhi, and now Moscow. By this point, our children were all in school, and we were living relatively close to the embassy. My wife had also begun working part-time in the visa section as an Eligible Family Member (EFM), though not under my supervision, which was an important consideration to avoid nepotism.

As the children were growing older and becoming more aware of the world around them, we wanted to give them a sense of home in the United States. They had spent their entire lives overseas, and we felt it was time for them to experience life and education in the U.S. In anticipation of this, we had bought a house in the U.S. before moving to Moscow, and now it was time to return and live in it.

With that in mind, all of my bids were for domestic assignments. I was now an FS-3 mid-level officer and was looking at positions in Washington that would align with my interests in transnational issues and collaboration. I focused more on issues-based bureaus rather than regional bureaus, which tended to be more narrowly focused. However, I did include a few desk officer positions on my bid list.

Given that I had already spent three consecutive tours in Consular Affairs, I saw the value in broadening my experience with an assignment outside the consular track. During the bidding process, I was contacted by the Bureau of International Organizations (IO) —

specifically, IO/PPC, which handled policy coordination and congressional relations for international organizations, primarily the United Nations. The office director personally called me in Moscow, which was encouraging, as most of the bidding process was still conducted via cable correspondence at that time.

The position I accepted focused on conflict prevention. In the wake of the Gulf War, there was growing interest within the UN and among member states in shifting from reactive crisis response to preventive action. My predecessor had established the Secretary's Preventive Action Initiative, and I would be responsible for managing that initiative.

The focus on prevention aligned well with my experiences in fraud prevention in India and organized crime investigations in Moscow. In both cases, my work had involved identifying risks before they escalated — whether it was preventing visa fraud before it happened or closing gaps that allowed organized crime to exploit the system. Now, I would be applying that same mindset in an international policy setting, looking at how to strengthen mechanisms for preventing conflicts rather than just responding to them.

Unlike previous assignments, there was no need for language training, and Washington itself was going to be a new professional environment for me. We had decided to settle in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where we had bought a house. After leaving Moscow in July, I took home leave before moving to Fredericksburg in August, just as the children were preparing to start school.

One of the logistical challenges was the commute. I had to learn the train schedules for the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), which was not far from our house — a key factor in choosing Fredericksburg. My daily door-to-door commute to Washington was about 90 minutes, and I generally preferred to take the first train at 5:30 AM, arriving at my desk by 7:00 AM. This allowed some flexibility in leaving work early when possible, making the long commute more manageable.

*Q: This is where I recommend we pause and pick up with you again in Washington in this new office at our next session.*

GOODFRIEND: I agree. I've got something I need to do in about forty minutes. And I don't know if you noticed, but the light in front of me just died — battery's out. So I guess that's our signal to wrap up for now.

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*Q: Okay, today is May 20, 2022, we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend. André, before we go on to your next assignment, you wanted to mention one other thing that you experienced while in Moscow?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes. I was in Moscow from 1994 to 1997, and during that time, in addition to dealing with organized crime, orphan adoptions, and the increasing demand

for visas, we also found ourselves in an unexpected situation — the first U.S. government shutdown I had ever experienced.

At the time, under the Clinton administration, Newt Gingrich was leading efforts in Congress to use the budget process as leverage for political objectives, leading to a stalemate. There was no budget agreement, no resolution in sight, and as the deadline approached, we were all watching the clock. And then, suddenly, it happened — the government shut down.

For those of us overseas, it was uncharted territory. Even among my more seasoned colleagues, there was uncertainty. What exactly does a government shutdown mean for an embassy? Do all operations stop? Are certain services allowed to continue? Initially, the answer seemed to be that everything stopped — we had no budget, no authorization to commit resources, and no guidance on what, if anything, could continue.

From Moscow, we could only imagine the domestic backlash as government services across the U.S. halted. But the immediate concern for us was the people who depended on the embassy — families waiting for visas, American citizens needing assistance, businesses engaged in bilateral trade, even routine diplomatic engagements with the Russian government. Everything ground to a halt.

As the shutdown dragged on, there was growing pressure, particularly from Congressional constituents, about the suspension of consular services. Among all the embassy's functions, consular services were the most visible to the public. People didn't necessarily write to their representatives about policy briefings or diplomatic discussions, but they absolutely did when they couldn't get a passport, a visa, or emergency help overseas.

Eventually, Congress determined that the only services that could continue were consular services. I believe the initial authorization was for American citizen services, but it may have later expanded to consular services more broadly. That meant that while other sections of the embassy remained largely shut down, the Consular Section was fully operational.

This had an interesting effect. Consular work, which had often been seen as somewhat peripheral to the embassy's core diplomatic mission, was now at the center of operations. Other sections of the embassy began framing their work in ways that tied back to consular services, since that was the only officially authorized function. Some of these connections were legitimate, while others were a bit stretched, but the overall effect was a shift in perspective — a recognition that consular work wasn't just routine paperwork, but a critical part of the U.S. mission overseas.

That shift carried forward in the years to come. Embassy strategic planning began to place a stronger emphasis on safeguarding the welfare of American citizens as a top priority. The Consul General's role in these discussions became more prominent, ensuring that the importance of consular work was recognized at the highest levels.

Eventually, a budget agreement was reached, and operations returned to normal. But the shutdown had reinforced a lasting lesson: when government functions are prioritized, consular services aren't the first to be cut — they are among the most essential.

*Q: As I recall, it was the early, very late part of '94, into the early weeks of '95, January of '95. Because just as it had been resolved, a huge snowstorm hit Washington and closed the federal government for a few more days.*

GOODFRIEND: That sounds about right, that sounds about right.

*Q: But yeah, the experience was common. I was in Vienna at the time. We were engaged in negotiations over various issues related to arms control, we were allowed to go to the office. But we were not allowed to send information to Washington, go to any of the negotiations, it was a very careful instruction. We could at least catch up with administrative work, but there was nothing we're allowed to do during that period.*

GOODFRIEND: And since this was the first government shutdown, there was no assurance — no precedent — for whether people would even get paid. Those who were told not to work had to assume they wouldn't be compensated for that time.

*Q: Right. Exactly.*

GOODFRIEND: It was only afterward that there was a recognition that we couldn't expect people to be committed to their obligations to the U.S. government without compensating them. That realization set the precedent for how future shutdowns would be handled.

*Q: Exactly. All right. Well, that was a worldwide experience. And I guess it would be felt again in later years with various other closures, but it certainly changed the thinking and the way embassies made plans, as you laid out in your description. All right. Should we now follow you to your next assignment?*

GOODFRIEND: We left Russia in 1997 and returned to the U.S. on home leave, now with three school-aged children — eleven, nine, and seven years old. Looking back, it was striking to realize how much time had passed. Before going to Moscow, they were preschoolers or just starting elementary school. But in the Foreign Service, we tend to think in blocks of time rather than a gradual progression — one tour ends, and suddenly, the family dynamic is completely different from when it started.

We had bought a house outside Fredericksburg, Virginia, before going to Moscow, anticipating that at some point, we would return. Now it was time to move in and settle. After home leave, which included visiting family in Arizona, we picked up a new minivan that we had purchased online — something that was becoming more common as the Internet evolved.

The Internet had grown significantly since my last return to the U.S. in 1993. By the time we left Moscow in 1997, browsers like Netscape Navigator had made it much easier to access online content. Newspapers were putting articles online, and retailers — including Amazon, then just one of many online bookstores — were starting to expand their services. For Foreign Service officers overseas, this changed how we stayed connected to the U.S. We could read hometown news from DC or Arizona and even make major purchases, like our car, in advance.

After home leave, we drove from Phoenix to Washington, DC, taking the northern route through Canada, before settling into our house in Fredericksburg. I was preparing to start my first domestic assignment at IO/PPC (International Organizations, Policy, Public, and Congressional Affairs). That office doesn't exist in the same form today, but at the time, it was responsible for policy coordination, engagement with Congress, and international organization initiatives, primarily focused on the UN.

This was a significant shift from my previous posts. In a consular section, the schedule was largely structured — you arrived in the morning with a set workload, and there was always a clear series of tasks. But now, in Washington, the pace was different. My primary responsibility was managing the Secretary's Preventive Action Initiative, which focused on conflict prevention within international organizations. But even defining the mission and determining how to get things done within DC required a different mindset — one that I would need to quickly adapt to.

Meanwhile, living 50 miles south of DC meant a long commute. I would wake up at 4:30 AM, catch the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) at 5:30 AM, and arrive at my office by 7:00 AM. Adjusting to the rhythm of life in DC, balancing work and family, and navigating the different working culture of Washington were all part of this next chapter

*Q: And just as a quick aside, at this time, the Secretary was Madeleine Albright.*

GOODFRIEND: That's right. That's right.

*Q: I mentioned that only because when I was in graduate school at Georgetown, she was a professor there. And her area of expertise was international organizations.*

GOODFRIEND: She had been U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and this initiative — the Secretary's Preventive Action Initiative — had originated before my assignment. I believe it started around five years earlier, following the UN's major role in coordinating the Gulf War coalition. There was a sense at the time that we were entering a new era, with the Cold War's bipolar structure fading. Some saw an opportunity to shape events more proactively, rather than simply responding to crises after they had erupted.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali advanced the idea that, rather than only reacting to conflicts, the international community should focus on preventing deadly conflicts before they escalate. The logic was similar to the thinking behind famine

prevention — if early warning signs of drought, floods, or economic instability could be identified, action could be taken to prevent famine rather than responding to it after it had begun. A program called the Famine Early Warning System had already been developed with this goal in mind.

Applying that same logic to conflict, researchers and policymakers began looking for ways to recognize early indicators of unrest. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict was active at the time, producing studies and mobilizing resources. Academic institutions, including Duke University and Ohio State, explored automated systems for conflict detection, using content analysis of media reports. As Internet use expanded, researchers examined whether textual analysis of news articles could reveal patterns of civil unrest — rising food prices, increased police actions, changes in political rhetoric — that could signal impending conflict.

My role in IO/PPC was to coordinate a U.S. government response when these warning signs were identified. The challenge, however, was immediately clear: without resources, nothing would happen. We could track indicators, we could discuss emerging risks, but unless someone controlled resources and had the political will to act, the initiative risked being little more than a theoretical exercise.

This was a fundamental issue with many early warning systems — detecting the problem was one thing, but agreeing on what the warning signs meant and, more importantly, deciding on action was another. By the time diplomatic and bureaucratic processes determined a course of action, the crisis had often already progressed beyond prevention.

In many ways, this mirrored the shift from prevention to mitigation that had historically defined international conflict response. While the initiative sought to proactively intervene, in practice, much of the effort still focused on conflict resolution after violence had already erupted.

I had a hard time accepting that this model would actually work as intended. By this point, this was my fourth tour, and while I wasn't a senior officer, I had enough experience to see that this initiative was not going to prevent conflict in the way it was envisioned. At best, it could help identify potential conflict zones and increase awareness, but actually stopping conflicts before they erupted required a level of political will and decisive action that simply wasn't there.

I wasn't alone in recognizing this. Many others in the international community — inside and outside the U.S. government — acknowledged the same fundamental problem. People would say, "Yes, it's a good idea, but the real issue is political will." Even Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General at the time, spoke openly about this challenge. The signs of potential conflict could be identified, but getting governments to apply the necessary resources and create conditions that would prevent conflict from escalating was another matter entirely.

Working in this environment, surrounded by well-intentioned people, I couldn't believe that it was simply a lack of desire to prevent conflict. It wasn't that policymakers and diplomats didn't want to take action — it was that there were too many competing factors. Decision-making processes were slow and bureaucratic, and responsibility for action was diffused among multiple actors. The system itself was not structured in a way that allowed for automatic, decisive responses to warning signs.

That, to me, was a flaw in the early warning model. It relied on the idea that if we could just detect the warning signs, that would naturally compel action — as if once we had enough data, the next step would automatically follow. But that's not how governments or institutions function. Data doesn't dictate action. Instead, data is analyzed, debated, and ultimately filtered through political and institutional constraints before any decision is made.

This reminded me of the way we now talk about driverless cars — where the vehicle's system automatically reacts to signs and stimuli on the road. In theory, the data drives the action — if there's a red light, the car stops; if there's a pedestrian, it slows down. But in policymaking, that's not how things work. Human decision-makers don't just "follow the data"; they interpret it, weigh their options, and sometimes choose not to act at all. Many people resist the idea that data itself should determine what they do. Instead, they believe they are using the data to make their own informed choices.

This tied into a deeper issue I saw in the communication model underpinning this initiative. The approach was based on a simplistic, one-way model of communication — sometimes called the "hypodermic needle" theory — where a message is injected directly into the listener, compelling them to act. This is similar to how propaganda models work, assuming that if a message is strong and clear enough, it will force a response from the audience.

But real decision-making doesn't work that way. People don't just receive a message and instantly act — they process it, compare it to their own priorities, and often filter it through their own biases and political realities. The assumption that early warning data would automatically lead to preventive action was flawed because it didn't account for how governments actually make decisions. And I had-

*Q: Go ahead.*

GOODFRIEND: I often found myself thinking back to my academic studies while working on the Preventive Action Initiative. As I've mentioned before, I had initially considered joining USIA, and I had studied communication — particularly media and information flow — which had always interested me. Communication models were a key part of those studies, and I saw direct parallels between those models and the challenges in early warning systems.

The hypodermic model — which assumes that if you inject a message directly into an audience, they will automatically act on it — was one of the earliest communication

theories. It was also central to propaganda models, where it was believed that media could directly shape behavior — that television could make people act in certain ways, that advertisements could compel someone to buy a product. But this model was discredited as early as the 1950s. Studies showed that people don't simply absorb and act on information they receive from media sources. Instead, other mediating factors play a role in how they process, interpret, and act on information.

One of the key alternative models was the two-step flow model. This model recognized that people don't passively absorb information — they filter it through trusted sources before deciding how to respond. A person might hear something in the news but then check it with someone they trust — a friend, a respected academic, a colleague, or an authority figure — to get a better sense of what's really going on. This secondary step plays a crucial role in shaping how people interpret and act on information.

Another relevant model was uses and gratifications theory, which focuses on how people actively seek out different types of information from different sources based on their needs. Some decision-makers rely on intelligence agencies for information, while others turn to NGOs, civil society groups, or academic institutions. If you're trying to deliver a message through the wrong channel, it might never reach the intended audience in a way that compels them to act. If someone expects intelligence-based information and you present them with a foreign policy analysis, they might disregard it entirely.

This wasn't just my personal critique — it was also embedded in the work of the Carnegie Commission, which cited this hypodermic communication model in their analysis. But by relying on a discredited media model, the initiative was doomed to face the same challenges that previous early warning efforts had encountered.

I was thinking a lot about uses and gratifications theory and two-step flow, especially as the State Department was changing how it consumed media. Around this time, televisions were installed in every corridor and office, constantly playing CNN or another major news network. This reflected a shift toward real-time awareness of global events, but it also raised questions about how information was processed and acted upon.

The hypodermic model would suggest that simply watching CNN all day would compel us to act on whatever was being broadcast. But in reality, the media doesn't work that way. Instead, what was happening was closer to the agenda-setting model — we weren't necessarily taking direct action based on what was on TV, but the fact that something was widely reported signaled that it was important enough to be raised on the policy agenda.

For example, if the news was covering an election result, a terrorist attack, a natural disaster, or an American held captive abroad, the mere fact that it was dominating the media would force it onto our radar. But then the two-step flow would kick in — the decision-maker wouldn't act immediately, but would instead turn to an aid, an office, or an agency and say, "What do we have on this? Pull together some options."

Then uses and gratifications theory came into play: where was that aid getting their information? Were they calling known contacts? Searching the Internet? Looking at embassy reports? Digging through paper files? How they sought out information mattered, because it shaped what was ultimately presented as the course of action.

Yet despite all these evolving information flows and decision-making processes, the Preventive Action Initiative was still relying on a rigid early warning model — waiting for clear signs of conflict, assuming that when those signs appeared, the system would automatically respond. But based on what I had seen in Delhi, Moscow, and the Russian Business Investigation Initiative, I knew that waiting for the "right signs" and then tasking someone to act wasn't enough.

Instead, what was needed was a continuous mechanism for sharing information, something that functioned more like a network rather than a rigid top-down system. In a networked approach, different offices share what they're seeing, collaborate organically, and act based on their own priorities, rather than waiting to be tasked with a formal directive.

In a system like that, everyone is credible if they are contributing information — not because a central authority has decided to make a move, but because the network itself values shared intelligence and expertise.

*Q: Well, in your description of the process of this process, and of what the responsibility was for IO/PPC, take just a second to outline what IO/PPC's areas of responsibility were because it did not backstop every international organization. And it definitely did not backstop regional organizations.*

GOODFRIEND: Within IO, not just IO/PPC, the Bureau of International Organization Affairs provided policy support in Washington for the U.S. Mission to the UN (USUN). But USUN itself was a separate office in New York, operating with a level of independence — it did not report directly to IO/PPC or even IO in the way that regional bureaus typically do.

What we were doing in IO/PPC was shaping the policy approach for how the U.S. engaged with international organizations. Unlike another office within IO that handled conflict mitigation, which worked more directly with UN agencies to assess resource needs and responses to conflicts where the UN was already involved, IO/PPC was more focused on policy coordination, communication, and congressional engagement.

Our work included preparing press guidance on U.S. engagement with international organizations, managing web content for the State Department's site related to IO policies, overseeing sports diplomacy as a way to facilitate diplomatic engagement, and working with Congress to explain what the U.S. was doing through the UN. The congressional aspect was reflected in the "C" in IO/PPC — Policy, Public, and Congressional Affairs.

Since we were not a regional bureau, regional conflicts typically fell under the jurisdiction of regional bureaus. However, like other global issues offices, IO/PPC's work cut across regional lines. The connection to conflict prevention was through the Preventive Action Initiative, which had originated under Boutros Boutros-Ghali and was seen as a policy priority for international cooperation. The idea was that we were at a new stage in history where, rather than just responding to conflicts after they erupted, the U.S. could work multilaterally with other governments and within the UN framework to prevent conflicts before they escalated.

The argument for this approach was not just humanitarian, but also practical and cost-effective. Preventing conflict meant preventing economic collapse, mass displacement, famine, and devastation — all of which were far more expensive to address after the fact. The challenge was not identifying this need, but rather figuring out how to turn it into action, and that was where we were focused.

*Q: And I just wanted to ask one other sort of process question, which is, how did you interact with the offices that dealt with, for example, UNHCR, the refugee, the UN Refugee Agency, Food and Agricultural Organization, all of these organizations that would need to be marshaled in the event of some kind of major world disaster?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, agencies like UNHCR fell under the broader UN system and were expected to have their own plans in place to coordinate their response when a crisis arose. Their role was to mobilize their networks and resources to prevent or mitigate disasters when needed. Our role in IO/PPC was not to manage these organizations directly, but to engage with U.S. government agencies and offices that worked with them.

Rather than working directly with UNHCR, we would engage with the F Bureau, which managed the U.S. response to refugee crises, including funding and assistance for displaced populations. Similarly, we worked with development-focused offices on funding and resource allocation, INR for intelligence analysis, and science-related agencies to assess environmental factors that might contribute to conflict, such as climate-related stressors. The E Bureau played a role in economic analysis, and the military was involved in assessing potential needs for preventive security measures or military assistance.

The way this was structured was through regularly scheduled interagency meetings that brought together representatives from different offices and agencies to review early warning signs, identify areas of potential conflict, and discuss preventive actions that could be taken. If I recall correctly, these meetings started as monthly but eventually transitioned to quarterly once a more regular flow of information was established.

The challenge, though, was in the pace and structure of these meetings. By the time early warning signs were identified and an interagency meeting was convened, the issue might not yet seem urgent enough to justify immediate action. If it wasn't an immediate crisis, the discussion would be folded into a regularly scheduled meeting, which meant weeks or months could pass before concrete steps were taken. By then, the situation could have

escalated beyond prevention. The process often took six months or more, and by that point, conflict was no longer something to be prevented — it had to be mitigated. That was one of the fundamental difficulties with trying to make preventive action work in real-time.

*Q: Is there one in particular, you remember where all of the pieces fell together while you were in the office?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, yeah, I began to advocate for changing the structure. There were frustrations with the existing framework, and while there was an instance where we did take action, it was actually peripheral to the Secretary's Preventive Action Initiative itself. But I wrote memos outlining how the structure might be changed and detailing the challenges we've been discussing — the fact that early warning systems were not actually preventing conflict, because by the time indicators were identified, it was already too late to intervene effectively.

Thomas Pickering, who I seemed to follow from post to post — he had been my Ambassador in Tel Aviv, New Delhi, and Moscow, then moved to the UN, and was now Under Secretary for Political Affairs — was the one receiving my memos on how the initiative might be restructured. My argument was that the framework needed to shift from waiting for early warning signs and then reacting to something more akin to preventive medicine. Rather than waiting for symptoms of conflict to emerge and then responding, the approach should focus on ongoing engagement with civil society groups and grassroots organizations, regularly taking the temperature of societies to keep them healthy before tensions escalated.

This was a fundamental shift. The early warning model was inherently reactive, but prevention required continuous, proactive engagement. Instead of a structure that tasked different offices to act once an issue had been flagged, the emphasis needed to be on information sharing — on building relationships, monitoring conditions, and maintaining stability before problems arose.

In many ways, this mirrored what I had done in Moscow with the Russian Business Investigation Initiative — shifting from a tasking mechanism to a network-based, collaborative approach. It also echoed my earlier experiences where, when I was asked to manually transfer data between systems, I questioned why the system was designed that way in the first place. If something wasn't working, my instinct was always to identify the flaw and propose a new approach.

Where this thinking eventually led — at least to some extent — was to the situation in Kosovo, or rather, to the period leading up to the Kosovo conflict. That was where we really had to grapple with the limitations of the existing model and what it meant to take preventive action in a real-world scenario.

At the time, from 1997 to 1999, I was in IO/PPC, and the situation in Kosovo was escalating. Slobodan Milošević was President of Serbia, and his government was carrying

out attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, which was then a province of Serbia. Kosovo had been semi-autonomous, with a deeply divided ethnic population between Albanian speakers and Serbian speakers.

The Serbian-speaking population in Kosovo felt that their rights were being disregarded by the Albanian-speaking majority. One of the core grievances, as Milošević framed it, was that Kosovo had more self-governing authority than it should have. The way he saw it, Kosovo's Albanian leaders had disproportionate power because Kosovo had representation in Serbia's national parliament in Belgrade, while Belgrade had no equivalent representation in Kosovo's local parliament in Pristina.

A loose analogy might be to the United States, where Arizona representatives have voting power in Congress in Washington, D.C., but Washington, D.C. has no representation in Arizona's state legislature. It's not a perfect comparison, but it illustrates the sense of asymmetry that Serbian nationalists pointed to as a justification for their oppression of Kosovo's Albanian population. But beyond this structural issue, the real driver of the conflict was ethnic nationalism and the belief that Serbia should remain an ethnically Serbian-dominated state.

That conflict erupted in Kosovo, which held deep historical significance for Serbia. For many Serbs, Kosovo was not just a territory but a symbol of national identity, rooted in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, where Serb forces suffered a historic defeat to the Ottomans. It was a "Remember the Alamo" kind of place — an event that had mythological importance in Serbian national consciousness. If, hypothetically, the U.S. were forced to cede the part of Texas containing the Alamo, Americans would feel not only the general resistance to losing territory but also a deep emotional and historical outrage at the thought of giving up such a symbolic landmark. That was the level of sentiment tied to Kosovo Polje, the battlefield in Kosovo, which remained a central part of Serbian national identity.

By 1998, the situation escalated as Serbian forces carried out attacks on Albanian-majority civilian settlements across Kosovo. Reports of atrocities and human rights abuses were mounting, and the international media was in an uproar. Secretary Albright, with her background in international organizations and human rights, took a strong stance, believing that preventive action was justified. The argument was that the world could not stand by and allow atrocities to unfold in Europe again, as had happened in World War II and Bosnia earlier in the decade. This was a situation where the Preventive Action Initiative needed to prove its effectiveness — how could the international community intervene before full-scale conflict broke out?

One of the approaches we considered was transparency. A key issue in Kosovo was the lack of reliable, objective information. The Serbian government presented one narrative, but the media — often sensationalized — presented another, making it difficult to assess what was truly happening. Decision-making models depend on trusted sources, and at that point, policymakers were relying on media reports, Serbian government statements,

or intelligence analysis, none of which offered a first-hand, neutral perspective. The idea was to remove this information vacuum and establish direct diplomatic observation.

We created the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission — a joint initiative with Serbia's government and international partners. Unlike traditional diplomatic assignments, this mission would not be based in Belgrade but would operate directly in Kosovo. The idea was that diplomats on the ground could travel freely, observe the situation first-hand, and report objectively, without being filtered through media or political bias. If diplomats were physically present, they could document events accurately, providing a credible source of information to their governments and preventing misinformation from shaping policy decisions.

I was tasked by Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Sheehan with coordinating the resources and personnel for this mission. It was a joint operation with the Department of Defense, with both State and Defense providing personnel and equipment. The team was roughly half State, half Defense. We secured Range Rovers, telecommunications equipment, and some of the earliest satellite communication technology available in 1999. We tested Iridium satellite phones, ensuring that the team could communicate from remote areas. We set up multiple redundant communication platforms — handheld phones, vehicle-mounted antennas for communication while moving, and even a notebook-sized satellite unit for transmitting reports. This was part of a broader technological shift — we were now entering a digital era of diplomacy, where real-time data could shape policy decisions.

The State Department's Office of the Geographer was involved in mapping the team's observations. We equipped them with GPS tracking so that, if they documented evidence of atrocities or military movements, it could be accurately mapped and analyzed in near real-time. The goal was to lift the veil of uncertainty — by ensuring objective, first-hand reporting, we hoped to prevent conflict by exposing what was actually happening, either confirming or debunking allegations of violence.

Once the team was deployed, there was radio silence for the first week. We knew they had arrived, and they were traveling within Kosovo, but we weren't receiving any updates. Finally, I called them directly. When I reached the team leader, I asked about their routine — what routes they had taken, what they had seen, how they were recording their observations. He explained their movements and findings, and I quickly wrote down everything he described, formatted it into a report, and circulated it via email to a small, select group in Washington

The next day, and every day after that, I would call the team to check in, asking them what they had seen, what routes they had taken, and what they were learning. But then I started questioning the process — why did I need to call them and manually write everything down? Why couldn't they send their reports directly? It was a similar issue to what I had encountered in my first State Department assignment — why were we relying on such an inefficient system when technology was available to streamline it?

When I asked them why they weren't reporting their observations directly, they explained that any written report would have to go through Belgrade. They would need to write it up, send it to the embassy in Belgrade, and then Belgrade would format it into a cable and send it out. This added an unnecessary delay to information that was supposed to be real-time reporting from the field. I suggested they send their reports via email — but they pushed back, saying that would be bypassing Belgrade, which was not permitted.

Yet, there was an inconsistency. They could tell me everything over the phone, and that was acceptable — but they couldn't send a report directly via email. It wasn't that they were prohibited from communicating their observations, but rather that they couldn't be seen as the formal source of the report. So we continued with this workaround — they would tell me informally over the phone, and then I would compile the information and circulate it in Washington.

At the same time, on a completely different track, I was having discussions with systems personnel in DC about how we could better share information digitally. The current approach was inefficient — I was sending everything manually by email, and there was no shared repository where relevant personnel could access and collaborate on reports. I asked whether we could create a centralized digital system for sharing information within the State Department.

The response was frustratingly bureaucratic. The State Department's IT infrastructure was siloed — each bureau had its own server, and they weren't set up to connect and share information seamlessly. There was no easy way to access reports across bureaus, which meant that even internally, we weren't collaborating as effectively as we should have been.

Recognizing my interest in information sharing, someone introduced me to a contact in Diplomatic Security (DS) who was facing a similar issue. This DS officer was trying to improve information-sharing within DS itself and with other law enforcement agencies. He mentioned that law enforcement and counter-drug agencies had already built an interagency information-sharing platform called the Anti-Drug Network (ADNET). There was also another system called LEO (Law Enforcement Online), both of which resided on SIPRNet, a secure classified network used for interagency collaboration.

The idea was that if the State Department could integrate into ADNET or LEO, we could not only improve interagency cooperation but also enhance internal information sharing. At the time, Booz Allen was managing ADNET as part of its broader government IT consulting work. If we could find a way to leverage that existing infrastructure, it could serve as a template for how State could modernize its own information-sharing systems.

*Q: Just a very quick question here, was SIPRNet a classified network?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, SIPRNet was a classified network. It stands for Secret Internet Protocol Router Network, as opposed to OpenNet, which was the unclassified network used for general State Department communications. While SIPRNet itself was classified,

its existence was not — it was widely known as a secure communication system for interagency coordination within the U.S. government.

*Q: Right. Yeah.*

GOODFRIEND: The SIPRNet connection enabled secure communication and information sharing that was otherwise impossible through OpenNet. My colleague in Diplomatic Security (DS) and I saw an opportunity — we started discussing whether we could build a business case for the State Department to formally join SIPRNet, since at that time, State was not yet fully integrated into the interagency classified network.

In 1998, my DS colleague and I visited Booz Allen, which was managing parts of ADNET, to explore how we could justify this shift. The idea was promising, but I didn't yet have a clear business case — there was no urgent, department-wide consensus that would justify making this move. Not long after, my DS colleague rotated out, leaving me as the only advocate pushing for State to integrate with SIPRNet.

That changed with Kosovo.

The diplomatic observer mission in Kosovo (KDOM) — which was a joint DoD-State Department operation — became the business case. The information-sharing problem was now urgent and real. As I mentioned earlier, I was calling the Pristina team by phone, manually relaying their unclassified observations into classified emails — a slow, inefficient process. Clearly, we needed a better communication system, and I decided to go to Pristina myself to assess how we could improve it.

I traveled through Belgrade, stopping at the embassy there before heading down to Pristina, where the KDOM mission was operating out of a hotel. It wasn't a U.S. government facility, just the best available option for our diplomatic team. When I arrived, I found that the DoD personnel had brought plenty of advanced communications equipment — but it was all still in boxes, unused, tucked away in a corner.

Instead of using that equipment, they had simply set up a basic SIPRNet connection using an encrypting modem and a laptop computer. That was all they needed to send classified emails and communicate securely. Ironically, Belgrade at the time didn't even have classified email capabilities — but the Pristina team did, just because of this SIPRNet setup.

So, go ahead, you were going to say something?

*Q: Well, because the people on SIPRNet were going to be DOD and CIA and other U.S. intelligence.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, exactly. Everyone but State

*Q: Exactly. Exactly. And even worse, everyone but State, including the Ambassador, who theoretically had Chief of Mission authority in that area.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, so I went back to Belgrade and drafted a memo for the Chief of Mission, laying out the situation in clear terms. I detailed step-by-step how State could access the SIPRNet.

With the acquisition of an encrypting modem and authorization from those managing the SIPRNet, Embassy Belgrade could be connected to the classified network with email and other communications. I outlined an approach for how this could be implemented.

Back in Washington, I pushed the same case. Now, I had a concrete business case — we did not have access to information being shared by part of our team in Pristina, and it wasn't their fault. They were willing to share it, but State had not joined the SIPRNet. I took this to IRM, knowing that nothing happens without a business case.

Previously, when I had raised the idea, IRM's response was, "What's the business need?" Now, I could point directly to the issue in Kosovo and how the lack of connectivity was hindering diplomatic operations. The cost was minimal — perhaps a membership fee — and the infrastructure was already in place. All that was needed was to open up a few digital ports to connect our network to the interagency system.

IRM agreed to a test. They asked me to identify twelve individuals who should have access to SIPRNet, and they would open up the ports for them. I compiled the list, and once access was granted, I not only began circulating reports from our observers, but I also looked at where DoD was storing its information on SIPRNet. They had told me where to find it, and with access, I could now retrieve and share it. If you had SIPRNet access, you were cleared to see this information.

I gathered the hyperlinks and URLs for the reports and maps that DoD was putting together on Kosovo. There were at least three different sites updating information daily. Instead of just providing the links, I downloaded the reports onto our internal classified system, and attached those downloaded PDF or Word documents to my daily email updates. This ensured that even those without SIPRNet access could still receive the information.

At the bottom of each message, I included a small plug — noting that if you had SIPRNet access, you could retrieve the reports directly from these links. The goal was to raise awareness that an interagency network existed, and to create demand within State for greater access. I encouraged recipients to tell their office directors or assistant secretaries if they needed SIPRNet access, so that we could expand participation.

At the same time, there were two parallel tracks unfolding. First was the substantive track — documenting what was happening on the ground in Kosovo. Our observers were witnessing atrocities, mass graves, and destruction. They often faced restricted access, denied entry to areas where they could see smoke rising, only able to document the

aftermath later. While sometimes media reports were exaggerated, many were accurate, and our teams were seeing it firsthand.

The second track was process-oriented — proving that State could enhance information-sharing and interagency collaboration. This effort was making steady progress. The SIPRNet integration was gaining traction, and we were positioning State to be more effective in future interagency operations.

Ultimately, despite our efforts to lift the veil on the conflict, the violence continued, leading to NATO intervention.

As the violence escalated and reporting to Belgrade became increasingly difficult, the diplomatic observer mission shifted its reporting strategy. Initially, they had relied on phone updates to me, and later, delayed reports through Belgrade, sent via cable. Eventually, their reports were published publicly, which was in some ways the original intent — to enhance transparency and provide direct observations from the field.

The KDOM mission began publishing its own reports on the open Internet, accessible to anyone. These were not public diplomacy materials; rather, they were firsthand accounts from the observers themselves, going directly to the public. This was a significant shift, allowing those directly involved in the mission to report findings independently, rather than having their observations filtered through traditional government messaging.

Meanwhile, NATO intervened as Serbian forces continued their atrocities. The conflict intensified, leading to negotiations on post-conflict arrangements. Amidst this, the Internet played a crucial role in bypassing Serbian state censorship. A notable example was Radio B92, a station shut down by Serbian authorities but able to continue broadcasting online, effectively circumventing government control over traditional airwaves.

This was 1999, and the ability to livestream radio via the Internet was groundbreaking. Similarly, the proliferation of satellite dishes in Pristina underscored the shift — people were not relying on Belgrade-controlled media but instead accessing news from international satellite broadcasts.

This transformation reinforced the importance of understanding information flows. If an entity continued broadcasting through traditional networks but no one was listening, its message was wasted. Recognizing how and where people accessed information was crucial — and it was shifting rapidly.

Within IO/PPC, this was evident in press guidance work. My predecessor had physically reviewed newspapers, compiling press clippings by reading hard copies. By 1999, I was refining Internet searches to find the same material faster and more comprehensively. This approach aligned with the agenda-setting function of media — monitoring what was being reported about international organizations and determining whether a response was needed.

*Q: I do have a question, as you were beginning to do this analysis. How would you go from identifying the sources that people were listening to, to influencing those sources in a way that was helpful for us goals?*

GOODFRIEND: There's another story that I'll tell him in a moment. But even just making the reporting of the observer mission public put it into the public sphere, where it was more easily accessed by media. In the past, Reuters, AP, or The Washington Post might have needed to contact us, saying, We know you have an observer mission in Kosovo. We're seeing this — what do you see? They might not even have been fully aware that we had an observer mission. If they had to go through that extra step to get comment, especially if our reporting was two days old because it had gone through the cable process or if there was uncertainty about who had the authority to release that information, we might lose the chance to have our observations influence what the journalist was saying.

By making the reports available online in near real-time, they could be factored into journalistic reporting immediately. A journalist might say, Despite what this observer mission is reporting, here's what we're seeing. At the very least, it was referenced. We could also get feedback from journalists — maybe informally, maybe not always publicly contradicting what was in our reports — but if they saw the report, they might want to go and cover the same issue, supplement it, or let us know they had additional information.

After the conflict, when negotiations were taking place in Rambouillet, France, each side had its vested interests. There was a desire to cut off distractions during negotiations — trying to prevent leaks, taking away cell phones, and limiting outside communication. Cell phones were still something relatively new. Before I went to Moscow in 1994, cell phones were not commonly used. By 1997, and certainly by 1999, everyone had one.

I bought my first cell phone in 1997 after returning from Russia. Shortly after, I purchased a small notebook computer, and by 1998, I had an additional device that let me access the Internet while riding the train. It was slow, but I could use my notebook computer to read the news digitally rather than relying on physical newspapers. This marked a rapid shift in how information was accessed and shared — something senior policymakers were also grappling with.

While we were taking advantage of the ability to make information public online, it was also a challenge to recognize that others could do the same. In negotiations that were previously held in secluded areas, participants now had cell phones and could consult with outside actors in real-time.

At the same time, I was coordinating an interagency group focused on the post-conflict environment — assessing what aid would be needed, security requirements, and related concerns. I wanted to see what was happening in the negotiations and what draft agreements were being circulated. Some of my contacts hesitated to share, checking

whether they were authorized to do so. Yet, at the same time, I found the draft document on the Internet — with an academic commentary attached.

Internally, we still operated as if information could be tightly controlled, but external actors had no such constraints. They were sharing drafts, getting feedback, and posting them publicly. I used that information to verify details and make them accessible to the working group I was coordinating. This exposed the ironies in our approach to information and the rapidly changing environment in which we now found ourselves.

You had asked how we were using these approaches to help shape the message. I mentioned the observer mission publishing its reports online. Another example was how State Department officials were being ambushed at meetings by members of civil society groups who couldn't reach them through official channels. If they called, they didn't get a response. So they would wait for them at conferences, approaching them directly.

I first heard about this in relation to landmines. Advocacy groups were pushing for a more aggressive approach to banning landmines, and they were coordinating by email in ways that hadn't been possible before.

They were using digital media to work together, identifying common interests. If they saw the point person at the State Department at a conference, they had a coordinated message and would ambush the person. They felt we weren't engaging with them.

From our side, the proliferation of civil society organizations made engagement difficult. Within the UN, civil society groups were now able to be observers — a shift from the past when only states were admitted. Our staffing wasn't adequate to engage with each group individually by phone, and officers didn't necessarily see that as their primary function. Public Affairs was responsible for messaging and talking points, but these organizations wanted to speak with the desk officers directly.

I was thinking about how we could use digital tools to open up more and engage with partner organizations. We couldn't operate in a purely state-to-state manner anymore and expect to accomplish our mission without working with civil society.

I mentioned earlier the preventive action model, where instead of reacting to crises, we take a wellness approach, engaging grassroots organizations before signs of conflict emerge. By being part of the ongoing conversation — not just showing up when there's a crisis — we would avoid the perception of being outsiders trying to mobilize civil society only when we needed them.

They had been working on the ground all along, unable to reach us, and might ask, Where have you been? We needed to be proactively involved, shaping public narratives, media reporting, and global conversations. It was similar to Moscow, when Russian media portrayed visa officers as insensitive. We had to engage constructively, showing we weren't afraid of the conversation.

I proposed creating an online forum — a discussion space where desk officers (not just public affairs staff) could engage directly with civil society before crises emerged. This would prevent ambush situations, allowing proactive dialogue about concerns and shared perspectives.

I pitched the idea to my Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary, suggesting that IO create an online forum for discussing topics within our jurisdiction. It wouldn't be for regional issues or areas outside IO's scope, but it would allow for legitimate, direct engagement with the public.

They were concerned we'd be overwhelmed. If we opened the door to the public and said, Talk with us, we're here, they worried we'd be ambushed. Were we prepared? What resources would we need? I said, "Let's give it a try."

I had to find a topic that was within our subject area, a real policy issue, but not too politically sensitive. Something engaging, where public feedback would be valuable, and decisions hadn't yet been made. I suggested the Millennium Agenda for the UN General Assembly. It was 1999, and they were developing the agenda for the next millennium.

Now, I had to find the technology to make this conversation happen. At the time, State Department had no public-facing servers that could host an interactive discussion. We had internal servers and public websites, but nothing that allowed for real two-way engagement.

Oddly enough, the CIA had a public-facing server where they engaged academics on strategic issues. They said I could use their server if I wanted. Around the same time, USIA had just merged into the State Department, and a former USIA systems officer, now with IRM, told me they had unused public-facing servers.

I leveraged these collaborative relationships to get things done without a budget. I had no funding for this, but the CIA was curious about public engagement on strategic issues, so they were open to it. I can't remember exactly whether we used CIA's servers or USIA's old ones, but we put together an asynchronous discussion platform — not live chat, but a forum where we posted discussion prompts and people responded over time.

The Assistant Secretary introduced the discussion to the public. I structured it with questions to guide feedback. To address concerns about being overwhelmed, I made it invitation-only, reaching out to around 100 people from civil society organizations, academia, and UN-affiliated groups. Many of them I already knew, and we invited their participation directly.

*Q: It would function more or less like a blog?*

GOODFRIEND: To some extent. A blog is more like an online journal where you post your perspective, and people leave comments underneath. But you might never engage with those comments directly.

This was different. We set a timeframe — I think about a month — and actively engaged in the discussion. It wasn't just about posting content; it was about facilitating an ongoing conversation.

*Q: One other question on the setup, did the people you invited know everyone else who had been invited? In other words, did you show your distribution list?*

GOODFRIEND: I don't believe so.

*Q: Okay, okay.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, when they wrote it, it was not anonymous.

*Q: No, I understand. But in other words, it was not a forum where they would be commenting on each other's comment*

GOODFRIEND: They could, I said, it was not anonymous. And so they could see who had posted what. But we weren't, I didn't know whether I could have invited — it's like having a reception, because sometimes you give everybody the guest list, sometimes you don't. You don't know who's going to participate, who's not going to participate. I didn't know what to expect with regard to who was going to participate.

In fact, we were not flooded, we were not overwhelmed by the response. It was more a case of trying to ensure that this discussion was an active one. Just because they were invited, they were not necessarily going to comment. Just because they expressed dissatisfaction about not having access or not having a way to engage didn't mean that now that you were releasing that pressure, they were prepared to engage.

I had to not only invite them, but re-invite them or encourage them to participate, point them to it, and to really have a conversation as if you were in a real room. You open it up, you say your piece, and say, "Okay, let's talk about this," and nobody raises their hand at first, or one or two, and the conversation is going to die out after three people say something. Then, if you're moderating that kind of conversation, you have to continue sparking it. You have to maybe call on someone.

And that's what I found myself having to do within this environment. When there were things posted, and then it looked like the conversation was failing to reach out to people, I would say, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" and get them to post.

By the end, I think we extended it. Some said, "It's too short a time to think about this." "Okay, we extended it." It gave us the flexibility to do that, and we extended it to enable as many to participate as wanted to. That would provide a good conversation that we could then look at — both looking at what they were highlighting concerning what should the goals of the Millennium Assembly be, what have been the challenges in the past for setting the agenda for the Assembly, but also looking at how the mechanism itself

was working as a way to engage effectively with the public and to give members of civil society a way to have conversations that they felt were being listened to by government personnel.

*Q: A quick question on one area of concern for the Millennium that you may have gotten and may have drowned out a number of others, which is Y2K and I'm just wondering how anxious people were and how often they mentioned Y2K as a problem for the coming millennium. Y2K being the fear that computer software was not sufficiently designed to be able to change the year from a nineteen prefix to twenty prefix?*

GOODFRIEND: I don't believe that Y2K came up. The focus was more on humanitarian concerns, development goals, and broader global priorities rather than immediate technical issues like Y2K. It wasn't something that dominated the discussion, if it was raised at all.

After the discussion concluded, we wrote up a summary of what was discussed. This was an exercise not just to explore the online discussion format but also to contribute in some way to shaping the Millennium Assembly agenda. We documented everything, and I had an intern helping me with compiling the results and drafting a summary.

We posted the results of the discussion online. I believe it's still accessible, and I can send you a link if you'd like to see it as a reference. I'm actually looking at it right now — the proceedings of the virtual forum on the role of the U.S. in the twenty-first century. It ran from June 28 to July 31, 1999.
(https://1997-2001.state.gov/issues/990901_ioforum_proced.html)

*Q: Okay, with a narrow time window?*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, like I said, it was a month — from June 28 to July 31. The discussion started on June 28, 1999, and ran until July 31, 1999. During that time, the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs hosted an Internet-based virtual forum on themes for the Millennium Summit and the United Nations General Assembly, scheduled for September 2000. Nearly a hundred people, representing a wide range of organizations from government, technology, and academic institutions, participated in the virtual roundtable.

There were four subtopics: peace and security, including disarmament; development, including poverty eradication; human rights; and strengthening the United Nations. I'll send you the link to that. But more than anything, this was an effort to show that there were different ways we could operate in the new millennium — that the environment around us was changing, that the way we communicate was evolving, and that if we failed to engage and participate in this new digital landscape, we risked being ambushed or marginalized. At the same time, the transition wasn't as daunting as it might have seemed.

We could quickly identify resources. It required some engagement, but that was our job — to engage. And once we did, we could foster real discussion without fear of being overwhelmed. While many people had expressed frustration about not being able to engage with us, they weren't necessarily waiting to rush in and ambush us in a digital forum.

Like any other forum, at a certain point, you have to prompt people to participate. You have to say, "We're all here. Let's talk." Looking back now, it's hard to believe that we were doing this over twenty years ago — this was 1999. Since then, we've learned a great deal about the dynamics of digital forums: the benefits and drawbacks of anonymity, how to facilitate real-time discussions, how to take public input and integrate it into decision-making, and how to engage in external discussions rather than always needing to be the host.

We don't always have to be the organizers; sometimes, we just need to participate in events hosted by others as credible and engaged partners. If the SIPRNet allowed us to engage within a classified environment and secure a seat at that table, this forum was an effort to do the same in the unclassified public sphere — to engage, to hold our seat at the table, or, just as importantly, to open our door and show what our digital home looked like.

*Q: One more quick question. As a result of the more or less success of this adventure, did other bureaus pick up the model and start using it for their purposes?*

GOODFRIEND: Not immediately. I mean, now, if you were to look at it twenty years later, you'd see that this is passé — the origins are lost in time. But it was similar, in some ways, to what I mentioned in Delhi when I put a computer monitor on the desktop and said, "We can do this. It's doable." And we did. The experiment was a success, but the continuation of it as a matter of policy didn't follow.

As soon as I left, they took the equipment down and said it was cumbersome, they didn't know how to manage it, and so on. With this initiative, after I left IO/PPC, I know that a colleague used the model for a discussion on sports diplomacy — how we should approach it, what we should be doing. But it didn't just run itself.

*Q: Right. Exactly. Yeah.*

GOODFRIEND: There was a way that we could accomplish things. The point was to show that we could do it — to remove the fear factor, that we were going to be overwhelmed or that this was unmanageable. But for those who used it afterward, it also highlighted the fact that it requires work. You can't just set it up and think that, having created the environment, participation will happen on its own. You still have to encourage people to engage, and that becomes an additional part of the work.

I think after the sports diplomacy effort, I don't believe IO/PPC did any others. But now we had a model, and whenever I saw someone else using a virtual discussion format, I

could recognize it. If I had to identify resources for it, and nobody knew where to find them, now it was much easier to do.

I remember — this may have been in 2000, after I had left IO — it might have been the World Bank or the IMF that attempted something similar. They opened up a discussion, and I was watching it to see how they were managing it. They made their statements and invited participation. They didn't get a flood of responses, just a manageable number of comments. But then, nobody from the World Bank or IMF engaged further.

Within a week, the comments shifted from substantive topics to people asking, "Where are you? Why aren't you responding? Is anybody here?" It wasn't a failure of the technology — it was a failure of engagement. A virtual forum isn't fundamentally different from a physical one. Imagine inviting a hundred participants into a conference room, standing in front of them, saying, "We're launching this discussion today. We hope it will help shape our policy with your input for the future. We invite you to share your thoughts with us" — and then just walking away, leaving them to talk among themselves.

That's a risk even now with virtual discussions. If you create the space but don't remain engaged, the conversation can drift or lose direction, or people might not participate because they don't feel anyone is really listening after the opening remarks.

Now, of course, these kinds of forums are widely used, but they didn't immediately take off as a standard way for the State Department to engage with the public. These things take time. But the foundation was there, and when needed, we knew how to do it. Even today, some individuals manage these forums better than others — not because of the technology, but because of the human element. A strong moderator who can engage with participants makes all the difference.

I have to be somewhere else at ten o'clock my time. If this is a good wrapping-up point, that's fine. If not, I can go for another ten minutes — it's up to you.

*Q: No, I would say let's go ahead and call it here. Give your voice rest and we can pick up with any of the remaining issues from IO/PPC at the next session. Because yeah, I also have an interview in the afternoon that I have to prepare for so I think this is a good moment. Alright, I'm good. Okay, good. I'll pause the recording.*

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*Q: Okay, today is May 27, 2022, and we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend. André, you're in IO/PPC. And just remind us of what year we're talking about now?*

GOODFRIEND: We're talking about 1999, roughly. I had arrived back in the United States after my assignment in Moscow in 1997 and took up the two-year assignment within IO/PPC from 1997 to 1999, focusing primarily on conflict prevention through collaboration with international organizations — in particular, the United Nations — and

the Agenda for Peace initiative that had been started by, I believe, Boutros Ghali and continued by Kofi Annan.

There was a lot of focus on how to move governments, think tanks, and civil society to provide early warning signs or information about potential conflict early enough to mobilize governments to act in time to prevent it. That was the overall model behind a lot of the actions. I think we were talking about the hypodermic model — that if you present information clearly enough, if you inject it into the discussion, into the other participants, it will cause a reaction that could avert conflict, just like whatever medicine is in a hypodermic needle might avert disease.

I had mentioned last time that I thought there were significant flaws with that particular approach because it's premised on a discredited communication model — for example, people were using in the 1960s to say that commercials on television cause people to buy various things, that there's a causal relationship between information that's presented and actions taken by the audience. There were numerous other models developed later that didn't necessarily debunk, but complemented that approach. They said that information doesn't act on its own in the way the hypodermic model suggests. It's also the same kind of propaganda model that may have been used in the 1940s and 1950s — if you say something convincingly enough, you'll cause others to act accordingly.

But there were other models. There was the two-step flow model: if you hear something, you'll talk with someone you trust and get their input. Or that people choose which media to turn to — that's the uses and gratifications approach. A person is not just going to listen to the analyst who comes in front of them and says, "Here's my analysis, you must act on this, this is urgent." The most these approaches can aspire to is more of an agenda-setting model — that having news broadcasts 24 hours a day, together with input from different think tanks and civil society organizations, may raise something on the agenda, but doesn't necessarily cause a specific action to be taken.

What I was trying to work on was not, "Can we stop a specific conflict?" but rather, "Can we put in place a better collaborative information-sharing model where we're able to see indicators before they become warning signs?" Where we are able to work with grassroots organizations and civil society organizations as a trusted partner they can engage with — so it's not about a warning sign and then a response, but more of an active involvement. We're trying to maintain healthy societies through working together with these other organizations.

With that approach — trying to facilitate better collaboration — I was able to successfully argue for incorporating or having the department sign up as a participant in the SIPRNet, which was the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network. It's an interagency network managed primarily by the Department of Defense for information sharing and sparking discussions on various issues at the classified — maximum "secret" — level. Not "top secret," but "secret" level interagency, which was not something that we'd had before. We didn't even have mechanisms to collaborate and share digital information internally within the State Department. Now we were participants in an interagency

framework that would enable us to engage as a partner — sharing data and intelligence, participating in conversations with our brother and sister agencies.

At the same time, there was one thing that stemmed from my work on the Kosovo issue: to better partner with DOD, because they were using the SIPRNet — to bring us into that collaborative environment. And then to collaborate more effectively and more seriously seek to engage with think tanks and civil society on open systems — not in a classified environment but in an unclassified environment. That was the premise of the discussion concerning the Millennium Assembly. And it was really a proof of concept in both cases, to show that we can do this. The technology is not unavailable. The technology is not expensive. We could do it, frankly, without a budget at all. There may have been a budget necessary to participate in the SIPRNet — but it was minimal because the network was already there.

And for the Millennium Assembly, we essentially used hardware that was no longer being used by USIA, I believe. Just working through contacts, we were able to do that. And that also, I think, put on the table within the State Department the idea of collaborative capabilities and what else might be possible.

The SIPRNet people — when I was working on getting the SIPRNet into the department — most of the people I was talking with didn't call it the SIPRNet. There were different communities on it. One, managed by Booz Allen at the time, was called the Anti-Drug Network, so law enforcement could engage — INL could engage — with the Anti-Drug Network in sharing information with other partners who were also dealing with countering the spread of drugs. There was also Law Enforcement Online, LEO. Actually, Law Enforcement Online was either on the SIPRNet or on another interagency network that was at the SBU level.

We had the reaching out to the public on spare equipment that I believe USIA had, but there was another information network called the Open Source Information System — OSIS. And it was essentially an SBU counterpart to the SIPRNet. So the SIPRNet was the backbone on which these other communities resided, depending upon what their focus was — anti-counterfeiting, drugs, law enforcement. And there was another one with the intelligence community, and it was called Intellink-S. It was an intelligence network for sharing intelligence at the secret level — "S" standing for "secret." And that also helped create a sense that we could be part of this information-sharing community, and that we were not out there on our own, trying to set up networks and trying to find ways to pull together people in a collaborative framework. We could, at minimal cost, participate in pre-existing networks.

The Open Source Information System was not on the SIPRNet. It was primarily managed by DOD. OSIS was primarily managed by the intelligence community, and it was sharing open-source information — information from newspapers, from other media. It was primarily not classified information, but as the name indicated, open source. And ultimately, after I had begun working with it — and like I said, we're talking about 1999 or so — I think within two or three years, it rebranded itself as Intellink-U, as a

counterpart to Intellink-S, which was secret, that is to say that it was not the existence of the community which was secret, but rather, it was able to handle information at the secret level. Intellink-U could not handle information at the secret level, but could pull information from open sources on the Internet.

And if you look at the years we're talking about — again, 1999, 1998 — the State Department did not really have Internet access on its desktop yet. People didn't have Internet access on the desktop. They had to use a different system to be able to access the Internet. So here we were, trying to take a step forward into an interagency community that was beginning to flourish on these various networks at different classification levels. And my role wasn't necessarily to address specific issues at the time. Maybe because, again, I think in a collaborative environment, I tried to recognize that each partner has its own mission. And that if we can provide them — if we can create an environment where they're able to partner with others to further that mission — then let them do it. Let them find partners.

And so, generally it was not a matter of me saying, "Okay, I found these networks and now I'm going to take over your rice bowls and do the things that you do because I'm a master of these networks," but rather highlighting that these networks were there and that we could carry out our work much more effectively with a whole-of-government approach if we utilized those networks to work together.

That's how I reshaped the Preventive Action Initiative — the Secretary's Preventive Action Initiative — essentially bringing collaborative approaches and tools into the Department, working closely with IRM at the time, and closely with other desk officers, other people who were the issue managers, the business owners as we might say, to work with them, to have them understand what the possibilities were. Not in the future, not ten years from now — but now. You can, without needing to budget for it, work with your DOD partners, with your other agency partners, with your partners within the State Department, in ways that had not been possible one year before.

That was where things were when I left IO/PPC in 1999 and went to join — went back to Consular Affairs — and became an issue manager, a subject matter expert, one could say a business owner, a consular officer within their systems office.

*Q: That's a very interesting way to describe a job. One thing before we go on is I'm curious, did you choose it? Did it choose you? Or how was it that you ended up in that position?*

GOODFRIEND: Within Consular Affairs? I think, within organizations — and this is just my personal take — people develop reputations when it comes to technology. Some are seen as friendly to it, others not so much. Some people really don't want to deal with technology at all.

*Q: Late adopters.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah. Not just late adopters — some are actually antagonistic. "I don't want a computer on my desk." "Let someone else use the computer." That kind of attitude. You'd hear things like, "I do other things. I don't play with computers," as if using computers was just playing. Rather than asking, "How do we actually carry out our work in this environment?"

*Q: Yeah, yeah.*

GOODFRIEND: So, in that context, I was looking to stay in Washington. I'd been in IO/PPC for two years. I think I mentioned our kids were in school — elementary and middle school. The oldest was a year away from starting high school. Every two years meant moving, and at that point, it would have meant moving him just before high school.

We were living in Fredericksburg and wanted to stay in the D.C. area until there was a more logical break in the kids' schooling. If we could stay for three more years, that would take our oldest halfway through high school — not just there for the last year, but with enough time to build friendships and go through those formative high school experiences.

That timeline would also mean our middle son would start high school in the new assignment, and the youngest would be finishing middle school. It just felt like a good breaking point. I was looking to return to Consular Affairs — exploring different roles, like something in Children's Issues or a Management Analyst role, looking at whether posts had the consular resources they needed.

But the office that really drew me in was one I'd worked with even before my first assignment. I'd helped try to get our computer systems to communicate with each other, so I was already a known quantity to them. They took me in for what was initially a two-year assignment, which we were able to extend to three.

*Q: Now, at the beginning, when you were describing this position, you said it was a consular officer in the Consular Systems Division, which is a very interesting description. And I wonder if you could elaborate on that.*

GOODFRIEND: Sure. This was the systems office within Consular Affairs. Today it's grown quite a bit — there's even a DAS-level position now for consular systems. The office is now called CA/CST — Consular Affairs Office of Consular Systems and Technology — and it reports directly to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resources.

But when I was there, it was at a lower level. It reported to the Executive Director of CA. Back then, it was CA/EX/CSD — a division rather than an office, the Consular Systems Division.

This was the office that developed the software consular officers used to adjudicate and issue visas and passports, as well as provide other services to American citizens, and also

handled the hardware that made it all possible. I mentioned earlier that after 1993, every consular post was required to have the technology to run name checks in real-time.

By 1999, when I joined the office, that requirement was still very relevant. I was there until 2002, since I got that third-year extension. You'd asked earlier about Y2K — that was definitely looming. At the same time, there was a congressional mandate that the technology enabling real-time name checks had to be in place by the end of fiscal year 2000 — so by September 2000, if I remember correctly.

So we had two big challenges: making sure the systems we had would function properly with the date change from 1999 to 2000, and also meeting the deadline for full online functionality. That meant consular officers could perform name checks and enter information in real-time, and that data would be immediately accessible in Washington.

It was also about accountability — creating an audit trail so you could see who had reviewed what, and ensure that decisions were documented and traceable.

*Q: Just one question about the breadth of access to the information. Did any other agency have access to that information? And the reason I ask is because periodically, there are complaints, that private data that goes to the U.S. government goes in a variety of places that the person giving the data does not want?*

GOODFRIEND: This was really the beginning of even having the capability to share information. This was 1999. I'd mentioned earlier that when I joined — in 1987, and then in 1988, before my first assignment — we already had some data-sharing agreements in place. Other agencies would sometimes share information with us — often more readily than we would with them. For example, the DEA would provide information about drug traffickers, which we'd input into the system, since being a known drug trafficker makes someone ineligible to enter the United States. Other agencies might share information about terrorism suspects or other security concerns.

My role at that time also involved processing information that hadn't yet been reviewed by an overseas post. Sometimes entries came in coded as "double-zero," meaning they hadn't been vetted yet. This was especially relevant with the Visa Waiver Program, which had just begun as a pilot. If someone applied for a visa, a consular officer overseas could look at our system and see which agency to contact for more details. But with visa waiver travelers, people never showed up at embassies — they arrived directly at the port of entry.

So one of my tasks was to prepare documents for INS that helped them know who to contact — for example, for travelers from the UK and Japan, which were the first two countries in the pilot program. Now, fast forward to 1999, and we had formal agreements with INS to share information. Around that time, we were also trying to make ports of entry between Mexico and the U.S. more efficient.

The idea was to share visa refusal data and lookout information quickly — fast enough that if someone was denied a visa in, say, Tijuana, and then tried to cross the border the next day, that refusal would already be visible to INS. This meant we needed near-instantaneous data transfer between State and INS.

That created another issue: INS didn't want all of the information we were collecting. By then, the consular systems had been updated — we were no longer just entering data after issuing or denying visas. We were trying to enter it in real-time. That made the speed and credibility of our data entry process even more important.

Everything on the visa application form — the OF-156 — was going into the system. As a consular officer embedded in a technical office, I remember the office director asking me: "Do we really need to keep all this information? INS only wants some of it. Should we be storing it all?" And that's a good question — from a technical standpoint. They were thinking about server space, about efficiency. Do we need the photos? All the biographic data?

And I said, absolutely. From a consular perspective, there are many reasons to keep that data. If an applicant is denied a visa in Paris and later shows up in Frankfurt, the officer in Frankfurt should be able to see what was said before. Did they give the same biographic data? What were the notes the previous officer entered? These are all part of a pattern of behavior that helps us evaluate credibility and intent.

These were the kinds of conversations we had in CA/EX/CSD. And this was during a shift in how we approached software and data. At the time, each post had its own consular server, which stored all its local data. But that data was also being replicated every few minutes to a server in or near Washington.

So while each post could access its own data on-site, to see data from other posts, officers had to use what we called the Consular Consolidated Database — the CCD. It was essentially a massive database that aggregated all posts' data and made it available via a web browser. For 1999, that was fairly advanced.

But we hadn't yet fully developed the reporting tools for the CCD. So we asked: What reports would be useful? What should other officers be able to see about adjudications at different posts? And there were ethical questions too — how do you prevent someone from casually reviewing a colleague's decisions at another post? How do you provide access while maintaining audit trails?

So we started grappling with issues like: Who should have access to which reports? What are the legitimate uses of shared information? I was involved in those discussions — not from a tech perspective, but from the perspective of how we use information, and what's appropriate to share.

If you think about other systems we were building at the time — like SIPRNet or OSIS — it was all about collaboration. The question was: How can we let different agencies access each other's information in ways that help them work more effectively?

There were basically two approaches. One was to build direct data pipelines to INS — just give them what they asked for. The other was to use OSIS, which was an SBU (Sensitive But Unclassified) network, and host a replica of the CCD there. With the right interagency agreements, others could access that.

So in short, yes, there was sharing — but it was still early days. We were trying to balance speed, usefulness, and privacy — and to be very intentional about how and why data was shared.

*Q: Here, I want to ask two quick questions. One is, you had mentioned this earlier, but I just wanted to be sure that you covered it completely had it become also a concern about the amount of information going in, in the sense of how much the technology could handle effectively. And we'll go ahead and-*

GOODFRIEND: That was a concern, but it was one that was being rapidly overtaken by advances in storage capacity. As we approached the year 2000, people were no longer just talking about gigabytes — they were starting to talk in terms of terabytes, which, at the time, sounded enormous. The Consular Consolidated Database (CCD) was already being measured in terabytes.

That meant it had to be properly indexed to support the types of searches officers needed to perform. But there was also a philosophical shift: instead of focusing on the limits of the technology, people were beginning to focus more on how we could work effectively with the information — how to make it useful. Technology was no longer seen as the main constraint.

*Q: And then one other issue related to the technology— had people begun to seriously consider the safety of the information?*

GOODFRIEND: Absolutely. There had long been concerns about protecting personally identifiable information and preventing unauthorized disclosure. Visa information, for example, was considered sensitive. While it wasn't protected under the same rules as data on American citizens — since foreign nationals aren't covered by the Privacy Act — there was a section in the 9 FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual), dealing with visas, that directed visa data to be treated as classified, unless that section has been moved in the past couple of decades. That was the guidance in place at the time.

*Q: Okay. Okay. But I also meant hacking.*

GOODFRIEND: Well, I think hacking was something new, given that connectivity via the Internet was also relatively new, but there were security safeguards. I believe one of the first major incidents occurred while I was working in that office.

You might remember the “I LOVE YOU” virus — an email that went around with the subject line "I love you."

*Q: I was overseas at the time. So I'm not I-*

GOODFRIEND: If you opened it, it would automatically forward itself to everyone in your contact list. At that time, it essentially brought down the Department's email servers. We weren't yet accustomed to this kind of attack — something that looked innocent but had the effect of a denial-of-service attack, overwhelming networks with traffic and rendering them unusable.

It had a massive impact. And it was a wake-up call across the Department. This was right around the Y2K period. Most of our desktops were running Windows — maybe even Windows XP by then. So another big issue was how operating systems were being installed, and how to configure them to resist these new threats.

Consular Affairs actually led the way in putting together system installation guidelines — before IRM (the Bureau of Information Resource Management) even had its own protocols fully in place. But there had to be close collaboration between CA and IRM, especially around cybersecurity. That collaboration was something I helped facilitate. I was essentially the point person between the two, helping ensure that neither side was imposing a rigid "our way or no way" mindset.

It was important to recognize that IRM had overall responsibility for Department-wide systems — but also that Consular Affairs had unique safety concerns and requirements specific to consular data. At the time, we weren’t even using the open Internet from our desktops. We had a network called OpenNet, which was closed off from the wider Internet. Later, it evolved into OpenNet Plus, which did allow for Internet access. That transition happened over strong objections from Diplomatic Security, who were rightfully concerned that exposing systems to the outside world created new vulnerabilities.

At that point, consular data was still kept in a closed environment — essentially isolated from the public Internet. Eventually, copies of the data were made accessible to other agencies through OSIS, the SBU (Sensitive But Unclassified) network, which had its own safeguards.

So yes, we were definitely aware of the risks, and we monitored them carefully. As far as I recall, there were no compromises to consular data during that period. It was maintained separately and with perhaps even more rigorous protection than some other federal datasets. That’s not to say future breaches didn’t happen elsewhere, but at that time, consular data remained secure.

*Q: I've lost your audio for a moment.*

GOODFRIEND: Right — so, as I was saying, this was the environment approaching Y2K. Most desktops at the time were running Windows — maybe Windows XP or something close to that. So there were questions about how these systems should be installed: What were the best practices? What settings would protect against vulnerabilities?

From what I remember, Consular Affairs actually developed its own operating system installation guidelines before IRM (Information Resource Management) had fully established theirs. Eventually, IRM began putting together more formal standards to ensure the systems were hardened against hacking attempts, software conflicts and other vulnerabilities.

But this highlighted the need for collaboration between the two bureaus. That was something I focused on — encouraging both sides to understand each other's needs. It wasn't about CA saying "we do it our way" or IRM insisting "you must do it our way." It was about mutual recognition. IRM had overarching responsibility for the Department's IT infrastructure, but CA had specific and sensitive requirements for consular systems.

At that time, desktop access to the Internet didn't exist. We had something called OpenNet, which was internal only — it didn't connect to the outside world. Later, that evolved into OpenNet Plus, which allowed Internet access from desktop machines. That change came over strong objections from Diplomatic Security, which rightly pointed out the increased risk of vulnerabilities when you opened up systems to the broader Internet.

Initially, consular data was held in a closed, isolated environment — not accessible via the Internet. Of course, that changed when copies of data were placed on OSIS (the Sensitive But Unclassified network), which allowed other agencies to access information under proper safeguards. Still, vulnerabilities had to be considered and monitored. To my knowledge, there were no breaches of consular data at that time. It was maintained separately and likely with more rigorous protections than some other government systems. Other agencies experienced compromises later, but our data remained intact during that period.

*Q: Okay. Yeah. I didn't mean to extend the discussion beyond the strict confines of consular.*

GOODFRIEND: No, it's a fair question. There were indeed agreements needed around what information could be shared with other agencies. And Consular Affairs generally preferred some form of reciprocity. For example, if someone reported the birth of a child overseas, there was value in sharing that data with the Social Security Administration, so a Social Security number could be created efficiently.

With law enforcement, there had to be standards. It couldn't just be open-ended fishing expeditions. But there were mechanisms: if a law enforcement request met certain criteria, the information could be shared.

Remember, I'm still talking primarily about 1999 and 2000. By the time we got to 2001, we had systems in place that enabled us, for example, to quickly retrieve visa records for the individuals who carried out the 9/11 attacks. We could immediately determine what data we had, what the officers saw, and whether proper procedures had been followed. And that triggered a broader review of lookout procedures — whether they had been appropriately applied.

I may be getting ahead of myself, but as you know, there was a lot of finger-pointing after 9/11 — particularly toward Assistant Secretary Mary Ryan in Consular Affairs.

*Q: Correct. Yeah, that she really got grilled on it.*

GOODFRIEND: She did. And she pushed back — rightfully, in my view. She emphasized that our system allowed us to verify that officers had reviewed the information available to them at the time of adjudication. The problem was, if other agencies had information they didn't share with us, we couldn't act on it. That's what needed fixing.

Her point was valid: we can't be held accountable for intelligence we were never given. But the political pressure was intense, and she ultimately bore the brunt of it. Still, under her leadership, we had built a global system that held officers accountable, tracked adjudications, and improved data-sharing.

After that, a new process was introduced. Monthly interagency meetings began taking place at embassies, requiring agencies present to alert consular officers to any relevant information — so they could flag it to Washington and ensure it was entered into the system.

During that time, I was focused on making consular data more accessible and usable. I helped improve reporting functions so consular staff could see adjudications across posts. And, with the limited authority I had, I used my role to push some practical improvements.

I was responsible for selecting consular hardware. If you remember, I'd previously tried — without success — in Delhi and Moscow to install computer screens at the visa windows. Now, around late 2000 or early 2001, I had the ability to make that choice. I requested the purchase of all-in-one computers which combined the computer and an LCD flatscreen into a single small device. These were new at the time, but they did what we needed and were compact enough to fit into the visa windows.

Those computers were like the flat-screens we now see everywhere — bars, offices, you name it. Back then, they were cutting-edge and small enough to realistically support visa adjudication directly at the window. I also oversaw the consular hardware refresh cycle, which replaced equipment on a three-year rolling schedule. We contacted posts and offered them these new compact computers — but only if they installed them at the windows, not just on someone's desk.

That incentive worked. Posts began adopting these computers in their adjudication windows, which helped us shift toward a process where data could be entered in real-time — either before or immediately after the interview. That was a long-standing goal of mine, going all the way back to my first tour in Tel Aviv, when I was told the software couldn't support that workflow.

Later, I tried it in Delhi — using a terminal in the window, but it was too large and clunky. They removed it after I left. By the time I got to Moscow, we had developed a better workflow. If the machines were small enough, the process worked.

Now I was in a position where I could influence how technology facilitated our processes — not just respond to constraints, but design for purpose.

*Q: Interesting, just one quick question here, was there any consideration that having to enter and look at data on a screen would slow down the interview process and create a little bit of a backlog?*

GOODFRIEND: That concern definitely came up. I remember we faced something similar in Moscow. As I mentioned earlier, we had the cashier collect the MRV fee and take the application forms so that we could enter data before the interview. Some consular officers resisted this, feeling it would slow things down — they just wanted to move applicants through quickly.

But in the long run, things balanced out. When you front-load the process by entering data in advance, everything's already in the system — without exceptions or delays. In the old process, data entry often happened after an officer had already reviewed the application. If a name check turned something up, the officer might need to call the applicant back, saying, "There's something I need to ask you about that didn't come up earlier."

That's not only inefficient — it's also prone to error. Refusal data might not get entered right away because the priority was often to finish issuance cases, especially if the visa had to be printed that afternoon. So refusal records might be delayed by a day or two — or even longer. And sometimes, forms got lost. So the question becomes: which process is really more efficient?

Under the old method, staff often had to stay late to catch up, and the system was more error-prone. Our goal was to show that this wasn't just a solution for large posts with assembly-line-style operations. Small posts, with just two local staff, could also benefit. Flexibility at smaller posts is fine, but that doesn't explain why, with that flexibility, they still wouldn't enter data up front.

So we were encouraging posts to shift the process — and providing them with the equipment to do it. Then came 9/11, and that reinforced the importance of being prepared. It validated what we were pushing for: that officers should have access to

lookout information in real-time and be able to enter their notes immediately during or after the interview.

There was also a training component — getting officers to understand that their notes weren't just for internal use. Previously, they might jot something on a paper form and file it away, thinking no one else would see it. But once notes were in a global system, DHS could view them. A person arriving at a U.S. port of entry could trigger a review. Other consular posts, and Washington, could also access them.

So we had to teach officers how to write clear, professional, and useful notes — notes that could be understood by someone halfway across the world. You're not just repeating what's already on the visa application form. If the applicant checked "married," there's no need to write "the person is married." Instead, what did you observe in the interview that informed your decision?

There had been legal cases where officers were accused of discriminatory practices based on handwritten notes that were later pulled from file cabinets. The shift to digital records made it more important than ever to draft clearly and explain the reasoning behind decisions — especially since these notes reflected not just personal judgment, but the reputation of the U.S. government.

This also became an opportunity for younger officers to develop a core diplomatic skill: how to explain their decisions clearly and defensibly. That ability to analyze, synthesize, and communicate is crucial — especially in a context where their decisions carry weight and represent the government.

There's something that comes to mind from my time at IO/PPC. Because I was seen as someone who understood both the policy and technical sides, IRM approached me when they were developing their systems strategy. They wanted to understand how their systems were being used — not just technically, but in the day-to-day work of officers.

They were thinking in terms of two models. For consular and management officers, the model was transactional. Information goes into the system, the system processes it, and the transaction produces a product — a visa gets issued, a housing agreement is reached, and so on. It's structured, data-driven, and ideally repeatable.

But I asked: where is the human decision-making in that model? How does the system support the officer's judgment? Where does the data come from? How is it used?

For political and econ officers, IRM had a different model — an analytical one. It showed a cloud of people sharing ideas and data, collaborating, but not producing any clear "output." That was the perspective which came through in their process model — lots of talk, no transaction. And my feedback was that these were overly simplistic categories. The truth lies somewhere in between.

Consular and management work also involves analysis. Officers must understand the economic and political context of a country to assess whether someone is likely to return home. That requires applying general trends to a specific case — what we might call deductive logic. Management officers do something similar when they determine whether a housing contract is fair for a specific property.

Political and econ officers, on the other hand, often engage in inductive logic — looking at individual data points to draw broader conclusions about trends, risks, or future developments. But even then, they're expected to produce something — an analysis, a report, a policy recommendation, a bilateral agreement.

So we shouldn't see these as mutually exclusive. Both sides use both types of logic. Both need structured data, analytical tools, and collaborative systems.

That was the perspective I brought to Consular Systems. I had a clear sense of what kind of information officers needed, how we could use technology to make it accessible and meaningful, and how to help our colleagues — both in the field and in other agencies — understand and work with it effectively.

I also used the levers I had to push for improvements. For example, I influenced the type of hardware we deployed to posts — like those flat-screen all-in-one computers I mentioned earlier, which made it practical to do visa processing at the window.

And we didn't stop there. We also created tools to help consular managers oversee their teams more effectively. A chief consular officer should be reviewing the adjudications made by their staff to ensure consistency and proper use of the law. That used to be a paper-based process — collecting forms at the end of the day and reviewing them manually.

So we said, let's use the CCD. We built a review report tool that let supervisors see adjudications online. We didn't require them to use it at first, but we made it available. And once officers were entering more of their notes into the system, there was less on paper anyway.

The goal was to demonstrate that these tools made the work easier and better. And once posts saw how quickly and easily they could generate useful reports from the CCD — far more efficiently than custom-coded reports from their local servers — they started to see the value.

*Q: I'm sorry, this does raise one question. Did this slow but certain computerization digitalization improve or make easier the yearly consular pack?*

GOODFRIEND: Package?

*Q: Package. Yeah.*

GOODFRIEND: I believe it did. I stopped working directly on consular matters in 2013, but between 2000 and that point — across more than a decade — there was a steady increase in the amount of data that was accessible to Washington and that could be pre-filled into the consular package.

Over time, more fields became available through systems like the CCD, but discrepancies between what was stored on a post's local database and what appeared in the CCD had to be reconciled. For example, we'd sometimes ask, "Why do the numbers of refusals or issuances in various visa categories differ between the report generated at post and the one generated in Washington from the CCD?"

Back in 2000 or 2001, the answers to that were sometimes murky. People were still trying to understand when the data was being queried — was the data being pulled in real-time? Was it reflecting a delay in replication from the post to the CCD? Those sorts of technical and timing questions were still being worked out.

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*Q: Okay, I was hoping before you went too much further, that you could just briefly describe what the consular package is and why it's such a big deal for Consular Officers.*

GOODFRIEND: Absolutely. One of the positions I had once applied for in Consular Affairs was as a consular analyst in the executive office. That role involved looking at the workloads and staffing at consular posts — things like the number of visa applications processed, the number of issuances, refusals, American Citizen Services cases, immigrant visa cases, congressional inquiries, and so on.

It's a position that brings quantitative analysis into consular work — not so much to judge whether a visa decision was good or bad, but to evaluate workloads and resource needs. The consular package is the document that pulls all of that together annually. It's used to determine whether a post has sufficient staff, tools and funding to meet its needs.

Before 1993, the budget for consular operations came from the broader State Department budget. That often meant there wasn't enough funding to go around. But after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the need for enhanced security and real-time lookout systems led to the introduction of cost recovery through fees — specifically the Machine Readable Visa (MRV) fee.

With those fees, there was now a dedicated stream of funding tied directly to consular work. The consular package became not just a planning tool but also a means to allocate actual resources — dollars that could be drawn on to support staffing, systems, and infrastructure.

The package itself had to be consistent across all posts. It was designed with standard questions and fields so that analysts in Washington could make comparisons and recommendations. Over time, the focus of those questions evolved. For example, posts

might be asked about the need for staff to handle congressional inquiries — which used to come by fax or letter but were increasingly arriving by email. Later, there were questions about digital outreach, such as using Facebook or YouTube for public engagement.

So yes, digitalization definitely made the process easier. Before the CCD, consular sections had to keep manual tallies — running logs of how many visas had been issued. When it came time to prepare the package, each section of the consular unit would scramble to pull its numbers together. Sometimes they were accurate, sometimes not.

With the CCD, much of that data could be pulled automatically or pre-filled — reducing the workload and allowing consular sections to focus more on the qualitative parts of the report: how their work was evolving, what challenges they faced, and what improvements they were implementing.

Other embassy sections often looked at the consular section and said, "If only we could quantify what we do like that, maybe we could justify more resources too." Because consular work naturally lends itself to metrics — you can count visas, passports, cases, etc. Political and econ work doesn't translate as easily into numbers. How do you quantify a policy report or a diplomatic conversation?

It goes back to those models IRM was exploring. They saw consular work as transactional: inputs go into a system and produce outputs — like visa issuances. Political and econ work, by contrast, was seen as analytical and collaborative — engaging in dialogue, gathering intelligence, and forming assessments, but with no obvious product to measure.

And that's why the consular package, with all its numeric inputs, made resource allocation more straightforward. Yes, having the data in the CCD — centrally stored and easily queried — made the process of preparing that package much easier, more accurate, and less time-consuming.

*Q: Okay, very good. All right. So now, you were continuing to engage in the ways that the computer and better systems could-*

GOODFRIEND: — Decision making. I was always a bit hesitant about terms like "data driven," "automated systems" or whatever buzzwords were floating around. For me, it was simpler: these were decision support systems. The purpose of nearly everything we were doing was to help someone — whether a consular officer, an ambassador, an office director — make a decision. That was the goal I defined for myself. The reason we needed computers at the visa windows, for example, was precisely because officers were making decisions in real-time, and they needed access to reliable information from multiple sources to support those decisions.

Around that time — 1999 to 2001 — we also had what I'd call a nascent intranet environment. We had OpenNet, which was an internal, browser-based network. It wasn't

managed by Public Affairs or what used to be USIA (which handled the external Internet presence aimed at foreign publics). We also had a domestic intranet page managed by domestic Public Affairs. These two were completely separate.

At the same time, we had our internal Consular Affairs intranet, known as CAWeb, which fell under my portfolio. I started asking: How can we structure this to deliver authoritative, current information to consular officers? They shouldn't have to scour the Internet looking for FAM references or old cables. How could we centralize and automate more of that? If there's a theme running through my work, it's probably: how can we get machines to do what machines are good at?

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: So I started exploring content management software. Could we enable each division within Consular Affairs — Overseas Citizen Services, Visa Office, Legal Affairs, etc. — to post updates directly to CAWeb? That way, they wouldn't need to email a webmaster every time they needed something posted. Instead, they could maintain and control their own information, with the webmaster responsible only for formatting and presentation standards.

Of course, there was some resistance. Many people were more comfortable emailing a text file and asking someone else to handle the formatting. But we emphasized: this is your information — own it. We'll make it easy for you to manage, but you need to be responsible for accuracy and timeliness.

With the right software, we could even post content dynamically in multiple places — say, on both the Visa Office page and a page that aggregated visa-related guidance from all divisions. I wasn't spending any money on this at first — except eventually to buy the content management system. And this was also around the time people were talking about knowledge portals.

In 2000, portals were a big trend online. Yahoo was a portal. Other companies offered tools that would aggregate information from different sources and present it in a personalized way. Some even let you configure your own portal — so you'd log in and see just what you needed to do your job.

That fascinated me. I reached out to companies that were developing search engines capable of reviewing text, identifying relevant content, and presenting it to users. One company had a search tool that could be embedded in a portal. Another specialized in tailoring content based on user profiles — pulling in relevant cables, for example.

I even worked with the office that managed cables to allow access to the cable archive, now available online, through this prototype portal. I also envisioned the portal pulling in CCD-based data, offering consular managers relevant analytics to help them manage workloads. It was an exciting time — we were imagining what a truly useful information environment could look like.

I had good working relationships across the various CA offices, and we were building toward a formal presentation. Then my office director suggested we pitch the idea to the Assistant Secretary. We prepared to present it at a senior staff meeting with the Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and office directors.

We demoed the portal prototype — it brought together everything we were aiming for: timely information, relevant data, intuitive design. But a few days later, I heard that the Assistant Secretary had been caught off guard. No one had informed her that the project was that far along, and she was not pleased. She wasn't opposed to the idea per se, but she hadn't been looped in — and that caused friction.

Even though we hadn't spent any significant money — it was just a pilot — I got a bit of a slap on the wrist. I was told to stop working on it, since it hadn't received formal approval. So we pulled back from the portal project.

That said, some of the technologies we explored did catch the attention of IRM. The search engine, in particular, was something IRM wanted to acquire. They ended up purchasing it themselves. The office working on the FAM saw its potential — not just for helping users find specific FAM entries, but for surfacing related guidance and content via text analysis.

Some of the collaborative tools we'd tested also sparked interest. IRM was increasingly focused on how to build systems that fostered collaboration — not just compliance. They started working with me more closely, not only on the portal concept, but also on the broader security framework for consular systems — trying to ensure consistency between bureaus and support more integrated information tools.

*Q: You're describing the synergies between the needs of the bureaus and the offices, and IRM. And it's very interesting, because I imagine consular is interacting with IRM in one way, and other bureaus are also interacting in other ways. But what I'm wondering is why wasn't the assistant secretary as well informed on it? And then why would an assistant secretary feel threatened by it?*

GOODFRIEND: That caught me off guard, too. My assumption was that the different offices whose content I was showcasing in the portal had been keeping their office directors informed, and that this was filtering up the chain. Especially since it was my own office director who encouraged me to move forward and present it at the senior staff meeting — I thought the Assistant Secretary was already aware.

Clearly, I misread how information was flowing within the organization. And there's an old lesson that still holds: never catch senior leadership by surprise. That applies to any organization, really.

*Q: No, of course, that's normal in any organization. But it just surprises me that when offered opportunities to move quickly, and with agility on improving process, that the first reaction is Oh, I haven't been informed. I don't know what's going on here. Stop.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, I felt that way too. I was told — quite directly — that the Assistant Secretary should have been brought in at the start. Lesson learned. That said, we continued on relatively friendly terms afterward. She wasn't fundamentally opposed to the idea, but I think being blindsided created a dynamic where she had to reassert control.

And to be fair, most of what I was doing involved leveraging existing tools — things already available — without incurring much cost. It just didn't work this time. That doesn't mean it wouldn't eventually happen, but it wasn't going to happen right then, or in that way.

What did happen, though, is that around that same period — 1999 to 2000 — I was working increasingly with IRM. This was shortly after the U.S. embassy bombings in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, which I believe occurred in 1998.

*Q: Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah. Go ahead. I'll double check.*

GOODFRIEND: In the wake of those attacks, there was a flood of reports from think tanks and oversight bodies asking: What went wrong at the State Department? Why were we caught off guard? Why weren't we sharing information internally in a way that could have helped prevent this?

The focus quickly turned to breaking down internal stovepipes — those silos between different parts of the Department — and creating more collaborative, transparent information systems.

One particularly influential report was called the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel Report, often shortened to the OPAP Report. It pushed for greater integration and coordination across the Department and among agencies. And at that time, the State Department also got its first-ever CIO.

*Q: Take one second to explain what that is because we're outsiders.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, Chief Information Officer with the rank of Assistant Secretary.

*Q: Okay.*

GOODFRIEND: IRM's traditional focus had been on managing the Department's computer resources — hardware, software, networks. But the Chief Information Officer (CIO), newly established at the Assistant Secretary level, was intended to take a broader view. Not just what technology we had, but how we used information across the

Department. How could we make the State Department a more information-savvy organization? How could we enable it to use data and tools to work more effectively?

The CIO took the OPAP report — the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel report — and tried to use it as a framework for launching a department-wide, inter-bureau dialogue. The idea was to hear from different bureaus: What do you need? How can IRM support better collaboration, even at the interagency level?

He secured significant funding for this initiative and began building an interagency network with collaborative capabilities. That network incorporated some of the search functionalities I had been working on — but now elevated to the Department-wide level.

However, there was pushback. Some in the Department felt he was moving ahead of the bureaus. The sentiment was, "Yes, IRM should support what we're doing — but technology shouldn't be driving diplomacy." There were concerns in the regional and functional bureaus that they might be forced to adapt their work to whatever technological vision IRM was pushing, rather than having technology support their methods of diplomacy.

That's just my understanding. Others may have perceived it differently, but that was the general tension I witnessed.

*Q: No, I think you're right. I'll just add a quick note here that in this period of the late 90s, into the early 2000s. In the field, as a political officer, I received requests to fill out surveys on what I would like to see in better computerization and better communication as a political officer. I don't know what was done with the survey. But they did do a few surveys in the course of those last years and twenty century, early twenty first, to at least, ask the field what they were interested in.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes — it was definitely a time of change, and of real consequence.

We met our deadlines. By the end of FY1999 or FY2000 — possibly September 30 — we had consular systems installed at every post, as required. The Y2K transition came and went without major issues, thanks to careful monitoring and preparation.

Then came September 11. I was still working in Consular Systems. I remember people gathered around the television in shock as the towers were hit, and then the Pentagon. We didn't know what would happen next. D.C. could be a target — the State Department, Congress, the White House. Eventually, people were told to evacuate. I walked to Union Station and caught a train toward Fredericksburg, where I lived. I only made it as far as Franconia–Springfield, where my wife at the time picked me up. It was a completely different world after that.

But what followed — those initial questions, "What went wrong? What could we have done differently?" — also led us to realize: we had, in fact, learned from 1993. We'd taken congressional mandates seriously. We'd built a global network that let us track

where the 9/11 attackers had applied for visas. Within hours, we could identify their records, share the information, and analyze what happened.

From there, the focus shifted again — not to restructure the consular system (we had already done that), but to ask: What can we now do with the data? Could facial recognition tools help us detect fraud — such as different names with the same face? Could we flag duplicate identities? These were things we couldn't have done with paper forms just two years earlier.

We weren't starting over — we were building on a foundation. The system was already global and real-time. Now we needed better insights, better tools, and more collaboration across Washington and posts.

That was the environment I left behind in 2002, when I took my next assignment — as a Regional Consular Officer based in Frankfurt. I was responsible for providing guidance to consular officers at small posts across Africa, many of whom were first-tour officers. I think my portfolio covered about 14 countries.

I'd been preparing for that role while still in Consular Systems. I asked myself: "What tools would I need in Frankfurt to support someone in Gabon, Togo, or Malawi? What reports from the CCD would help me advise them?" I wanted to ensure that CAWeb — the Consular Affairs intranet — was a tool I could use in that job. I envisioned being able to point officers to the right information, review their case notes, and guide them from afar.

Of course, I'd also visit posts in person — generally twice a year. I was on the road half the year. Those visits weren't inspections — they were collaborative. We'd built relationships through email and phone, and when I showed up, it was to deepen the connection, not to evaluate from a distance.

Meanwhile, on the personal side, we were planning carefully for our family move. The kids were set to attend the International School in Frankfurt. As I mentioned earlier, the timing worked: our oldest would complete the last two years of high school there, the middle child would start high school, and the youngest would finish middle school.

We had offered them choices — trying to be inclusive about where we might go. At one point, our oldest tried to rally the younger two to push for boarding school instead. Each of them named countries where local schools didn't really work, hoping that would mean they could attend a boarding school in the UK or elsewhere. I even added some of those posts to my bid list just to entertain the option.

But ultimately, I was assigned as Regional Consular Officer in Frankfurt — a post with both a good school and the infrastructure I needed for my new role.

*Q: Alright, this would be a good place to break because we're at the two hour mark and you're actually ready to go to a new tour. Also to give your voice a rest.*

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*Q: Okay, today is June 2, 2022, and we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend, as he begins his next tour in Frankfurt. And André, what year was that?*

GOODFRIEND: That was 2002. I was assigned as a Regional Consular Officer based in Frankfurt, working with small posts in Africa. It was a two-year assignment — even though it was overseas — because the extensive travel involved made it a hardship post of sorts. The person in that position was regularly on the road and couldn't really settle in the place they were technically assigned to. That heavy travel schedule made it a challenging assignment.

*Q: Were all of the countries you were assigned the same? Or did they change over the time you were there?*

GOODFRIEND: The countries I was responsible for remained mostly consistent throughout my assignment. In a couple of cases, I filled in for a colleague or took over posts that had previously been handled by someone else — someone who had actually worked at that post. Instead of continuing to assign them as the regional officer for that post, I was asked to take it over.

This position of Regional Consular Officer was still relatively new at the time. The first iteration of it was for the states of the former Soviet Union, and the officer was based in Moscow. That's actually how I first became aware of the program — when I was in Moscow from 1994 to 1997. The regional officer there provided guidance and support to newly established posts, which were often staffed by just one consular officer — usually someone on their first tour. The idea was to have a more senior officer nearby, in the same time zone, who could travel easily to those posts and offer guidance.

Back then, the Soviet Union had just broken up, and these were all new states with new embassies — very small operations. The regional officer position was created to serve as a consultant and advisor to these posts. But there was a catch: the officer was funded out of the Moscow budget, and there wasn't a separate line item for travel. So over time, it became clear that the travel costs were unsustainable, especially as the nature of the flights changed — what used to be cheap internal flights within the Soviet Union became international flights between sovereign states, and prices rose.

Eventually, it no longer made financial or logistical sense to keep that position in Moscow. Frankfurt was chosen instead. It had a major international airport with flights to all the necessary regions. Frankfurt was also easier to support in terms of staffing, housing, and infrastructure. Unlike Moscow, which was a difficult post to manage logistically, Frankfurt had surplus capacity from what had once been a military base — housing, office space, services — all of it. So it became a regional hub for the State Department.

By the early 2000s, Frankfurt had evolved into a base for multiple regional officers. When I came on board around 2002, there was one officer for Eastern Europe and two for Africa. My predecessor had been based in Brussels because his wife was stationed there. That made sense logistically, and Brussels had good flight connections to Africa due to Belgium's colonial legacy. Paris had also been considered, but its capacity to support additional personnel was more limited, even though its airport was well-connected to Africa.

When I bid for the position, I think I was only the second person to hold it. There were now three officers total, each covering different areas, and we all reported to a supervisor in Washington — not to Frankfurt itself. This ensured that Frankfurt didn't try to pull us into local assignments and that our resources remained focused on the posts we were supporting. It also meant that our budget came from Washington, which helped avoid the earlier issues with travel funding.

Midway through my tour, a supervisory position was created specifically for regional consular officers. That person was based in Cairo, as her husband was stationed there. So our supervisor was now in Cairo, though the reporting structure to Washington remained.

In terms of personal logistics, we closed out our house in the U.S., packed everything up, and moved to Frankfurt. The kids enrolled in the American International School there, which had an IB (International Baccalaureate) program. That was important to us, since the IB diploma would give them flexibility to attend universities either in Europe or the U.S. Our eldest was halfway through high school when we arrived, so he finished high school during our two years there. Our middle child began high school in Frankfurt, meaning he'd complete two years there and two years at our next post. And our youngest had two years left of middle school, so he'd start high school after we moved again. It all lined up nicely in terms of educational transitions — better, actually, than if it had been a three-year assignment.

We lived in renovated military housing on the former base. It was adequate and comfortable. My wife at the time found work fairly quickly. That had become more of a necessity by then. In Fredericksburg, before this assignment, we had a system: I'd work early mornings through the afternoon, then be home with the kids while she worked evenings. As the children got older, she was more comfortable working during the day.

In Frankfurt, I was traveling about half the time, so she found a job first in the Human Resources department, and later as the Office Management Specialist for the Deputy Principal Officer at the Consulate. That title — Deputy Principal Officer — can be confusing. This wasn't a small consular section in an embassy; this was a full-fledged consulate. The Consul General, or Principal Officer, oversaw not just consular work but also political, economic, and administrative functions. My wife supported the Deputy Principal Officer in that broader context.

Everything settled in well. The kids took a school bus, but we also saw Frankfurt as a good place for them to start gaining independence — learning to use public

transportation, navigate the city, meet friends. It was a manageable city, not particularly dangerous or chaotic, and they were at the right age to begin exploring.

Also, around that time — 2002 — it was becoming more common to get cell phones for kids. I think I had only just acquired my first one after returning to the U.S. in the late '90s. They weren't smartphones yet, just basic phones, but they were cheap and reliable. Having phones gave us some peace of mind as the kids started moving around independently.

When I arrived, we were transitioning offices — from one building to another, expanding to accommodate the growing number of regional officers. There wasn't a formal setup yet: no real office of our own, just a designated space. We set up our computers. Two of us shared a room with cubicles; the third had a room next door. We had logistical support from the broader Frankfurt mission — for travel vouchers, timesheets, that sort of thing — but we didn't have an Office Management Specialist (OMS) or dedicated admin staff. We handled our own schedules, made our own travel arrangements, requested our own visas.

The first task was reaching out to all the posts I was now supporting — introducing myself via email and starting to plan visits. It was about building relationships and establishing myself as their point of contact for consular matters. That early outreach laid the groundwork for the rest of the assignment.

*Q: Let me ask a quick question here. Since you had no other admin support, about how much time from your day or from your week was admin versus actual consular work?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, it varied. One thing that helped was that we were moving toward more computerized processes. And because we traveled so much, we operated under a blanket travel authorization. That made things a lot easier. Normally, you'd have to get a separate authorization for each trip, which — as I mentioned with the first officer in Moscow — could be a real administrative headache. He ran into trouble when the travel budget ran out, and getting authorization for each trip became a major obstacle. So the blanket order significantly reduced that part of the administrative load.

Other tasks kind of blended administrative work with engagement. For example, reaching out to a post to introduce myself or set up a visit — yes, that's something an OMS might normally do. They might say, "The RCO would like to visit in the next three months — what dates would work?" But since we didn't have OMS support, I handled that myself. Still, that also meant I was engaging directly with the consular officer at post — which, in these small posts, was usually a one-person operation without their own OMS.

So instead of going through two OMSs, it was just me reaching out directly. And that actually had benefits. It gave me the chance to understand what challenges they were facing and discuss timing with them directly. Sure, you could call that administrative work, but it was also meaningful engagement.

Once dates were set, I'd book travel. I'd either contact our travel office and ask them to find flights — or, more often, I'd do it myself. I preferred to plan the itinerary using tools like the OAG (Official Airline Guide) and our internal systems. Rather than saying, "Find me flights to Benin," which is too vague, I'd go in, see what routes made sense, and create a specific itinerary. Then I'd send that to the travel office to book.

So yes, that was work an OMS could have done. But by doing it myself, I avoided the back-and-forth that comes from someone else not quite understanding your preferences. If I had to explain everything in detail, then review what they came back with, and revise it — it might take more time than just doing it myself. Since I was comfortable with the systems, it was often quicker for me to map out the trip and send it in.

That said, the tedious part came after the trip — filing the travel voucher. That meant collecting tickets and receipts, stapling everything just the way the travel office wanted it, filling out the forms to their specifications. That part really was a grind. And because I traveled so much — 14 posts, visiting each twice a year — it became a lot of paperwork. I would've loved to just hand it off to someone and say, "Here — please take care of this." But we didn't have that option. So I did it myself.

Not having admin support also meant that we were each responsible for maintaining our own records of engagement with the posts we covered. After every visit, we'd write a report — usually five or six pages — summarizing the situation at post: what was going well, what could be improved, and what recommendations we had. We'd share it with the post, but we also had to file and store those reports ourselves. There wasn't a shared or centralized system.

So if one of us had to cover for another officer, we didn't necessarily have access to their records or previous reports. Everyone was maintaining their own files, their own contact lists, their own notes. There was no standard operating procedure, no common approach — just whatever each officer had created for themselves.

We did try to formalize the need for admin support and get a dedicated position authorized. That meant going through the bureaucratic steps — justifying the role, outlining duties, estimating the number of hours, the grade level — all of that. We began that process shortly after I arrived, but it took longer than the two years I was there. So, during my time, we still had no admin person.

In the meantime, we leaned heavily on digital tools — and I in particular really pushed for that. I was comfortable in that environment, especially from my experience in Consular Systems. I saw the potential for using collaborative technology to build a more effective digital workspace.

The goal was to create something like a digital library or filing system that would allow us to collaborate more effectively with the posts we were supporting. It wasn't just about storing documents — it was about building a shared space where we and the consular officers at these small posts could access and exchange information easily. And I was

advocating for that strongly, because I knew it could make a difference in how we supported those posts.

I was hoping to create an online community for the small posts I worked with, using a collaborative tool we had called eRoom. For each post, I set up a dedicated folder where I could store all the relevant records and documents — visit reports, guidance, notes — everything related to that specific post. Both I and the consular officer at the post had access to their folder.

There was also a shared area within eRoom where I could post links to useful resources — like the FAM, relevant cables, and other guidance. This way, officers didn't have to wait for me to send something individually; they could go to this shared space and find what they needed on their own. The idea was to make it a collaborative environment — something similar to what we'd tried to do in a classified setting with SIPRNet in my previous assignment. Create a shared digital workspace that allowed us to function more like a connected community, rather than a collection of isolated individuals.

Because that's what they were — isolated. The officers at these small posts usually had no one else in the consular section. That's actually one of the criteria for being part of the Regional Consular Officer (RCO) program: we supported the smallest posts, the ones with just one consular officer, often on their first tour.

These officers typically didn't have anyone to turn to for questions or guidance. They were new to embassy life, trying to figure out how the whole system worked — who to contact in Washington, how to interpret regulations, how to interact with other parts of the mission. And in some cases, they were wearing multiple hats: not just the consular officer, but also the political officer or the GSO (General Services Officer). It could be incredibly challenging.

*Q: Wow. Yeah.*

GOODFRIEND: But the thing is, at these small embassies, aside from maybe the DCM or the Ambassador, most of the other American officers were also on their first tour. These were tiny posts — just a handful of U.S. staff, and maybe three times as many local employees.

Consular Affairs saw these posts as exactly the kind that would benefit from having a mid-level officer come in and provide support — someone who could consult, help work through complicated visa cases or American Citizen Services issues, and just keep things running smoothly.

We were talking earlier about prevention versus response, particularly in the context of conflict. In many ways, this program was a perfect example of preventive work. If you're waiting for warning signs — well, by the time those signs come in from, say, Libreville, the problem has probably already happened. At that point, you're reacting, not preventing.

But if you have someone regularly engaging with the post, checking in, discussing issues early — then you can spot and address things before they escalate. That's really the idea.

*Q: An interesting analogy just came to mind. I have a physical therapy trainer who told me, if you're thirsty, you are already dehydrated. You should be drinking water in a way that you don't feel thirsty.*

*Since you're talking about warning signs and potential for even larger difficulties, were any of the posts that you had in Africa already in conflict, or in a post conflict moment where it was still an iffy situation?*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah, absolutely. And I really like that analogy. That's exactly the kind of mindset we were aiming for — promoting wellness instead of reacting to illness. Just like your trainer said: if you're already thirsty, you're already dehydrated. The goal is to be proactive, to maintain that balance before the warning signs even appear.

That was really the philosophy behind the regional program. We had these small, often remote posts in challenging environments — usually staffed by first-tour officers, often without anyone they could consult with on consular issues. That's a setup that can go off the rails pretty easily unless there's a support structure in place. This program was about creating that support — not in the form of inspections every couple of years, but through regular, engaged presence.

The idea wasn't to show up only when something went wrong, but to have consistent, ongoing contact. Ideally, we could help resolve or even anticipate issues before they escalated. From my perspective, the most valuable thing we brought was that regular engagement. Yes, we had a fixed schedule — visiting each post twice a year — but even that was tight. With fourteen posts, that had me on the road half the time. So every visit counted, and the idea was to be anticipatory, not reactive.

You're talking about actual violent conflict at post — and yes, there were definitely posts I visited where the situation was challenging. In fact, as I think about it, quite a few.

My very first visit as Regional Consular Officer was to Lomé, Togo. While Lomé itself wasn't experiencing any unrest at that moment, almost as soon as I arrived, I got a call from Washington asking if I could drive over to neighboring Ghana. Ghana was preparing to receive refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, where conflict had broken out. So even if my post wasn't directly in crisis, the region was volatile, and situations could shift quickly.

I cut my visit to Lomé short and drove over to Accra. Ghana was a larger post and technically not one of the ones I covered, but I went there to help coordinate preparations in case an evacuation became necessary. Côte d'Ivoire wasn't one of my assigned posts either, but I ended up taking it under my wing, visiting a few times, especially as unrest flared up now and then.

Libreville, Gabon was another example. When I visited there for the first time, they were also handling the arrival of evacuated American citizens. We worked closely with the French, who had a military base in Gabon. This kind of coordination with other missions and military units was not unusual in those environments.

Then there was Chad. Chad was, at times, so unstable that embassy staff couldn't leave the compound. And even though Zimbabwe wasn't in my portfolio, I still had to go there a couple of times due to the worsening situation.

So, yes — many of the posts I supported were in difficult or even dangerous circumstances. Each one had its own unique context. And remember, these were usually first-tour officers, often dealing with issues that would have challenged even seasoned diplomats.

I recall one officer contacting me because a man had come to the embassy claiming to be an American citizen — but he had no passport. Why? Because he had joined the French Foreign Legion, and as is typical in that setting, they had taken his U.S. passport and issued him a new identity. Now he wanted out. The officer wasn't sure how to handle it. Should we inform the French? They're our allies. But on the other hand, he's an American citizen — and it's not our role to turn him over to another country's military.

So, we verified his citizenship and issued him a travel document. But we also had to inform him: the French might be looking for you, and it may not be easy to leave. And in fact, as he tried to depart, he was arrested — not by the local authorities, but by the French, who were operating their military base there.

Now we had a new question: how do we ensure consular access, when the person is being held not by the host country, but by foreign military forces? Eventually, we confirmed he was in French custody on their base, and we were able to get access to him and provide the services we're obligated to provide to any American detained abroad. Ultimately, the French allowed him to leave, and the officer handled the case properly and diligently, making sure he didn't disappear behind some diplomatic curtain.

That was just one case. In another, an American arrived by sea and was arrested on suspicion of plotting to assassinate the leader of a neighboring country. That's not a scenario most consular officers expect to deal with. The host country considered extraditing him to the neighboring country — but now we had to work with Washington and the post to craft the appropriate diplomatic note.

We had to make clear our concerns under international law, particularly regarding extraditing someone to a country where they might face abuse or torture — especially given the severity of the accusations.

These were first-tour officers operating in circumstances where they often had no one they felt comfortable turning to for guidance. Without support, issues could easily spiral

out of control — turning into something far more serious than necessary. And at that point, you're no longer preventing problems; you're just reacting to them after they've already escalated.

What we were trying to do through the Regional Consular Officer program was help prevent those issues from bubbling up into crises. Yes, problems will always arise — but with the right kind of early engagement, we could keep them within the framework of routine casework, rather than letting them grow into situations that demand excessive resources and coordination because they've been allowed to fester.

Part of my effort was also to recognize that many of these small posts were dealing with similar challenges — and there was value in them learning from each other, peer to peer. But in reality, there was no real network connecting these isolated officers — except through their interactions with the regional officer. So we worked to change that.

We created a collaborative site for the posts to share information and best practices. And shortly before I left, I worked with Washington to create a dedicated role for Regional Consular Officers within the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD). Normally, to access data in the CCD, you need an assigned role that authorizes you based on your "need to know."

For instance, if you're the consular manager at a post, you'd have access to all of your post's consular data. If you're in Washington supporting posts globally, you might have broader access. But regional officers weren't yet built into the system that way, even though we were responsible for oversight and guidance across multiple posts.

So I argued that RCOs should be given consular manager-level access to the posts they supported. If I was covering fourteen posts, I needed to see what those posts were doing — review case notes, follow activity, and provide real-time support. Otherwise, I'd be flying blind.

Once I had that access, I could log in and, on any given day, take a random look at the work happening across my posts. It wasn't about micromanaging — it was about giving constructive feedback, just like a consular manager would do in a larger embassy. Sometimes I'd see a note that didn't support the decision made, or that suggested the officer might want to reconsider or ask for advice. And then I could reach out. In a few cases, even the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) at a post would contact me, asking if I could speak with the consular officer about a particular case.

Having that CCD access made all the difference. It allowed me to consult meaningfully — based on real data, not vague descriptions. I could talk through a case with full context, almost as if I were there at post.

We had those tools, yes — but a lot of the work was still about building human networks. It's one thing to sit back and say, "Okay, I've got access to all this technology. I can see

what you're doing in the system, you can email me, we can talk on the phone." But that only goes so far.

What I heard consistently from officers in the field was that they really benefited from knowing each other — not just having a name on an email thread, but actually meeting, connecting, sharing experiences.

*Q: Oh, absolutely. Sure.*

GOODFRIEND: Right — so, while the officers themselves would rotate in and out, we were really trying to build what I'd call a living network — a system where people could work with each other, feel supported, and know there was expertise in the region they could tap into.

Some officers already had informal connections, especially those who had been in the Foreign Service for a while or had served in neighboring countries. But many didn't. So we started organizing a conference specifically for consular officers at small posts. These officers were often excluded from the larger regional conferences simply because they couldn't leave their posts — there was no backup.

That was another area where we stepped in. We worked to make sure that DCMs and ambassadors understood just how critical it was to provide backup support — not only to allow these officers to attend conferences and training but to prevent burnout.

At some posts, you had a consular officer who was also the GSO, and maybe even wearing a third hat. They felt like they could never take leave because there was no one else to cover for them. That's not sustainable. So we had to advocate for that officer and say, "There has to be a plan. Either someone at post is designated to cover, or if leave is planned in advance, Washington can arrange to send someone out temporarily."

*Q: Okay. And I had a quick question about that. If you're at a small post, and you're a consular officer, you need somebody else who has a consular commission to do the work. And to get that you have to go through Consular training. Theoretically everyone has. But it may have been many years since you went through it. And at some point, whoever is the backup and for GSO to have contract authority, just in case, there's an urgent need for somebody to sign a contract. It doesn't happen often, but you never know.*

GOODFRIEND: Exactly. That's part of what I mean when I talk about prevention versus reaction. These aren't surprises — these are foreseeable needs. Like you said, someone needs to have a consular commission in place as a backup. So: let's make sure there is a designated backup. Let's make sure that backup has the authority, and let's go one step further — give them a chance to actually use it once in a while.

That way, when the consular officer has to step away, the backup doesn't say, "Well, I do technically have a commission, but I have no idea what I'm doing. I guess we're just

going to have to shut down the consular section." That's avoidable. But it takes some planning.

Part of my role was simply reminding people of that. Officers at small posts do have a right to take leave — they're entitled to a vacation. But at a small post, it's not automatic. You have to plan. You have to identify your backup, make sure they've got some experience under their belt, and help the DCM or ambassador understand that this kind of cross-training and preparation isn't optional — it's necessary. Otherwise, you end up burning people out, or giving the impression that time off is a luxury the post can't afford.

The same applies to duty rotations. If there's only one consular officer, and there's no rotation, that person ends up on duty all the time. And that's just not sustainable. But if you've created a solid duty book — one with clear, useful information — then even an officer from another cone can handle most after-hours inquiries.

It's exceedingly rare that something requiring a consular commission — like issuing a visa or passport — would need to happen at night. Most of the time, it's okay to say, "We understand the urgency, but we're closed right now. Come back in the morning." But it helps to have that laid out clearly in the duty procedures — and sometimes it takes a regional officer with experience to say, "Here's how this is done in a sustainable way."

We were there to provide that kind of guidance — not just on technical policy questions, but also moral support. We'd recommend processes, like having the backup sit in on consular work once a month to stay sharp, or having a plan for how the section would operate during leave. These were practical steps we could take to help the officer feel less alone and more prepared — and to give the post a more resilient system overall.

And it worked both ways. Sometimes the consular officer would need support in explaining a need or process to their DCM. Other times, the DCM would reach out to me and ask me to help walk the officer through a difficult case or to reinforce that a particular approach was indeed the right one.

In short, we were there to provide consular consultancy services — using whatever tools we had, whether that meant online systems, phone calls, or face-to-face visits. We also organized workshops for local staff, giving them a chance not only to build skills but also to meet each other and form a support network of their own.

*Q: One other issue in general for Consular officers that I'm wondering if you played a role in was identifying fraud and how to deal with it?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, definitely. That was something I'd worked on quite a bit in previous posts. In both Delhi and Moscow, I served as the fraud prevention officer. And actually, something interesting happened between those two tours — we changed the name of the position.

When I was in Delhi, it was still called the anti-fraud officer. But by the time I got to Moscow, we had shifted to calling it fraud prevention officer. And I like to think maybe I had something to do with that shift — though I'll never know for sure.

The terminology really reflected a change in mindset. Anti-fraud implies that you're fighting something after it has already occurred — reacting to it. Fraud prevention is a different approach. It's about putting systems in place to stop fraud from happening in the first place. Again, it ties back to what we've talked about: prevention versus response.

So, in my work as a Regional Consular Officer, that perspective was always part of what I brought to the table. It meant focusing on accountability — reviewing visa issuances, monitoring records, tracking fee collections, and looking for emerging trends. Often those trends reflected broader societal or regional shifts.

And with the growing computerization of consular operations, we had new tools for oversight. I mentioned earlier that, when I was with the Consular Systems Division, one of the things we implemented was giving consular managers the ability to review applications digitally, rather than sifting through paper files. That made a huge difference.

As a regional officer in Frankfurt, I used that capability to review visa applications from posts I covered. I'd look at the electronic notes, examine the decisions being made, and if something caught my eye, I'd reach out to the officer — ask about their thinking, raise a concern, or walk through how I might interpret a particular case. It wasn't about second-guessing them, but about creating a dialogue and helping them develop a stronger sense of what good adjudication looks like.

We also addressed fraud prevention at the workshops we organized for Locally Employed Staff. Those sessions were a chance to share experiences, spot patterns, and strengthen collaboration. Consular Affairs in Washington supported these efforts, particularly when it came to tracking and documenting fraud indicators, and building awareness of trends affecting the region.

One key area at the time was the Diversity Visa (DV) program, which was in the middle of a major shift. When I became an RCO in 2002, applicants still submitted a paper card to express interest — just a postcard from anywhere in the world.

*Q: Take one second to explain what the diversity visa was.*

GOODFRIEND: Sure. The Diversity Visa program came about in response to concerns that changes made to U.S. immigration law in 1965 had unintentionally reduced the diversity of immigrants coming to the United States.

Before 1965, the U.S. used a quota system. Every country was assigned a specific number of immigrant visas, and those numbers were based on the demographics of the United States as they existed in the 1920s. So, for example, if the U.S. population in the 1920s was 20 percent of German origin, then 20 percent of the visas would go to people

from Germany. If 15 percent were of Irish descent, then 15 percent of visas would be reserved for Ireland. The idea was to preserve the existing ethnic makeup of the U.S.

But that system excluded people from countries that didn't already have a large immigrant base in the U.S. — places whose migration waves came later, or whose populations weren't reflected in the 1920s demographic snapshot. There was a justified sense that this approach was discriminatory.

So, in 1965, the U.S. scrapped the national origin quotas and replaced them with a system based on ceilings — each country would be subject to the same numerical limit. No country could exceed a certain number of immigrant visas in a given year. Countries like Mexico, the Philippines, or China often hit that ceiling, which resulted in longer wait times, but for most other countries, that limit wasn't a major constraint.

The new system focused primarily on family-based and employment-based immigration. So if you were the spouse or child of a lawful permanent resident or an American citizen, or if you were the sibling of a citizen, you fell into one of the family-based categories. Employment-based visas were allocated based on the type of job and level of skill involved.

But even with this more open framework, concerns remained that certain regions were still underrepresented in the immigrant pool — especially countries that due to their smaller family sizes, appeared to have been disadvantaged by the 1965 changes to U.S. immigration law.

That's where the Diversity Visa program came in. It was designed to address that gap by providing an opportunity for individuals from those underrepresented countries to immigrate, even if they didn't already have a family connection or job offer in the U.S. The goal was to broaden the geographic diversity of U.S. immigrants.

Highlighting the way in which the 1965 change may have disadvantaged some nationalities, under the system that was put in place in 1965, any American citizen could file a petition for a qualifying family member, and that person had the same opportunity to move through the process whether they were from Germany or Zimbabwe. That was the intent — to make the system more equitable.

But what began to happen over the years, especially over the next few decades, was that in some countries, families tended to be much larger. One person would immigrate and then petition for numerous siblings or relatives, who would, in turn, bring over their family members. This created chain migration dynamics that, over time, led to immigration patterns becoming increasingly concentrated in a handful of countries.

So while the 1965 law was meant to correct the skewing caused by the old quota system, it ended up creating a new kind of skew. People from countries with smaller families or fewer family ties in the U.S. found themselves effectively locked out. And over a

generation, that gap widened — because if no one from your country had immigrated before, then there was no one to petition for the next wave.

Ireland was a key example. It had been disproportionately affected by the post-1965 family-based system, despite having a long history of immigration to the U.S. So the first version of the Diversity Visa program was largely targeted to benefit Irish nationals — to rebalance things and ensure they weren't left out of the new immigration landscape.

The Diversity Visa (DV) program was designed to address that problem on a broader scale. It established a system that each year would identify countries underrepresented in recent immigration flows and then offer a new pathway: a lottery. The idea was to open immigration opportunities to people who didn't have family members in the U.S. or a job offer waiting for them — two things that had become prerequisites under the existing framework.

The DV lottery doesn't automatically grant a visa. That's a common misunderstanding, sometimes misrepresented in the media. What it does is allow people to express interest. That expression of interest acts like a petition. If selected, the individual is then invited by the State Department to apply for an immigrant visa — subject to all the usual checks. Security clearances, eligibility reviews, and admissibility standards all still apply.

And because DV applicants typically don't have a sponsor — either a family petitioner or employer — they must meet certain baseline requirements to show they're likely to succeed in the U.S. They need at least a high school education or the equivalent, or qualifying work experience in a field recognized by the Department of Labor.

That's the rationale behind the DV program: to maintain geographic and demographic diversity in the U.S. immigration pool, and to give individuals from underrepresented countries a chance to come, even without pre-existing ties to the United States.

Now, when I became a Regional Consular Officer in 2002, the DV process was still paper-based. Applicants submitted a postcard or letter indicating their interest, and those entries were sorted and selected manually. There was a move underway to transition to an online system — but there were concerns.

The question was: Would moving to an online-only process end up disenfranchising applicants from countries with limited Internet access? Particularly in parts of Africa, Asia, and South America, connectivity wasn't widespread. Shifting from paper to online sounded modern, but the risk was that people in underdeveloped or rural areas might be unintentionally excluded.

Since many of those countries were part of my regional portfolio, State asked for my perspective. What I saw in the field was that, while Internet access was far from perfect, the postal systems were often even worse. In many places, it was more likely that someone could visit a cyber café than reliably send and receive mail. So, in a way, the

move to an online system — even with its limitations — offered more transparency and reliability than relying on paper entries routed through uncertain postal networks.

If someone drops a postcard into the mail in Togo, how certain can they be that it will actually reach the Diversity Visa processing office? Not just eventually, but within the specific time window that's required — say, between October 1 and November 15. That's a serious concern. There's no way for the applicant to know if their entry was received, if it was received on time, or if it was even delivered at all.

With an online system, by contrast, you get immediate feedback. First, there's the basic question: can you access the application submission screen? If you can, and you fill out the form and click "submit," you receive a confirmation. Right then, you know that your entry was received — on time, by the correct office, and in the correct format. That level of certainty simply isn't available with the old paper process.

Of course, at first, there were concerns about whether applicants in less connected countries would even be able to reach that online submission screen. But as the system rolled out, I started noticing something interesting while visiting countries in the region: cyber cafés were popping up — sometimes right on street corners — created specifically to help people submit Diversity Visa entries online.

There was a flip side to this, though. It also gave rise to a wave of fraudulent websites and scam operations that claimed to help with DV applications but were really designed to exploit applicants — either financially or by harvesting personal information.

So we had to do outreach. We had to make sure people knew what the official website looked like, how to recognize imposters, and how to avoid being duped. At the same time, this wave of activity actually helped spotlight a broader issue — cybersecurity. It highlighted just how many fraudulent sites are constantly out there and how vigilant we, and our applicants, needed to be.

*Q: Right.*

GOODFRIEND: And around that time, there was also a broader effort to make U.S. government websites more recognizable — more consistently branded — so the public could clearly identify which websites were official. We were telling people: If it's not a .gov site, it's not a U.S. government site. We emphasized what our sites should look like — official seals, consistent design, trusted symbols. That kind of branding was essential not just to protect the integrity of the system, but also to protect applicants from being defrauded.

Because what we started seeing was a rise in private individuals and companies posing as helpful services, when in fact, they were diverting applications or exploiting applicants. Some were outright scams — charging people to submit forms that were never actually submitted, or harvesting personal data.

Now, not all facilitators were bad actors. The term “facilitator” could go either way. In the best-case scenario, a facilitator would simply help someone navigate the process: explain how to fill out the form correctly, clarify what information went where, help format the name fields properly, make sure the photo met the technical requirements — that kind of thing. That kind of help is valuable, especially in places where applicants might not have access to reliable Internet or technical skills.

But then there were the other kinds of facilitators. They would say, “Just use my address,” or “I’ll use my email for your application. I’ll let you know if you win.” And what would happen is that they’d receive the selection notice — not the applicant — and then turn around and charge the applicant just to get that information. In some cases, people never even found out they’d been selected. The facilitator held the power and could choose whether to tell them or not.

In looking at how the Diversity Visa process was unfolding, we also had to focus on public awareness — making sure that applicants understood how to navigate the process and what to expect. That meant explaining what to be cautious about, how the notification process worked, and when and how they’d be contacted — especially in the countries I was serving.

One of the recurring challenges was around qualifications. As I mentioned earlier, DV applicants need to meet certain basic education or work experience requirements — either a high school diploma or qualifying work experience as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor. But sometimes, people misrepresented their qualifications when submitting their entries. Not always maliciously — sometimes it was simply a misunderstanding of what counts as high school equivalency or what the U.S. would recognize as qualifying work experience.

The problem is that the expression of interest — whether through the old postcard system or the newer online version — was completely free. That encouraged a large number of submissions, many from people who didn’t actually meet the qualifications. But once someone was selected and invited to apply for a visa, the process quickly became costly.

The application itself wasn’t free. Even though winning the lottery allowed them to apply, it didn’t guarantee a visa. They still had to pay all the standard fees — application fees, which are in the hundreds of dollars per person, plus medical exams for every family member.

And we’re not just talking about individuals. Many applicants were part of families — three, four, five people — which meant multiple application fees, multiple medical exams. It was not unusual for a family to spend well over a thousand dollars just to reach the interview stage, only to be told that their claimed qualification wasn’t valid. Maybe their work experience didn’t meet the Department of Labor criteria. Maybe their diploma wasn’t equivalent to a U.S. high school education.

Sometimes it wasn't so much a matter of combating fraud as it was about making sure the rules were clear — that people understood what the program actually was and what it wasn't. Too often, applicants would treat the process as if it were a formality: "Just fill in the blanks and you're good," assuming that nobody would actually check. But that's not how it works.

Take, for example, one of the most common issues: discrepancies in family information. Say someone submitted their initial Diversity Visa entry and listed two children. But then, when it came time to submit the full visa application, they listed three. That's a red flag.

There could be legitimate reasons for this — like a child born after the initial entry — but the biggest concern was always that someone was attempting to bring along a relative who wasn't actually their child, in hopes of securing them a visa. And that would be considered fraud. In those cases, the entire application could be disqualified.

Naturally, this often led to misunderstandings — and sometimes real emotional tension — especially for families who had spent significant money on application fees and medical exams. From their perspective, they thought they were being reasonable or flexible. But from our perspective, it was a matter of ensuring the integrity of the process.

So a big part of our role — mine and the officers at post — was helping to explain all of this clearly. How do we communicate these rules in a way that's understandable and fair? How do we make sure people aren't misled about what to expect from the process? And how do we give them the tools to apply successfully and legitimately?

These were the kinds of issues that were unique to the Diversity Visa process in some ways, but they also reflected broader challenges in consular work — especially at small posts.

At the same time, many of the fundamentals of adjudication were similar to other types of visa work. For officers who were juggling multiple roles — say, serving as both political and consular officer, or economic and consular officer — these cases offered a valuable learning experience. I've always felt that consular work can deepen your understanding of political or economic conditions on the ground. And, conversely, having that political or economic lens can really enhance how you approach a visa case. Understanding the applicant's environment gives important context to their circumstances — and that context can be critical to good decision-making.

There were definitely advantages to officers wearing multiple hats — especially when it came to visa adjudications. For example, someone with an economic or political background could sometimes more easily spot inconsistencies in an applicant's story. They could recognize when someone wasn't responding in a way that matched what you'd expect from someone genuinely working in a particular profession, or when their understanding of the local economy didn't align with their claimed role in it.

That kind of insight was incredibly valuable. For officers considering a move into another cone after their consular tour, these interviews provided a unique foundation. Interviewing dozens of people each day teaches you a lot — about how people present themselves, about local dynamics, about how systems are understood or misunderstood by the public. And all of that has relevance far beyond consular work. It was a real chance to build judgment and discernment that could carry over into any other role.

For me personally, it was a fascinating tour. I got to visit places I probably wouldn't have had the chance to otherwise. At that point, I was an FS-02, and many of the Deputy Chiefs of Mission at those posts were FS-02s as well. In other words, there weren't any consular jobs at those posts that were at my level — so this was the only way I could get a real sense of those environments without actually being assigned there. And I didn't just bring experience — I gained it as well. I learned from the officers on the ground: what they were facing, how they were solving problems, and what made those posts unique.

One of the goals was also to help those officers connect — to enable them to network effectively and feel like they weren't alone in what they were doing. I tried to foster that through a transparent, collaborative environment. For example, I experimented with building out an online FAQ: if someone at one post asked a good question, I'd post both the question and the answer to our shared collaborative space, so others could see it, benefit from it, and even comment on it.

Of course, this was back in 2002 to 2003, and the concept of online collaboration was still fairly new. We were just beginning to explore those tools, and people weren't always quick to jump in and participate. Sometimes it took a lot of encouragement to get people to engage in an online discussion.

It's actually encouraging to see how much that has changed in the years since. In the past twenty years, people have really embraced these platforms. Back then, though, it was still a bit of a novelty — and we were working through the early challenges of building a digital culture of collaboration.

*Q: Before we close on this tour, were there any particular consular challenges or cases that stand out in your mind as unusual, or really requiring a great deal of your attention?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, I mentioned a few earlier — the individual who left the French Foreign Legion, or the person arrested for allegedly attempting to assassinate a neighboring leader. But there was another case that stands out: the entire consular section at one post had to be dismissed due to misuse of their computer systems — sharing inappropriate images and violating professional standards. That left a first-tour officer suddenly without any consular support staff at a small post.

It wasn't just a consular issue; it reflected some of the broader challenges of being at a small post — where you're often navigating new technologies, unique interpersonal dynamics, and unexpected crises, all at once.

Beyond these more dramatic situations, though, the real core of my work was consistently engaging with officers — helping them see the bigger picture. Many were juggling consular responsibilities alongside political, economic, or commercial work. Part of what I tried to do was help them see how those roles intersected. Consular work isn't separate from the rest of the mission — it informs and is informed by the local political and economic context. Helping officers understand that connection was a big part of my approach.

But perhaps the most important thing I could offer was simply being someone they could talk to — someone who understood what they were going through. These were bright, capable officers who, with time and experience, could handle anything that came their way. But they were often isolated, and even in the most collegial posts, there could be a sense of professional solitude.

So my role, in many ways, was preventive and anticipatory rather than reactive — helping them build the internal and external networks that would keep them from burning out. It meant showing them that the State Department was full of people who were ready to help — and that if you knew how to navigate the system, things could actually happen quickly. Whether it was arranging an evacuation, finding backup personnel so they could take leave, or helping their DCM understand how Consular Affairs could support them — we were there to ensure the post wouldn't be left in the lurch.

We also worked on identifying what resources a post would need in advance — what should be in the consular package, what should be spelled out clearly in terms of staffing and backup. It was all about averting crises before they even arose. Helping officers manage their workload and expectations in a way that aligned with how the Department and Consular Affairs actually functioned, and ensuring that their supervisors understood that support was both available and expected.

*Q: Okay. All right, we have come up to the two hour mark. I'm going to have to pause here but it sounds like a good place to break. So let me pause the recording*

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*Q: Okay, today is June 16, 2022, and we're resuming our interview with André Goodfriend. And André, you are right now in Frankfurt as a regional consular officer. And there was still a bit more about this tour you wanted to review?*

GOODFRIEND: Right. In our previous conversations, I mentioned that much of the focus was on providing guidance to officers at very isolated, small posts in Africa. I would visit these posts a couple of times a year, but we also made use of the technologies that had recently become available to us to create a living network — allowing officers to communicate effectively with one another.

This also enabled me to monitor their decision-making processes in real-time by accessing the consolidated database, reading their notes, and discussing cases with them directly. We organized conferences as well, where these officers could meet each other and talk about the specific issues that small posts face.

I was working with about fourteen countries in Africa, and a colleague had a similar number. We also covered parts of Eastern Europe. These were usually posts with a single consular officer — often someone on their first tour — so the challenges were very different from those at larger posts, where officers could consult with each other and where the volume of work allowed for more varied practices.

As I mentioned earlier, we were using collaborative technologies to function more effectively as a team. This coincided with a broader shift within the State Department, which was starting to embrace networking, collaboration tools, and Internet-based workflows. Keep in mind, the Internet had only recently arrived on our desktops.

There were still concerns — serious ones — about security. The idea of collaborating and sharing information in this way was seen as risky. Would these tools allow people to share sensitive information inappropriately? Would they enable the aggregation of data that, while harmless on its own, might pose a threat when combined? These were new questions for the Department.

The platforms we were promoting to support internal information sharing were being carefully reviewed for such risks. At the time, there was a distinction between our SBU (sensitive but unclassified) network and the Internet, and the ability to move information across those boundaries — whether bringing something in or pushing something out — was a major concern.

We used a particular platform for sharing information and had to go through an approval process within IRM. Diplomatic Security raised objections, arguing that this type of sharing posed serious risks. We had to argue that our goal was internal sharing. While we already had the ability to share externally, we lacked an approved internal platform. Without it, people were more likely to take information outside the secure environment, engaging in external discussion groups rather than keeping those conversations in a controlled setting.

I traveled back to Washington from time to time to engage with IRM and with a new office being formed at the time — the Office of eDiplomacy — which was looking into collaborative platforms for internal use. These would let us work with cables online and share information more effectively.

I think the kind of collaborative network we built among the small posts served as a model for IRM and eDiplomacy — showing that there were ways to work transparently and collaboratively using the networks we had.

It wasn't just about lacking the technology. We also had to overcome a reluctance to use it and address concerns about how to use it securely. How do we configure the tools to monitor usage? How do we train personnel on what's appropriate to put in the SBU environment, what can be shared externally, and what should or shouldn't be brought in from outside?

These weren't just tech issues — they were professional questions about the nature of the information and data being handled, and how to recognize the value of that information.

It was a time of change, with new opportunities and unfamiliar ways of working starting to take hold. That was between 2000 and 2003.

I think in our last conversation I mentioned the shift to a digital Diversity Visa program — do you recall if I covered that?

*Q: Yes. You did.*

GOODFRIEND: So again, this transition to a digital environment — both internally, in terms of how we reviewed information submitted to us, and externally, in how it affected the societies we were interacting with — had a significant impact. As we moved more of our processes to digital platforms, we began telling applicants in Africa, Asia, South America — across all regions — that rather than mailing paper documents to Washington, they would now need to submit digital photographs and complete digital applications.

This shift had an effect on those societies as well. Many of them had limited Internet access at the outset, but the requirement to participate digitally — because that's where opportunities were increasingly located — prompted change. It wasn't necessarily disenfranchising. In some ways, it may have been less disenfranchising than relying on opaque postal systems, where people could never be sure if their documents actually arrived. Still, it was difficult to say definitively whether people were being enfranchised or disenfranchised by the shift.

What became clearer with the digital transition was where adequate Internet access existed — and where it didn't. It also revealed, in real-time, whether applications were reaching their intended destinations or whether there were problems within a society's digital infrastructure that needed to be addressed.

All of this was unfolding while I was working as a Regional Consular Officer. At the same time, we were exploring new oversight processes. As I mentioned earlier, in these regional roles, the immediate supervisor was the Executive Secretary, and the reviewing officer was the Deputy Assistant Secretary. But physical location began to matter less.

In my second year, for instance, my immediate supervisor was an FS-1 officer serving as a supervisory Regional Consular Officer based in Cairo. My reviewer was the Executive Director in Washington. There was no direct oversight or supervision from anyone

located in Frankfurt. That was a very different model — made possible only through the communication technologies we now had available.

This period also reflected a growing sense of global connectivity, which by 2001–2002 had become far more tangible.

And, of course, this was also the period when major global events were unfolding. It was 2002, just after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. The war in Iraq was beginning and dominating both U.S. foreign policy and global attention.

During that time, I was in Frankfurt. I can't think of anything else specifically related to my work there that I should touch on — unless you have a question.

Our engagement with officers at different posts, how we used the available tools to build a more collaborative approach, and our ongoing reliance on air travel to maintain those connections — all of that was part of it.

And with that, it was time to start bidding for the next assignment.

*Q: Right, exactly. What were your considerations as you were thinking about the next assignment?*

GOODFRIEND: I had wanted to head a section or division within a Consular Section and continue serving overseas. When I began making my initial bids, I was still an FS-2 and had put together a strong list of FS-2 consular assignments, both in the region and globally. I can't recall exactly which posts were on that list, but it was mostly consular positions, and I began reaching out to the posts accordingly.

Then, during the bidding process, I was promoted to FS-1. That changed everything — I had to discard my FS-2 bid list and start focusing on the FS-1 positions. At that point, one of the biggest considerations was my children's schooling. I think I had mentioned earlier that Frankfurt had been a good fit because my oldest was able to complete his last two years of high school there. By now, he was ready for university. Our middle son was halfway through high school, so we needed a post with a solid high school program — ideally one offering the International Baccalaureate so he could continue in the same curriculum. And the youngest was just about to begin high school.

So, we were specifically looking for posts that could accommodate those schooling needs. While I'd been able to compile a strong FS-2 consular bid list, at the FS-1 level, there were far fewer consular positions that met our criteria. I began looking at some multifunctional or generalist FS-1 roles, including some in environment and science sections in places open to generalists. But on my FS-1 consular bid list, there were only two posts: Paris and London. I knew both would be highly competitive.

Still, I felt I had a better shot at Paris. I spoke French and had used it in my previous role as a Regional Consular Officer, particularly in Francophone Africa. I also knew a number

of people at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, so I made that my primary focus. I reached out to contacts at the post and in Washington. At one point, someone in Paris asked whether I knew if I was CA's (Consular Affairs') candidate — implying there might already be a preferred candidate. But I kept pursuing the Paris assignment and wasn't really reaching out to London.

Then, about halfway through the bidding season, I received a message from the Consul General in London. They'd noticed my name was on the bid list but that I hadn't reached out to them. They asked if I was interested in the post. I replied that I was indeed interested — Paris was my first choice, and London was my second — but if they were interested in me, I'd be very happy to accept.

In the end, a different candidate was selected for Paris. But I became both CA's candidate and the Consul General's candidate for London. I was happy to accept the assignment as the American Citizen Services (ACS) Chief.

Around that time, I was also engaged with HR about eligibility issues. Although I was based in Frankfurt for the Regional Consular Officer position, the work involved travel across Africa, and the job itself was considered a two-year hardship assignment due to the travel demands. Frankfurt itself, though, was a non-hardship post — and both Paris and London were also non-hardship. So, HR wanted to make sure I met the "fair share" criteria for bidding on a non-hardship European post.

I had previously served in Moscow, which helped with eligibility. Some of that tour was counted toward qualifying for a non-hardship assignment. But to make the case more fully, I had to calculate exactly how many days I had spent physically in Africa at the hardship posts — essentially arguing that even though my base was Frankfurt, the position's nature and travel schedule made it equivalent to hardship service. I added up the days I'd spent in Africa and combined that with time still counted from Moscow, and I just barely met the threshold to bid on Paris and London.

So, I got the London assignment. It was a good turn of events — a happy time. I'd been promoted, which was gratifying, and I was assigned to London, where my wife at the time was from. Our children had grandparents nearby, which made a difference for them. From their perspective, they were more excited about London than Paris. Personally, I would have still preferred Paris, but they were very happy about the move to London.

So yes, it was a happy time overall.

My mother's health had been in decline even before I took up the Frankfurt assignment. She had hoped to come visit us there but was never able to make the trip. Through the Internet, though, we were able to stay connected. My brother and sister kept me updated, and my mother, too, was able to send digital photos — something that wouldn't have been possible even five or six years earlier. We were able to stay together as a family, in a way, through email and digital communication.

But by May of 2002, the messages I was receiving were increasingly distressing. She had been hospitalized with cancer, and her condition was worsening. We were scheduled to finish the tour in July, but it was now touch and go — there was real concern that she might not last until our home leave. I began exploring the option of taking compassionate leave, and the post was very supportive. Since my mother was now in hospice care, it looked like this might be the last chance I'd have to see her.

We quickly made arrangements, and I traveled to Phoenix, Arizona in June on compassionate leave, which covered the flight. I spent about a week with my mother. It wasn't clear how much longer she had, but we had as good a time together as one could under the circumstances. There was still some hope she might hold on until July.

I returned to Frankfurt and finished out the month, wrapping up the tour. Then we prepared for the move to London. Since it wasn't a long-haul post, we didn't need to fly. We packed up our minivan — three kids made us very much a minivan family — and drove to my in-laws' house. We left the van there and flew to Arizona for home leave.

By the time we arrived, my mother was still alive. The entire family was able to see her, which was meaningful. While we were there, she passed away. It was good that we were all together. This is one of the realities of Foreign Service life — being far from aging parents and other family members, and hoping that when the time comes, you can be there. In this case, I was deeply grateful to the Department for allowing me to take compassionate leave and see her before she passed away. And with home leave, the whole family had the chance to be there together, attend the funeral, and support one another.

After that, we returned to Washington. The mood was somber, but I found colleagues to be very compassionate and understanding. There is a kind of family environment within the Foreign Service — among people who have been through similar experiences and know each other from past assignments. While I was in Washington for consultations ahead of my London posting, I received messages of condolence from colleagues, which meant a lot.

I think I arrived in London in July or early August of 2004. Because of the advances in our computer networks, we'd been able to preview various housing options before arrival. Information from London had been made available online, so I could understand what to expect, how housing was allocated, and what was available. I submitted my preferences, and the housing we received ended up being within walking distance of the embassy — which was great for me, since I enjoy walking. The embassy was about a fifteen-minute walk in one direction, and my son's school was about a ten-minute walk in the other.

My children attended an international school offering the International Baccalaureate rather than the American School. It was a relatively small, city-based school — without its own playing fields, they used a nearby park for sports. But from a logistical

standpoint, it worked well. We were well-situated in a part of London where everything we needed was accessible on foot.

Before arriving at post to lead the American Citizen Services (ACS) section, I had actually stopped in London en route to South Africa for a conference. That visit gave me a chance to check in with the ACS section and see what kinds of challenges they were facing. At the time, they were beginning to roll out an online appointment system for U.S. citizens applying for passports and other services. The aim was to better structure their workflow.

I took what they had started and helped push it further. During my consultations in Washington, I discussed how this approach could be developed. The idea was to use technology more effectively to manage our workload. This was something I had already seen in action at smaller posts — especially the challenges faced by individual officers who needed a system to manage appointments in a way that matched available staff and capacity.

By giving consular officers the tools to control their own scheduling — and backing that with support from Washington and local post leadership when cutbacks or adjustments were needed — we could help both small and large posts alike. London, though a very large post, was moving in this direction. In fact, it handled the largest volume of passport applications outside the Western Hemisphere.

It was helpful to visit about a month before arriving officially, just to understand where the team was heading and to see how their plans aligned with my own ideas for managing the unit. I had also tried to bring them onto the collaborative platform I'd used as a Regional Consular Officer, helping them familiarize themselves with it before I arrived.

So, by the time I set foot in London, I was already somewhat oriented. I'd engaged with the officers, understood the challenges, and started laying the groundwork for a collaborative, more structured approach to consular work. That was the environment I stepped into.

*Q: A quick question, you mentioned that London produced or gave out the largest number of American passports. I'm wondering if that is because so many Americans lost their passport or it was stolen. Or these are passports for newly married British citizens who are now getting passports for American citizenship.*

GOODFRIEND: It's really a combination of factors. The U.K. has the largest U.S. citizen community outside the Western Hemisphere. From what I vaguely remember from our statistics, there were around a quarter of a million Americans in Britain at any given time — a mix of residents and visitors.

So yes, it's a blend of what you mentioned. There were many babies being born to American parents in the U.K., Americans living there who simply needed to renew their

passports, children growing up in the U.K. getting their first passports, and tourists who lost theirs or had them stolen.

We also had military personnel whose passport applications were processed through London, due to nearby U.S. military bases. I don't recall the exact figure, but we processed tens of thousands of passport applications per year.

Beyond that, London handled a wide range of services — routine and otherwise. That included notarial services, consular reports of birth abroad, and also renunciations of U.S. citizenship. During my time there, I tried to stay actively engaged with how these processes were being handled. I'd occasionally be called over by staff to speak with those coming in to renounce their citizenship — just to get a sense of their reasoning, their mindset.

We also dealt with Americans in jail, destitute Americans, and citizens in need of assistance. The embassy served the full range of consular services, and I wanted us to be there for all of them.

I used to tell my staff that in many ways, it felt like a kind of homecoming for me — but with a reversal of roles. Back in 1986, I had been living in London myself. My first son was born there, and I came to the very same embassy to register his birth as a U.S. citizen and apply for his first passport. Some of the people I spoke with in 1986 were still there when I returned in 2004.

Back in 1986, I had been on one side of the window — seeking consular services as an American citizen in London. And now, here I was on the other side of the window, responsible for providing those same services to the American citizen community. I didn't want to lose sight of how I felt back then — what my expectations had been as an American citizen.

I asked myself: what should an American abroad expect from their embassy? Now, as a Foreign Service Officer — by 2004, with about seventeen years of service — I had a much clearer understanding of what we could actually do. The question was: how could we use the tools now available to provide the best possible service?

That was the mindset I brought into the role. It wasn't so much that the attitude of the staff needed to change — we all wanted to provide the best service possible, and to make it easy for people to access that service. But what needed to change was our recognition of the new capabilities at our disposal. We had technologies and approaches that simply didn't exist ten or fifteen years earlier.

One example was the ability to schedule an appointment online. Before, people had to call in to book an appointment, or even show up and wait. Now, we could provide a more convenient option. Another shift was in how we responded to public inquiries. If someone emailed us with a question, should we just respond by asking them to call? Or should we answer their question directly by email?

Some felt that a phone call offered a more personal touch — and sometimes, yes, a conversation can clarify things better than written correspondence. But in many cases, a straightforward email reply was more efficient and less burdensome for the individual.

So the broader question became: how are we communicating with the public? Are we using our tools to their full potential? And is the public satisfied with what they're getting from us?

At the time, there was still some lingering skepticism — similar to what we'd heard when the Diversity Visa program first moved online. The concern then was that people in rural or underdeveloped areas didn't have Internet access, and that the digital process would exclude them. But here we were talking about England — and more specifically, England and Wales, which fell under London's consular jurisdiction. (Edinburgh handled Scotland, and Belfast handled Northern Ireland.)

I recognize, of course, that the United Kingdom is a single country. But the American Citizen Services section in London was primarily focused on England and Wales. So when I was talking about our outreach and services, I was speaking specifically about that region.

There was clearly a well-developed infrastructure in England and Wales. Internet penetration there was as widespread as in many parts of the United States. And yet, there was still a lingering perception that people didn't really have access to digital tools — or that we couldn't expect people to use the Internet. One common concern was: what about the elderly? Won't they be confused? What will they do?

We had to take a step back and ask: what are they doing now?

This reminded me of the earlier shift with the Diversity Visa program — when applications moved from paper mail to online submissions. The concern then was similar: what happens to those without Internet access? But again, we had to look at what people were already doing. In many cases, they were already turning to relatives, friends, or someone in the community to help them fill out forms, navigate websites, or communicate with us.

The same was true with passport applications or consular inquiries. Not everyone could easily frame their question over the phone — some people found it easier to write it out and clarify it in an email. That wasn't disenfranchising. If the Internet was widely available — and it was, in England and Wales — then encouraging people to use it wasn't excluding them.

We couldn't build our entire process around the assumption that someone unfamiliar with technology would be completely isolated. More often than not, they had someone in their life — a family member, a neighbor — who could assist them with making an appointment or composing a message. Our role was to make the process accessible and

efficient for as many people as possible, recognizing the realities of how people were already adapting.

*Q: We're momentarily frozen. Your image and audio is momentarily frozen. I think André we'll probably reinitiate. And we'll just keep this zoom meeting open, hoping that he can just reinitiate just wait a moment more. Okay. Yeah, we momentarily lost the line.*

GOODFRIEND: What was the last thing you heard me say?

*Q: It was sort of at the end of the description of why the Internet could still be a better tool for those seeking American Citizen Services than coming in, in person or talking to you by far.*

GOODFRIEND: There were staff who, I think, still valued what you might call the "handmade" approach to consular services. The idea was to be like the Rolls-Royce of public service — nothing machine-tooled, everything custom-designed to fit the individual, like a well-made glove. There was an emphasis on human interaction, on tailoring the experience.

But that approach could also lead to frustration — especially when people weren't able to reach a human being because all our staff were already engaged. If we couldn't schedule services in advance, and instead kept our doors open with the expectation that people could just show up and be seen, then we risked creating bottlenecks.

For instance, if we were short-staffed or someone was on leave, that open-door policy meant long waits for services. And if we couldn't scale down during periods of reduced staffing — or scale back up when everyone was present — we couldn't manage expectations or demand effectively.

We needed to recognize that simply leaving the phone lines open and saying "call us anytime" or leaving the doors open with "just come in and we'll help you," might feel like a welcoming, friendly posture, but in practice it often created more frustration than satisfaction.

On the other hand, when we structured our workflows — when people came in with appointments, knowing what to expect, and we knew what to prepare for — we were better positioned to deliver the service they needed.

Internally, another challenge was access to information. Most of our policies, guidance, and precedents — how we'd handled things in the past — existed only in hard copy. There were training efforts in place for incoming staff, but the actual documentation that formed the basis for our decisions was mostly on paper, typically locked away in safes.

I pushed to digitize those holdings — to bring everything online. That meant getting cables and policy documents into digital form and making them accessible and shareable within the team.

At the time, I was supervising about 40 people directly. The overall Consular Section had around 100 staff — roughly 60 in the visa unit and 40 in American Citizen Services. It was a large operation, due in part to the size of the American citizen population we served.

The more we were able to organize, share information, and craft consistent written responses, the better we could manage the workload.

*Q: Just quickly… of the forty that you were supervising, how many were U.S. Foreign Service officers, maybe eligible family members, and how many were local staff?*

GOODFRIEND: We had four Foreign Service personnel in the Special Consular Services unit. That unit handled the more emergency-oriented cases — people who were destitute, had been robbed, were in prison, or needed notarizations. It also dealt with missing persons — cases where families were trying to locate a relative abroad. So Special Consular Services covered a wide range of serious, often urgent situations that Americans might face while overseas.

Then, in the passport unit, we had another three officers handling passport services. So the section was divided between those two main units — Special Consular Services and the passport unit. Among those officers, I believe two were eligible family members (EFMs), so not all were Foreign Service Officers.

The rest of the staff — by far the majority — were locally engaged staff (LES). That was the core team I worked with on a daily basis.

In addition, we had a connection — though not direct supervision — with the Federal Benefits Unit, which was staffed and supervised by personnel from the Social Security Administration. They had a Social Security officer assigned to London who managed a team of about ten people focused on federal benefits.

That was roughly the structure of the American Citizen Services (ACS) team in London.

And if you recall from our earlier discussions, one of the consistent themes throughout my prior assignments — from Tel Aviv onward — was the importance of entering data first. That is, when someone submitted an application, the information should be recorded in the system before anyone made a determination about eligibility. That way, we had a clear record of receipt before beginning the review process.

In the case of passports, there was an additional layer, similar to how things eventually worked with visa applications: a fee needed to be paid before any decision could be made.

A passport application required a fee before it could be considered — and that was true for every service we offered. Notarial services, for example, also required payment up

front. One of the challenges we faced in trying to be as accommodating and friendly as possible was that applications were often being accepted and reviewed by local staff before any fee was collected.

If an application didn't meet the criteria — for example, for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad or a passport — the staff would explain to the applicant what was missing and ask them to return with the additional information: a missing document, a new photograph, or whatever was required. But since no fee had been collected and no record had been made of the visit, there was no formal trace of the interaction. If someone later called and said, "I was there on Tuesday and was told to bring something back," there would be no record, and in many cases, no American officer had ever seen the application.

So when we looked at how to structure our services more effectively — especially as we moved toward online appointments — we had to design a rational, consistent workflow that everyone would follow.

The new approach worked like this: the applicant would first make an appointment online. That allowed us to know in advance who was coming in and how many people we were expecting. On the day of the appointment, the applicant would arrive and first go to a reception clerk — not someone trained to evaluate eligibility or completeness, but someone whose job was simply to accept the application and confirm that the applicant had paid the required fee.

This was a key change: no application would be accepted unless a fee had been paid, and that payment was confirmed with a receipt. Only then would the application be submitted to the reception clerk.

From there, the data would be entered into the system — again, before any review of eligibility took place. That task would fall to a more experienced staff member, someone at a higher grade, who would enter relevant notes for the officer who would ultimately make the decision.

This workflow allowed us to standardize the intake process and train junior staff to handle initial submissions without placing the burden of review on them. It also sped up the process by removing the need for a senior staff member to make immediate judgments at the window, with the applicant standing there.

By having applications submitted, entered into the system, and only then reviewed, we ensured that every case had a record — and that we weren't issuing informal, undocumented decisions simply by turning people away without a formal denial or receipt.

This system applied not only to passports, but to Consular Reports of Birth Abroad and all other services we offered.

In cases where we told someone they didn't meet the requirements for a passport, that was essentially a denial — at least for that day. And yet, if no fee had been collected and no data entered, there was no record of that decision. That was a key mindset shift we needed to make: how do we engage with American citizens in a way that both provides good service and ensures we have a clear record of the interaction?

Providing good service doesn't always mean being friendly at the front window but leaving no documentation of what's been done. We were trying to take a step back and really review our processes.

As things moved forward, we saw parallels with the Diversity Visa program and its shift to digital. Just like that transition had revealed that people did have access to the Internet and could use online tools, we found that making appointments online for American Citizen Services was very successful. It allowed people to schedule their visits, see available slots, and plan accordingly. And for us, it gave us the ability to manage our workload in ways that weren't possible with an open-door model.

Emergencies were still accommodated, of course, but we could now anticipate the number of visitors on any given day. We could block time off for staff training simply by not offering appointments on those days. It gave us flexibility.

Initially, there had been concern — especially from some staff — that Americans would push back against the idea of needing to make appointments. But in reality, many Americans appreciated the structure. After all, they make appointments for services in the U.S. too. The key issue isn't the appointment itself — it's honoring the appointment. If someone has gone to the trouble of scheduling, their expectation is that they'll receive the service on the day they arrive.

Our responsibility, then, was twofold: to make it easy to book an appointment, and to deliver the promised service reliably and efficiently.

Throughout this process, I was in regular communication with Washington. We were looking at how London could serve as a kind of testbed — for workflows, appointment systems, and other innovations. There were skeptics in both London and D.C. — people who felt that such a formalized structure was unnecessary or that a more personalized, ad hoc approach might still be best. But we said, let's try it. Let's see what works.

As new tools for American Citizen Services became available, we consistently volunteered to test them. Whenever something new was being piloted — especially if it could improve efficiency — we made sure London was among the first posts to raise its hand.

One of those tools was real-time access to digitized passport records. If someone came in claiming their passport was lost, we could now instantly retrieve the record of their previous application — including the photo and data submitted years earlier. That allowed us to verify their identity on the spot.

Before that, the process was much slower. We'd have to contact Washington and request a copy of the original application. Sometimes that meant waiting for a fax or an email attachment with the scanned document. Now, with real-time access to the global database, we could see a person's application history at any post within seconds.

This was similar to what had long existed for visa adjudication — where posts could view an applicant's visa history worldwide. But on the American Citizen Services side, these technologies were only just being introduced. And, understandably, there was more sensitivity involved — because we were dealing with American citizens.

American citizens were always our primary concern. We wanted to be sure we were providing appropriate, effective services — and equally important, that we were respecting the privacy of their data. That meant knowing how to use information securely and responsibly in the course of delivering the services they applied for.

We volunteered to be a testbed for many of the new tools being developed. Sometimes that worked to our benefit — often, though, it was to our chagrin. The software in those early stages frequently didn't work as expected. There were significant delays in retrieving and displaying data. But we worked through it. After about a year, the systems began to function more reliably and as intended.

We also started taking fuller advantage of the capabilities we had. Instead of scrambling to manage everything on paper with limited information, we now had better access to digital records and more comprehensive data on the applications being submitted. That allowed us to take the time necessary to review them carefully and determine eligibility with greater confidence.

With this improved access, we also began detecting more cases of passport fraud — cases that may not have been noticed before, simply because the tools weren't available to connect the dots. It made sense. If we were processing, say, 35,000 passport applications per year — and I don't recall the exact number, but it was in that ballpark — and even 1% of those applications were fraudulent, we were potentially looking at 350 suspicious cases annually.

The switch a decade earlier to the Machine Readable Visa had made it more difficult to obtain a visa fraudulently. And as it became more difficult to fraudulently obtain a visa, people started to see more value in acquiring a U.S. passport under a false identity. A visa still subjects you to a higher level of scrutiny when entering the United States. But if someone can successfully obtain a U.S. passport fraudulently, then they're holding a far more valuable document — one that grants easier entry and greater mobility.

So, yes, if even 1% of the 35,000 passport applications we processed annually were fraudulent, that would be 350 cases. If it were 0.1%, that's still 35. It's hard to imagine there wouldn't be some fraud. And with the new tools we had, we were finally in a position to start detecting it.

We began identifying three, four, sometimes five fraudulent applications a year. That's a minuscule percentage — but given how valuable a U.S. passport is, even a handful of cases were significant. And until then, fraud prevention units at most posts had focused almost exclusively on visa fraud. As I mentioned in relation to my time in Moscow and New Delhi, that had always been the priority.

But now, we began to broaden our scope. Visa fraud remained the primary focus, of course, but we started working closely with the Regional Security Officer (RSO), Diplomatic Security, and the Fraud Prevention Unit to emphasize that passport fraud exists too — and that we now had the tools to detect and investigate it effectively.

Another priority for me, particularly in a large post like London with such a high volume of both visa and passport applications, was ensuring that our entry-level officers had the chance to develop professionally. The natural tendency at a high-volume post is to assign officers to adjudication full-time, but that can limit their exposure to the broader scope of consular work and stifle innovation.

We tried to create room for them to take on projects — not just for their own growth, but because their ideas and perspectives could benefit the entire section. Structuring the workflow so that non-officer staff handled tasks appropriate to their level helped free up officers to take on additional responsibilities beyond the window.

And we wrote those projects into their Work Requirements Statements, making sure their efforts were recognized. For example, we encouraged officers to explore new ways to engage with the American citizen community.

One notable event during my tenure was the 2005 terrorist attack on London's public transport system. In such moments, we wanted the embassy to be seen not just as a place to go in an emergency, but as an integral part of the American citizen community — something people could turn to regularly for useful, relevant information.

Many Americans living in the U.K. — particularly in London — felt they didn't need the embassy. They spoke the language, they felt they understood the culture. To them, the embassy was there "just in case." But if they weren't engaged with us, we often had no way of knowing what was going on in their lives, or how best to serve them.

So we started sending a monthly email newsletter. It served a dual purpose: it helped keep our contact information up to date, and it let us provide meaningful information — not just warnings or alerts, but things people actually found useful.

I asked the officers to consider: what would you want from the embassy if you were on the other side of the window? What would you expect? So the newsletters included things like U.S.-themed community events (especially around Thanksgiving), updates on passport guidelines, or information about Social Security — such as why you'd need a Social Security number for a child born abroad, and how to apply for one.

One of our entry-level officers managed the newsletter project. Another worked on mapping — asking, "Where are American citizens in the U.K. actually living?" If we could develop a dynamic map based on registration data, we could better tailor our outreach and services to the communities we were meant to support.

These were all efforts aimed at keeping the embassy relevant — not just as a formal institution, but as a living part of the American citizen community in the U.K. And they required us, as managers, to give officers the space and support to step back from the window from time to time, think critically, and contribute in broader, more strategic ways.

This approach was valuable not just for professional development, but also for morale. In today's environment, we often talk about diversity of experience and the benefits of drawing from a diverse workforce. That's not just about demographics — it's also about recognizing different perspectives, backgrounds, and ways of thinking.

It's helpful, in that context, not to try to force everyone into the same mold — to say, "This is how we do it, and everyone must do it exactly the same way." Instead, we tried to engage with our staff individually: What's your area of expertise? What's your perspective? What do you think you could bring to how we provide services within the consular section?

It was a different kind of management approach — one that, I think, also benefited from our broader efforts to increase transparency within the section. As I mentioned earlier, we were working to digitize our records and make information more accessible, not only for efficiency but to foster a more open and collaborative environment.

*Q: Along these lines, you're mentioning professionalization and development of skills. Did your section ever have the opportunity to send people to other sections or give them work, aside from American Citizen Services that might be related, but would offer an opportunity to expand into other fields?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, there was often movement between the American Citizen Services (ACS) side and the visa side — that kind of rotation was fairly common and expected. In addition, we had a broader rotational program for entry-level officers. After about a year, an officer might rotate into another section such as Public Affairs or Political. That was part of their developmental track.

But aside from physically moving someone into a different section, we also encouraged collaboration across sections. Some of the projects we worked on created opportunities for that — where officers didn't need to transfer, but could work alongside other sections and get exposure to different types of work while showcasing the relevance of what we were doing in Consular.

For example, when we were examining cases involving fraud, that naturally brought us into close coordination with Diplomatic Security and the Regional Security Officer (RSO). And, as I mentioned earlier, during the terrorist attack on London's public transit system, we were involved in task force efforts that required close work with multiple other sections — helping assess the broader situation, implications for U.S. citizens, and mission security.

Another high-profile incident was the polonium poisoning of a former Russian intelligence official living in London. He died from tea laced with polonium, and the incident had consular implications as well. The assassins had been careless, leaving traces of radioactive material all over the city — on the airplane they took from Russia to London, in the restaurant where the tea was served, in the hotel towels where they stayed.

This posed a real public health risk — not just a political or law enforcement issue. There was concern that American citizens might have flown on that plane, stayed in the hotel, or visited the same venues. So we worked closely with U.K. authorities to understand the risk and identify any locations where Americans might have been exposed. That meant working with our own Political Section, with the Environment, Science, and Technology Section, and figuring out what information needed to be communicated — and how best to do it.

Another example of inter-office collaboration was our monthly newsletter to the American citizen community. The Public Affairs Section didn't have a regular outreach vehicle like that, so they were very interested in seeing how they could contribute to the content. They had information they wanted to get out to their contact lists, but also saw our newsletter as a channel for reaching American citizens more directly.

At the same time, we had to be very clear about the boundaries. This was an American citizen newsletter — it wasn't a Public Affairs bulletin. We couldn't share our mailing list with them due to privacy laws. But if they had material we believed was useful and appropriate for American citizens, we could review it and choose to include it ourselves.

This kind of engagement gave our officers a chance to learn about the legal constraints we operate under, and to understand the unique roles of other sections. What does Public Affairs do? How does that differ from what we do in Consular? How can we collaborate in ways that enhance both of our missions?

So yes, even if someone didn't rotate into a different section formally, there were many opportunities to work across section lines, to expand skills, and to see how our work intersected with the broader mission of the embassy.

*Q: This does lead me to one other question, which is you have the newsletter as an outreach, were there other significant forms of outreach that you did?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, we had a few different types of outreach. One was through the Public Affairs Section, which allowed officers to submit their names to participate in

public diplomacy programs. Many of our officers, especially entry-level officers, took advantage of that. They would go out and speak at universities or other venues about U.S. policy. It was a promoted opportunity that helped them build public speaking experience and engage with the host country community.

But in addition to that, we also had outreach that was specific to the American citizen community. Officers from our section would go out and speak with various American citizen groups — often local clubs named for the areas they were based in, like the American Citizens Club of Surrey, or others in different parts of the U.K. We would talk with them about the services the embassy provides: how to register to vote from abroad, how to apply for or renew a passport, what to do in an emergency, and more generally about the relationship between private citizens and their embassy.

We also did outreach with student groups. The U.K. was — and continues to be — a popular destination for American students studying abroad or participating in short-term academic programs. Because there's no language barrier, many schools send groups to the U.K. for a semester or summer session. When we had large groups of visiting students, we would bring them into the embassy for briefings — just to orient them to the legal and cultural differences they might encounter.

That included information about local laws — things like drinking age regulations, or items that are considered legal in the U.S. but illegal or restricted in the U.K. (such as certain types of knives). These are things that might not seem obvious but could lead to legal trouble. We'd also highlight the kinds of things listed in our country-specific information sheets, tailored to Americans traveling or residing in the U.K.

All of these were in-person outreach opportunities. And we also had some unique community connections — for example, there was a large American Hasidic Jewish community on the outskirts of London.

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: We would see members of that community come in from time to time to apply for passports. It was a somewhat insular community. To give you an example: there was a young man who came to apply for a passport in his own name. He filled out the application and submitted it, but the staff noticed something odd — the date of birth on his birth certificate appeared to have been altered. It had clearly been erased and written over.

When they asked him about his date of birth, he couldn't give a clear answer. He didn't seem to know his own birthday, which raised suspicions. The staff thought there might be some kind of fraud going on, so we sat down and spoke with him.

As it turned out, he said he'd simply asked his mother for his birth certificate, and this was the one she had given him. He hadn't thought he was doing anything wrong — this was his first adult passport, although he had been issued one as a child.

We called his mother, and the staff spoke with her. She explained that they'd had another son before him, with the same name, who had died. They still had that older child's birth certificate, and when this son was born, they reused the name — it had belonged to an ancestor, and they didn't want it to be lost. When the current applicant asked for his birth certificate, she couldn't find the right one, so she took the old one and altered the date.

We then circled back to the applicant — why didn't he know his own birthdate? He couldn't tell us his birthday in the secular calendar, but when we asked for it in the Jewish calendar, he knew it immediately. He gave us the Hebrew date on the spot. So we looked up the corresponding secular date, and it matched. That was something that would've been difficult to fake, and it helped us confirm his identity.

That gives you a sense of just how culturally distinct this community was. English wasn't his first language — they spoke Yiddish at home — and there was limited familiarity with the secular calendar. It highlighted for us the need for deeper outreach.

This was a large American citizen community living just outside London, and we began to wonder: were they registering the births of their children? Many families had a high number of children, and it might have been difficult logistically to bring them all into the embassy. So we initiated outreach to that community specifically — to talk with them directly, explain what the embassy could do for them, and make sure they knew their rights as American citizens.

We emphasized that everyone is entitled to a passport, that all their U.S.-born children should be registered, that Social Security numbers could be obtained, and that they could receive Social Security benefits in the U.K. We made clear: you are American citizens, and the embassy is here for you.

There was a concern that some members of the community didn't get out much or didn't have much interaction with institutions outside their immediate circle — so they might not have known what kinds of services they were entitled to. Our message was: you don't have to be disconnected. You're American citizens, and this is your embassy. Here's what you can expect from us.

*Q: Here, I'm going to ask that we pause, because we've gotten to two forty-five. But at the next session, we'll pick up with the other aspects of the job in London and follow you to the end of that tour.*

GOODFRIEND: All right.

*Q: I apologize for ending a little early. But we'll certainly be able to pick up there.*

GOODFRIEND: Not a problem at all. I hope the rest of your afternoon goes well. It's nearly 10 p.m. here — and believe it or not, I have a 10:30 phone call coming up. The joys of, well, as I've mentioned, trying to maintain a sense of engagement with...

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*Q: Okay, today is July 7, 2022. This is session nine, with André Goodfriend. André, we left off in London, but you still have a fair amount of time there. Let's continue from after the birth certificate for the Orthodox Jew who used the lunar calendar and did not know his secular birthdate.*

GOODFRIEND: Yeah. That was just an example of the kind of work we did with passport applications — taking them seriously, verifying information, and being alert to possible fraud. In that case, there wasn't any. But in London, we did come across a number of cases where fraud was involved.

One case I recall was someone applying for a passport who had received one previously. He had apparently served time in prison with the individual whose identity he assumed. He knew that the person he left behind had never traveled, so he was able to get a so-called "clean" passport. There was nothing in the record to indicate that he didn't match the name or appearance of the rightful bearer. There were several other cases like that.

Through diligence, some procedural changes, and the recognition that passports are as valuable — if not more so — than visas, we began treating passport applications with the same level of scrutiny, if not greater. We used available technologies to verify information and made use of newer tools that had just come online. We reviewed previous applications and cross-checked information that passport applicants should be able to confirm. These became part of a regularized process, and I think it made our system much more secure.

That kind of work was fairly routine for Citizen Services in London. Most passport applications were straightforward: if a person had a previous passport and hadn't lost their citizenship or had no hold on the passport, they were entitled to another. But there were situations that weren't so routine.

I was actually heading the section during the terrorist attacks in London in 2006. Did we talk about that earlier?

*Q: I don't think so.*

GOODFRIEND: I think I may have mentioned it before, but maybe not as part of the recording. I arrived in 2004. In July 2005, my staff began to notice something was happening on the London Tube system. They were seeing "breaking news" reports on television. Initially, it was being described as an electrical incident under assessment.

I had chosen not to have a television in my office. My feeling was that television can alert you that something is going on, but after that, it tends to recycle the same limited facts,

mixed with speculation and sensationalism. So I relied on other tools to understand the situation.

However, as soon as we heard that something had happened, we needed to find out what it was. One of our primary responsibilities is the safety and welfare of American citizens. If there's an incident that might affect private U.S. citizens, that becomes our concern. The RSO — Regional Security Officer — is responsible for the safety of the diplomatic community, but the consular section handles information and outreach to private citizens.

Even if it had just been a transportation issue — a full closure of the Tube system — it could have had serious implications, given how many people rely on it. We wanted to provide accurate information if it turned out to be something that raised concern for Americans in the city.

As we continued gathering information, working with the RSO and drawing on our own police contacts, it became increasingly clear that this was not just an electrical failure. Within about an hour, we were hearing it had been an explosion in the Underground. That changed everything. We needed to determine whether this was an accident or something more. But either way, there were likely to be injuries — possibly Americans among them — and we needed to know who had been affected, where they were being taken, and whether there were any fatalities.

Because it happened underground, details were slow to emerge. At the time, the general guidance for consular officers was that if there's a train wreck, an earthquake, or a terrorist incident — any situation in which Americans may have been hurt — our role is to get to the scene. It's important for Americans to know that their government is looking out for them. We try to help those who are injured, dazed, or uncertain about what to do. We help identify them, contact their families, and inform the U.S. government about the status of American citizens involved.

Alongside us, many other embassies were trying to do the same — working with their contacts in the police to get information. Eventually, it was confirmed: this had been a bombing on the Tube.

We then had to decide where we could be most helpful. Should we be at the entrance to the affected station? But realistically, we wouldn't be able to access the actual scene, which was underground — and we could potentially be in the way. If people were being carried out, we wouldn't necessarily be able to identify who was American and who wasn't, and we might obstruct emergency personnel.

Our priority became getting accurate information: how many were affected, and who they were. Shortly after the initial incident, there were several more attacks. We had to gather as much information as we could — quickly — because Washington had not yet woken up, and there would be a very short window before the State Department would be demanding answers.

They would want to know: Were any Americans involved? What exactly had happened? What steps were we taking to find out where the Americans were?

As it turned out, there were indeed Americans on the affected train car. A couple had been taken to a hospital. We were trying to find out which hospital. Several hospitals were possibilities, and identifying the citizenship of each injured person was not the first priority for the British authorities, understandably.

We worked to emphasize the importance of that information for us. We were now not only in touch with police, but also contacting each hospital where victims might have been taken, trying to identify the Americans. At the same time, we took care not to interfere with the care being provided. Our goal was to ensure we had the information we needed to support the Americans involved and to offer any further assistance the embassy could provide.

*Q: One more question, often Americans around the world but principally in the U.S. hear about these things and start calling the embassy immediately. Did the embassy set up any kind of task force or something like that to deal with it?*

GOODFRIEND: Well, this is where my own approach to things came into play. As we've discussed before, I try to make effective use of technology — let the technology do what it's good at, and free up people to do what only people can do.

Yes, Americans in the U.S. were very concerned about their family members and started calling at all hours. There's a five-hour time difference between the U.K. and Washington, D.C., and an even bigger one with the West Coast. So people would be calling the embassy throughout the night.

Often, embassies will set up a task force to handle calls, and the duty officer is responsible for managing some of those. But the question for us was: how do we split the workload effectively with Washington, which has far more resources — more people to answer phones — but still needs the information we have in London?

In the past, the assumption was that London would have the most up-to-date information: how many people were injured, how many Americans had been identified, what was happening with those individuals, and which calls had come in.

To divide the workload, we turned to the Consular Consolidated Database. We've talked about this before — it became critical after 9/11 for quickly accessing information related to visa applications from anywhere. It's the same database I used as a regional consular officer in my previous posting, where I could engage in real-time with small posts in Africa from Frankfurt — reviewing their notes and adjudications remotely.

Using that same principle, we said: maybe we can work with the database to create a shared view — or a subset of data — that would allow us in London to enter the information we were collecting: the number of people injured, the names of identified

Americans, and other key details. That way, Washington could see what we were seeing, and we wouldn't have to duplicate efforts. They could respond to calls with accurate, up-to-date information, while we continued our work on the ground.

The Americans who were identified — those were typically the subjects of incoming inquiries. People were calling because they were worried about a relative or a friend they hadn't heard from. That was usually the situation: someone would say, "I have a friend traveling in the London area — or maybe somewhere in Britain, or even Europe — and I don't know where they are. I haven't heard from them, and now that this incident has happened in London, I'm concerned they may have been involved."

So they'd call and say, "We don't know what's happened to our son or daughter," or "We haven't heard from so-and-so for a couple of days — or maybe a week — and we're concerned they might have been injured."

If the call came to us in London during working hours, we would record the inquiry: who was calling, who they were asking about, and any other details — like where the person might have been staying. That information would be entered into the Consolidated Database. And because it was a shared, real-time system, whatever we entered was immediately visible to Washington.

The same worked in reverse. At the end of our workday — say, 6:00 p.m. in London — it was only 1:00 p.m. in Washington. They were still fully staffed and able to continue handling calls. They could enter inquiries into the same system, and we would see that information first thing in the morning when we returned to work.

If there was something urgent — like someone being injured or in a hospital — Washington would still call us directly, and we'd respond even after hours. We had a duty officer available for such cases. But for the bulk of the inquiries — people trying to locate loved ones or confirm whether someone was affected — this shared system allowed us and Washington to work seamlessly and avoid duplication.

We were also experimenting with accessing the Consolidated Database from home. I might have mentioned earlier my role in bringing the SIPRNet to the State Department. We were also using OSIS — the Open Source Information System — which was an interagency Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) network. And that could be accessed —

*Q: Sensitive but unclassified.*

GOODFRIEND: That's right, that's right. It was sensitive but unclassified. At the time, the State Department was replicating the Consolidated Database on that system for use by other agencies. And if you had the proper credentials, you could access it from home.

I could get up first thing in the morning and check for any updates — before even heading into the office. I'd look at the system we had set up for recording information

about the welfare and whereabouts of missing American citizens, just to make sure we were staying on top of things.

What we didn't do was pull people away from their regular work and sequester them into a separate task force in another room, working 24 hours a day, isolated from our ongoing operations. Instead, we used the tools we had — tools that allowed our personnel to work from wherever they were.

We were even experimenting with early mobile access. This was 2005, so we were working with what were then very primitive smartphones. I think it might have been just before BlackBerrys became common — or maybe right around the time they started coming into use. There were other devices too — PalmPilots, if you remember those. I'm trying to recall the names of all those early tools we were testing.

*Q: Right, let me just mention one thing about palmpilots. Oh, my God! I was in Budapest as a cultural officer. And my boss wanted to be the first adopter of palmpilots. They must have weighed one pound. And were way bigger than your hand, that you couldn't put them in a pocket because they would practically tear through and they were anyway larger than an average pocket. And you had to do everything with a stylus. It was glitchy and the local ability to maintain them through towers and so on was also very glitchy. While I was in Hungary, between '05 and '08, they finally did switch to Blackberries. And Blackberry certainly worked much better.*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, this brings back memories of that era. I don't think we used PalmPilots directly — they didn't connect to the Internet, so all the data stayed on the device. But we did experiment with a similar handheld device made by HP. I can't recall the exact model, but it was something like a PalmPilot. We tried loading our duty book onto it to see if consular staff could carry their essential information without having to lug around a suitcase. The idea was that they could take notes on the device, and at the start of the day, transfer those notes — already in digital form — into our internal system. We were aiming for a digital duty log, transitioning away from those old green notebooks you might remember.

This was all part of our effort to adapt — using emerging technology not only to reduce staff burnout during major incidents but also to create what was essentially a virtual task force. People could work from wherever they were, without needing to be physically in the embassy around the clock.

I remember, during that time, I was at an event when I got a call about dental records for someone we were trying to identify — a fatality, unfortunately. We were working to confirm their identity. The dental records came in, and though I wasn't at a desk in the embassy, I took the call and routed the information to the right people. We got the email with the records and were able to proceed with identification. That's when we were really moving into an environment where everyone was expected to be reachable, and we were experimenting with accessing necessary data from anywhere.

I believe I got a BlackBerry around then and was trying to see what kind of access it could provide to our systems. We were testing whether it could connect to opennet, to the intranet, and what kinds of information could be pulled up and used on the go.

So to answer your original question: no, we didn't set up a traditional task force with people staffing phones 24/7 inside the embassy. Instead, we leaned into the technology we had. Washington handled the overnight calls while we were offline, and we picked up the workload during our day — updating the globally accessible database, visiting hospitals, coordinating with police.

We were also working with Washington to update the FAM — the Foreign Affairs Manual — on how to respond in crises. We realized that going directly to the scene of an incident often provided less actionable information than going to where the authorities were coordinating their response. So we worked to revise the FAM guidance, shifting the focus from rushing to the site of the event to going wherever we could be most effective.

It came down to making deliberate decisions: not just passively watching events unfold, but asking, Where can we provide the best assistance? Where can we gather the best information? That's how we could safeguard the welfare of our citizens as effectively as possible.

*Q: Now, meanwhile, you're doing all of that in London, typically, for something like this, you're also in touch with the operation center. And they may have put together a task force. How did that relationship work? Was it engaged? Was it necessary?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, we were engaging with the Consular Task Force. The Operations Center often sets up two types of task forces during major events. There's usually one focused on the broader situation — gathering and coordinating information about the event itself — and another, the Consular Task Force, which is specifically focused on coordinating consular assistance around the clock.

In our case, we were primarily engaging with the Consular Task Force. They were using their existing infrastructure — including the resources they normally use for handling passport and visa inquiries — to field public calls related to the incident. They redirected those resources to set up a call center that could take inquiries from the public and then channel that information to us in London.

I believe this was the first time that this particular model was used — where we looked at how we could quickly repurpose available resources for maximum benefit. Instead of building something entirely new, they leveraged the call-handling tools already in place for other consular matters, set aside dedicated lines for public inquiries, and linked it all to a centralized database.

That database could be updated in real-time by both Washington and London. Our staff in London could access it from anywhere we had a computer — whether at the embassy or

elsewhere. This allowed us to stay mobile, make hospital and police visits, and still remain connected to the larger information flow.

At the same time, we were handling the deeply human side of the crisis. It was still our responsibility at the embassy to make those difficult calls — to reach out to family members in the U.S. when a loved one had passed away or been confirmed killed. That was something only we could do.

*Q: Here's just one last quick thing. In situations like this, the entire embassy is involved; various different offices, if you have an FBI rep there involved, the political section is involved for the political rounds. I don't mean to ask you to go over every single thing. But was there anything in terms of that all of government engagement that was important for you in the consular section?*

GOODFRIEND: In this particular situation, the Consular Section and the RSO had the lead. The political section was involved as well, but more on a separate track — trying to understand the broader implications of the event and its political context.

But when it came to identifying whether Americans had been affected, where they had been taken, and how to get that information, that was our responsibility in the Consular Section. The RSO took the lead on assessing the level of risk and coordinating what information we could or should provide to the public.

We were also responsible for drafting what were called Warden Messages — notifying American citizens in the area about what was happening, where to avoid, and any precautionary measures they should take. London was essentially shut down for a day, so there were real implications in terms of public safety and mobility.

*Q: Take one second to explain what the warden system is for the consular session?*

GOODFRIEND: I think it goes by a different name now, but throughout most of my career, the Consular Section used what was known as the warden system to provide information — primarily related to security, though sometimes it was broader — aimed at safeguarding the welfare of American citizens.

*Q: Your screen is frozen, but we haven't lost the connection yet. Hopefully, this little glitch will resolve itself.*

GOODFRIEND: Okay. Was the sound alright, during that glitch?

*Q: No. Go back a sentence or two.*

GOODFRIEND: Sure. As part of our responsibility to safeguard the welfare of U.S. citizens abroad, we need to keep them informed of potential threats. And we have to

ensure that there's no double standard between the safety measures we take for our diplomats and those we take for private American citizens.

That principle — of not having a double standard — became especially sharp after the attack on the Pan Am 103 flight which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland. After the disaster, there were media reports that some in the diplomatic community had been quietly warned in advance, while that information wasn't shared with the broader public. From that point on, we've been scrupulous: if we share information internally to protect our diplomats or their families — if I tell my kids, "Stay away from there, it might be dangerous" — then we are also obligated to inform the American public.

The warden system was our mechanism for that. Wardens were usually American citizens who volunteered to serve as intermediaries between the embassy and the American community in their area. This goes back well over a hundred years — before the Internet, before telephones — when the embassy would pass a message to a warden, who would then relay it to 10, 20, 30 other Americans under their responsibility. It was a kind of cascade communication structure.

With modern telecommunications, we now often communicate directly — via email, website updates, or other channels. But we still engage with wardens, make sure they know what information we're sharing, and work with them to identify any issues or concerns coming from the local American community.

As I mentioned earlier, the RSO had the lead in assessing the security situation and issuing internal guidance. During the London attacks, many of our local staff couldn't get home that night because the public transit system had shut down. The next day, others couldn't make it in. So another part of our responsibility was to keep American citizens informed about those logistical disruptions — what had happened, what they might face if trying to travel into the city, and our understanding of how things were likely to develop.

We had to do that without stepping on the toes of the local authorities — without getting ahead of them — but still making sure we were providing accurate, timely information to protect U.S. citizens.

In the U.K., that wasn't a major issue. Generally, we could align with the information being released locally. But in some countries, there are discrepancies. If a host government downplays a serious security threat, we may still feel obligated to inform American citizens. That can sometimes cause friction.

One well-known example was the air quality situation in China. The Chinese government wasn't providing accurate data, and we believed this was a safety and welfare issue. So even though it caused some tension, we started informing our diplomatic community and American citizens directly.

*Q: I'll just say one quick thing here, I have interviewed an environmental and science officer who worked in Embassy, Beijing, who I think was the one who instituted the use of an atmospheric measurement of particulate in the air, various things that would be considered particularly hazardous to anyone breathing the air in Beijing, and it drove the Chinese crazy, because we put it on the the embassy in play and it would conflict with what the communist party wanted people to believe.*

GOODFRIEND: Right, right. That really underscores the point. In the U.K., the information we provided to the public was generally consistent with what the British authorities were releasing. But that's not always the case.

We have to — we should — always come down on the side of providing accurate information to the American public, even if local authorities would prefer otherwise. The safety of our citizens is paramount.

That was our approach during the terrorist attack on the public transit system — providing timely and accurate information. And it ties into a broader shift in how we handled emergencies and how we were beginning to use new technologies and tools to collaborate more effectively.

There was another notable incident while I was in London: a former Russian official — possibly former KGB and FSB — was poisoned. His name will probably come to me as we talk, but it involved a radioactive substance.

*Q: Oh, I think it was polonium?*

GOODFRIEND: Polonium — yes. What they determined during the investigation was that the individual — he was a former Russian official, possibly KGB and FSB — had gone to meet someone at a tea house. The person he met had put polonium in his tea. It eventually killed him, though it took some time. He became seriously ill, was hospitalized, and later died.

The polonium appeared to have been brought into the UK from Russia, and those transporting it were very sloppy. Traces of the radioactive substance were found on the airplane they used, in the restaurant, in the hotel where they stayed — multiple locations.

So we were now facing another safety and welfare issue, but of a very different kind. We coordinated with our Science Office because this involved a radioactive element introduced into the British environment. How did it get there? How was it being traced? What were the risks?

While the technical and environmental aspects fell under the purview of our Environment, Science, and Technology Officers, the consular responsibility was to inform private U.S. citizens about potential risks to their health — especially if they had been in those places: the restaurant, the hotel, or that particular flight.

The challenge was that these Americans might no longer be in the UK — we didn't know where they were. So we worked with Washington to issue information to anyone who had been in London during that time period. We also used the registration system for Americans abroad.

And this is a plug: when Americans register with the embassy while traveling, we're in a position to provide them with information that can directly affect their safety and welfare — those "Warden Messages" we talked about earlier. But we can only send those if we have their email or contact info.

When registering, travelers usually include their dates of travel. So we searched the registration database for Americans who were in the UK at the relevant time. Washington then reached out to them to let them know about the possible health risks and advised that they might want to see a doctor, just as a precaution.

That was an example of using digital tools in a new way — something we couldn't have done years earlier. Thirty years ago, registration was done using physical cards, stored in a Rolodex or card file at the embassy. It wasn't until the early 2000s, maybe around the time of the first Gulf War, that we really began shifting to online registration. Until then, you had to physically go to the embassy and show your passport — there was no other reliable way to confirm someone was an American citizen.

But with digital registration, that verification could be done remotely. It made it easier for citizens to register and easier for us to use that data to help them. During that first decade of the 2000s, we were really starting to explore how these new tools could improve our outreach and response.

For example, there were even hurricanes — or tornadoes, I think — going through Britain during that period. We started thinking: Could we use the database to identify Americans in the affected areas and proactively reach out? So we tried matching postal codes of those weather events with postal codes in our registration system. That way, we could contact people and simply ask, "Are you okay?" That kind of outreach wouldn't have been possible just five years earlier.

We were beginning to explore how to be more than just a crisis responder — how to be a partner to the American citizen community. We wanted people to see the embassy as a helpful, caring presence — an organization that's here for their welfare and can offer useful, timely information.

We even started creating a monthly newsletter to share information. Did I mention the newsletter before?

*Q: No.*

GOODFRIEND: Okay. So, as part of exploring how to better engage with American citizens — using the tools that were now available to us — we started thinking about how

we could get a better handle on what was happening in the American citizen community, and how to build a relationship with them that wasn't just reactive.

We realized that if the only time Americans heard from the embassy was when we were warning them — saying, "You need to do this, or something bad might happen" — then our outreach wouldn't feel very credible or friendly. People might be more likely to dismiss the warnings if they didn't see us as a trusted and consistent presence.

So we started putting together a newsletter. I believe the first issue came out around November 2005. It focused on Thanksgiving, providing information about events in London for Americans — like places offering Thanksgiving meals or services. For example, there was a mass being held at St. Paul's Cathedral. But we also recognized the need to be inclusive, so instead of highlighting only one event, we did a survey to gather information about different kinds of events across the city.

We were actually surprised by how many Thanksgiving-themed activities and meals were available in London. Restaurants were offering special menus; there were gatherings and other observances. So we compiled all that into the first edition of our newsletter.

We also tried to include some content relevant to Americans living beyond London, though most events were centered in the city.

Part of the inspiration for this effort was personal. I think I mentioned before that I had once been a private citizen in London myself. I'd registered the birth of my son at the embassy years earlier. Now, returning as head of the American Citizen Services section, I often asked myself: If I were still just a private citizen, what would I want the embassy to tell me?

So each month, we began assembling a newsletter with information that might be useful or interesting to the American citizen community. It helped establish a regular and positive presence for the consular section — not just in times of crisis, but as a part of everyday life.

It also helped foster that mindset throughout the embassy. We encouraged our consular officers and staff — and others across the mission — to think: What might be helpful for Americans to know this month?

We tasked one officer with compiling the newsletter, and they'd reach out to colleagues throughout the embassy to ask if there was anything worth including. So the newsletter became both a tool for engaging with private Americans and a way to strengthen collaboration across the embassy.

The newsletter also helped us put together a list of people who actually wanted to hear from us. As word spread that we were putting it out, more and more people asked to be added to the mailing list.

That became valuable in a way that went beyond outreach. With the old registration list I mentioned earlier, if we didn't use it regularly, the email addresses would go stale. People moved, changed email providers, or simply abandoned accounts — and we wouldn't know. In a real emergency, we might find ourselves sending messages to an outdated list, unsure who was actually receiving them.

But by sending something once a month, like the newsletter, we would get bounce-backs when email addresses were no longer valid. Or people would reply and let us know they'd moved and wanted to be removed. It allowed us to keep the list current, which in turn helped ensure we could reach people quickly in a real crisis.

And it highlighted another issue: we found that when sending to more than 50 or 100 recipients, spam filters would sometimes block our messages. We had to learn how to work around those limits — sending messages in smaller batches, structuring them differently, and refining our distribution processes.

This became a serious topic of conversation between posts, especially those with large American communities. We were asking each other: How are you managing your mailing lists? How do you keep them up to date? How do you test them?

This was 2005–2006, when email communication with the public was still relatively new. I think we were at the forefront of using email proactively, not just reactively, to stay relevant and connected.

All of this fits within a broader theme: crisis management through routine communication. If we could manage communication effectively during non-crisis times, we'd be much better prepared during an actual crisis.

If we only tried to communicate during a crisis, chances were high that our systems would fail — we might get blocked by spam filters or struggle to send messages out quickly enough. In a fast-moving emergency, delays of hours — when we needed minutes — would be unacceptable.

We were also experimenting with ways to target communication more precisely — using postal codes to send messages to Americans in specific geographic areas. We even began mapping those registrations, visualizing where higher densities of Americans lived by overlaying their locations onto UK maps. In some ways, I think we were ahead of our time in using geographic data to deliver better services.

And it worked. Because we were managing our workload more effectively — we used appointment systems, for instance — we could allocate resources more intelligently. That freed up capacity to engage the public meaningfully, without being overwhelmed.

So when a crisis did happen, we weren't burned out. We could operate in a distributed, sustainable way. Washington shared the burden — we worked closely with them — and

our systems allowed staff to work from wherever they were, without relying on a 24/7 task force locked inside the embassy.

Instead of carrying around a Blackberry and answering calls at 9:00, 10:00, midnight, 2:00 a.m. — we avoided burnout by designing a rational system: a virtual task force, supported by technology, real-time databases, and shared responsibility.

These approaches helped us mitigate crises and even anticipate them. It ties into the larger concept of conflict prevention — something we talked about two tours prior. It's not just about early warning and rapid response. It's about ongoing engagement — building trust, maintaining open lines of communication, and fostering relationships with the community before a crisis occurs.

If we're seen as a regular presence — checking in, offering useful information, being available — then when something serious happens, people know how to reach us and are more likely to listen.

We used this approach to address a number of significant situations: the polonium poisoning, the Tube station attack, the airport attack in Glasgow, and even tornadoes across different parts of the UK. And we could respond quickly because we were prepared.

We also participated in the local Consular Corps in London, which met monthly to discuss shared concerns — everything from how to engage effectively with the police to handling notifications about citizens in prison. Host governments are supposed to inform embassies when a citizen is detained, and we have a responsibility to visit and monitor those cases.

We also shared information about international adoptions, parental child abduction — issues that fall under consular responsibilities. So we weren't working in isolation. We were part of a larger ecosystem of engagement — both with our citizens and with other diplomatic missions.

*Q: Quick question when you say a Consular Corps was that just the embassy or were Americans, the warden system or other Americans outside the embassy also involved?*

GOODFRIEND: The Consular Corps referred specifically to consular personnel at the various embassies and consulates in London. We did meet separately with our wardens and reached out to private American citizen groups as part of our broader outreach — sending officers to speak with different American clubs and associations — but the Consular Corps itself was composed of embassy and consulate staff.

That included officers and locally employed staff, and also honorary consuls. Honorary consuls were often citizens of the host country representing the commercial or citizen interests of another state, and they participated in our Consular Corps meetings as well.

By around 2006, I became the head of the Consular Corps in London. It was my responsibility to organize the meetings — send out invitations, select topics of interest, and identify speakers who could offer valuable insights for our community of consular colleagues.

The value wasn't just in the formal content of the meetings, but in the regular face time it provided. We weren't just meeting each other once at a reception or a coffee. These were gatherings of 30, 50 people — having lunch, hearing from a speaker, asking questions, and exchanging practical information about our work.

Toward the end of my time there, we moved to a more collaborative leadership structure. I shared leadership with colleagues from Hungary, Slovenia, Morocco, and Serbia. We worked together to choose topics and coordinate efforts — reflecting the same principles of collaboration and shared effort that were guiding much of our work.

This wasn't something unique to London. In Moscow, for example, I helped establish a Consular Corps from scratch. In New Delhi, I joined one that was already in place. These corps existed in many posts, though their focus varied — often on visa matters in places like Russia or India. But in London, the scope was broader. We addressed the full range of consular issues, not just visas.

Within the Consular Section in London, we were also working along similar lines — using technology to improve how we functioned. One of my goals was to digitize all of our section's holdings.

For example, I had an assistant who, before I arrived, had primarily managed the ACS chief's calendar and taken calls. But by the time I stepped into the role, I managed my own calendar on my desktop. We had begun moving toward a shared information system, and I saw the opportunity to reframe the assistant's role — not to manage my information, but to manage the section's information.

My calendar was now shared and accessible to others. But more importantly, we started digitizing our internal resources — scanning files that had previously been closely held by long-standing staff members, and making them available to the whole team.

This included precedent cases, ALDACs (All Diplomatic and Consular Post cables), relevant cables — anything that would be helpful for staff to review and learn from. We essentially built a shared digital reference library within the American Citizen Services section.

At the time, that involved manually scanning paper records and organizing them in shared digital folders. Today, much of that is routine — cables and other records are generally accessible if you know where to look — but back then, we were doing the groundwork ourselves, transforming how information was accessed and shared across the team.

*Q: I just want to ask a very quick question. Often this kind of I don't quite mean radical, but almost revolutionary change is resisted by some of the staff because they're not used to it. They're concerned that their jobs might be made redundant and they either will have to be transferred to different work or simply made redundant and laid off. Did you have troubled getting your staff to accept these changes?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, there was resistance. I'd be disingenuous if I said there wasn't. But it was also a time of broader change, and many things were shifting at once.

As I mentioned — I think in our conversation a couple of weeks ago, and just a moment ago — we had changed several of our core processes. One major change was in the passport intake process.

Previously, senior staff — maybe three or four of them — handled intake. They would review the application before it was entered into the system, make notes on it, and decide whether there was enough information to proceed with issuing the passport. That sometimes led to situations where applications were handed back to the applicant, with instructions to return with more documentation. But since nothing had been entered into the system and no fee had been paid, there was no record that the person had ever submitted anything at all — even though staff time had been used.

We changed that process. First, we moved to an appointment system. People no longer simply walked in to submit a passport application. This allowed us to manage our staffing more effectively. Without appointments, you could have days where you're understaffed and suddenly swamped, or days when you're overstaffed and barely anyone shows up.

With appointments, we could ensure the right number of staff for the actual workload scheduled for that day.

Second, when applicants arrived, the first thing they did — after confirming their appointment — was go to the cashier and pay the fee. Only after payment would their application be reviewed. This meant there were no more cases of people leaving without paying, even after using staff time.

Third, instead of handing the application to senior personnel right away, applicants submitted their forms to more junior staff, who conducted a cursory check: Was the form filled out? Were all fields completed? That sort of thing. But they didn't assess the substance of the documentation.

So now, junior staff were handling intake — something they hadn't done before. Previously, they focused mainly on data entry. Now, they were engaging with the public more directly, taking in applications, doing the basic checks, and then passing them on for data entry and, finally, senior-level review.

This shift was already changing the skill sets required. People who had previously only been doing data entry were now engaging with the public and conducting initial

application reviews. That meant they needed upgraded skills — communication, judgment, and the ability to handle public interaction.

The more senior personnel were still reviewing applications, but now they were doing so behind a computer screen instead of in front of the applicant. They had to enter notes directly into the system rather than writing them on the paper forms. While their core knowledge — the criteria for issuing a passport — remained the same, the tools changed. They now had to interact with digital systems, check different data sets, and complete their adjudications entirely within the computer system.

We took a step back to review what skills were actually needed and asked ourselves whether we needed to rewrite some of the position descriptions. My working assumption was that we were moving away from certain clerical positions — particularly the lowest-grade roles that were primarily focused on filing paper or simple data entry. Those tasks were becoming obsolete.

Instead, I wanted to shift those positions into roles that required more intellectual engagement and people skills. To me, that was the future: technology and public service working together. And as I mentioned earlier, the time savings we gained through appointment scheduling and workflow management allowed us to redeploy our officers for improved outreach and engagement — doing things we simply hadn't had time for before.

As we digitized our records — precedent cases and other reference materials that had been zealously guarded in the offices of long-time staff — we were also developing the skills of our team. They were now expected to understand the relevance of these materials, apply them, and prepare for more complex work. Essentially, we were raising the baseline.

I never saw the higher-skilled roles as being under threat. Quite the opposite. In my view, those with advanced skills — particularly those who were collaborative, who mentored others, and who helped build team capability — were the ones whose value would only grow. But those senior staff who clung to the idea of being the only person with the answers, who resisted sharing or mentoring — that role was under threat.

Of course, there was resistance. Some of the clerical staff didn't want to shift into higher-responsibility roles. Even if opportunities were presented, they would say, "That's not what I signed up for." Others resisted losing control — resisted no longer being the gatekeeper to information or expertise.

But I saw my role as not just managing change, but shaping it. Many of the changes we implemented — digitization, structured processes, online access — are now commonplace. At the time, they weren't. But I believed we could either proactively adapt to the environment, or let it change around us and be left reacting to it.

That required effort on my part. But I figured, that's what I was there for — that's why I was the head of the section. And I was in regular contact with Washington, too, especially as we explored what worked best in a section like ours. For example, the load-sharing model with Washington — letting them handle routine inquiries during our off-hours — required some cultural change on their part as well. The traditional mindset was, "Post handles this. We don't do that." But once they saw that working in a shared digital environment allowed us to handle critical functions more effectively — especially during crises — they were willing to engage.

Once we had our internal processes under control, we gained capacity to do more. We could now set aside days for training, because we could predict and manage our workload. We designated days for outreach — bringing in wardens, for example, to meet at the embassy. We invited the Ambassador to address them, and our team briefed them on what we did. We also invited the Consular Corps from other embassies to visit us and see how we worked.

We used our section as a platform — both to lead by example and to reflect a positive image of the embassy. We weren't just a quiet back-office function that Americans only turned to when they needed a passport for their baby or were in a crisis. We became a visible and vital part of the American citizen community.

It also allowed us to better challenge and support our entry-level officers. Instead of assigning them to endless passport processing, we gave them real projects. For example, mapping the consular districts and tailoring outreach efforts to those areas — that was an entry-level officer's project. So was managing the newsletter. These roles gave junior officers the opportunity to work across sections of the embassy and contribute to mission-wide initiatives, all while still fulfilling the core responsibilities of the American Citizen Services section.

*Q: Now, we have about twenty minutes. I just want to ask if you now want to return to London and talk about the evacuation of Lebanon, we don't have to if there are other things you want to talk about, and then save that for the following session.*

GOODFRIEND: I'll do the evacuation of Lebanon next time.

There was one other intriguing thing that comes to mind from my time in London. As I've mentioned, we had a very large American citizen population, and many American tourists came to the UK — partly because of the shared language and also because it was relatively close to the U.S. We had a lot of engagement with Americans.

But we began noticing a pattern — Americans contacting us about friends, fiancés, girlfriends, or boyfriends who, they said, were in trouble. We tried to help. We tried to identify these people, to locate them — and often, we couldn't find any record of them. They weren't in our systems. They didn't appear to exist.

The first case that really stood out happened when a woman showed up at the embassy. She said she was concerned about her boyfriend. She had traveled to London with her daughter to meet him, but he didn't show up at the airport. He had, however, sent her a message from Frankfurt saying he was injured, in the hospital, and sorry he couldn't meet her, but he hoped she'd understand and that they'd see each other soon.

She was worried and asked us to reach out to him. But we couldn't find any record of this person — no passport, no indication he was a U.S. citizen. Nothing.

We spent some time with her. Fortunately, she had a place to stay and was not in immediate distress. She had the means to take care of herself, but she was clearly concerned. We looked at the correspondence she had received. The writing style was unusual — not typical of native American or British English. She also had a photo of the man, which we gave to our fraud investigator.

He found that the image was actually of a male model — a real person, but not who this woman believed she was corresponding with. It was a photo in the public domain. We told her this.

And then more cases started to appear. Americans contacting us about someone they believed to be a fiancé, boyfriend, or girlfriend — often saying the person was in the hospital. In many cases, a supposed "doctor" had contacted them to say there had been a motorcycle or car accident, and that the American patient had given their name and number as an emergency contact. The caller would say that funds were urgently needed for surgery and ask if money could be wired.

So the American back home would call us — asking if we could locate their loved one in the hospital. And of course, as I've mentioned before, if an American is hospitalized abroad and doesn't have a support network, we step in as that support. We visit, help them communicate with family, check on their welfare.

But in these cases, we couldn't find the person. There was no record. They didn't exist.

We'd ask the caller: Do you have a birthdate? Have you ever met this person? Often, they hadn't. In one case, someone even claimed to be married to the person in trouble — yet had never met them in person.

It became clear we were seeing a pattern. We reported it to Washington and, if I recall correctly, there's still something on the U.S. Embassy London website about this scam. This would've been around 2005, 2006, or 2007. We called it the "fiancé/girlfriend/boyfriend scam" — what's now more widely recognized as catfishing.

People were forming emotional relationships online with someone claiming to be an American abroad — then receiving an emergency message asking for money.

It was a new kind of challenge for us, and one that foreshadowed many of the scams we're more familiar with today. And again, this was long before the term catfishing became widely known.

*Q: This is a good quick opportunity to ask one question about this whole process, which is that Americans have a presumption of privacy in working with the embassy. And they have to sign a document saying yes, we allow the embassy to speak with X person or all people about whatever. Did that requirement cause you problems as you worked on these cases?*

GOODFRIEND: No, it didn't cause problems — because we never found the person.

If we had located someone, then yes, we would have needed to engage with them directly and say, "You've been contacted by someone in the U.S. who's concerned about your welfare. Would you like to communicate with them directly? Would you like us to pass on any information?" And at that point, we would ask them to sign a Privacy Act waiver.

But in most of these cases, it was a welfare and whereabouts inquiry, which we're allowed to initiate without a waiver. The waiver only becomes necessary if we obtain information and intend to release it back to the inquiring party.

There was one case, however, where the situation turned out to be real. Someone contacted us saying they were communicating online in real-time with a woman being held captive by her boyfriend. At first, we thought it might be another fictional case, part of the same pattern. But we have an obligation to check every report — we would never dismiss one outright just because others turned out to be scams.

Fortunately, we had the technology to do quick checks. The first step was to look for a passport record. If we found one, that was an indication the person might actually exist. In this case, we were given a phone number, and told that the boyfriend had briefly left, giving her a chance to reach out.

We contacted her — and she did exist. She was indeed being abused. We were able to work with her and with local law enforcement to get her out of that situation and ensure her safety. That was a rare case, but it reinforced our policy: never dismiss a case without checking it out.

Most of the cases we received, though, were about fictitious people — scammers building fake emotional relationships in order to ask for money.

We also dealt with a number of scams involving fake lotteries. People would contact us, saying they'd been told they won a lottery, but had to send money to collect the winnings. We posted guidance saying, essentially, "If you didn't enter a lottery, you probably didn't win one."

The rise of the Internet brought with it a rise in these scams. Some targeted people by telling them they'd won the U.S. visa lottery, often using fake websites. That was something we saw not just in London, but earlier, when I worked in Africa. False information, fake relationships, fake opportunities — it was all becoming more prevalent.

It became part of our role at the embassy to help people recognize the scams, point them toward the right resources — such as the FBI's website for reporting Internet fraud — and, when possible, track down the details ourselves. This was part of the changing nature of consular work in a globally connected, Internet-enabled world.

*Q: We were approaching two o'clock. Should we pause here and then pick up with sort of the final aspects of your tour in London?*

GOODFRIEND: Sure — we can pick up next time with the evacuation from Lebanon. I also had a TDY to Saudi Arabia during that tour, which we can include.

*Q: Okay, let me go ahead and pause.*

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*Q: This is session number ten with André Goodfriend. Today is July 19, 2022. André, you're still in London and head of the American Citizen Services section. And there's still a bit more that you did until 2008 at the end of your tour?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes. By that point, we were well into the tour. The section was functioning effectively, with a lot of internal information-sharing through digital systems. We had the ability to work smoothly with Washington — during crises and in normal times. We were scheduling public appointments for passports and notarial services. Whatever services people needed from us, we were managing our workload and human resources effectively. This meant staff had manageable tasks and could also better balance work and personal life.

Through coordination with Washington and good workload management, I felt we had a well-run section. We stayed on top of things, with no backlog — whether in passport services or other consular matters. One area that stood out in London was the relatively high number of citizenship renunciation requests. We had to start scheduling those, because we saw a noticeable number of American citizens — often in their 50s, 60s, or 70s — who had lived in the UK for decades. They'd kept their U.S. citizenship for sentimental reasons or attachment to the country. But as they aged, with children and grandchildren living in Britain, many began reevaluating the practical side of dual citizenship — like the complexities of filing taxes both in the UK and the U.S., with differing systems of accounting for income.

Because the American population in the UK was so large, we had quite a few people who decided that this was the time — particularly when planning their estates — to make that change and renounce. I found it meaningful to talk with these individuals about why they

were giving up their citizenship. Citizenship is something people feel deeply about, and for most, the decision wasn't taken lightly. They just wanted to simplify their lives at that stage.

There was even one prominent British politician who came in to discuss dual citizenship. This was a public figure who still held U.S. citizenship and had been considering renunciation. We discussed the process, the implications, the pros and cons. But that's a story for another time when it comes to public figures.

On the flip side, we also had quite a few people — mostly older Britons — who discovered later in life that they actually had a claim to U.S. citizenship. This was in the early 2000s — around 2004, 2005, 2006. World War II had ended about 60 years earlier, and in its aftermath, there had been many children born of relationships between American soldiers (usually men) and British women.

Some of these individuals — now in their 50s or 60s — only found out much later, often when their mothers, now in their 80s, opened up about the circumstances of their birth. Many of them had been raised by another father figure — either because the mother married after the child was born, or because the American father never played a role in the child's life.

These people would come to the embassy wanting to understand the implications. Could they claim U.S. citizenship? Our staff had become well-versed in both the documentation needed and the laws governing citizenship through birth. The law differs based on whether the parents were married, whether the father or mother was the U.S. citizen, whether the child was born in or out of wedlock, and how much time the American parent had spent in the U.S. prior to the child's birth. Military service sometimes granted more leeway, but in most of these cases, the American father hadn't stayed in contact with the child.

So, all of those factors had to be assessed to determine if someone had a valid claim to citizenship. It was a recognizable pattern in the UK at the time — something particular to that era. I doubt it continues in the same way today. It was really a phenomenon that emerged perhaps 40–50 years after the war and likely faded out around 70–80 years after the war.

*Q: Here just a question, what would motivate someone at that relatively late age to even seek American citizenship?*
GOODFRIEND: They weren't necessarily seeking it. They were trying to understand what it meant.

A person might come into the embassy after finding something in their late mother's papers or having a conversation with her toward the end of her life. It was almost like a genealogy quest — trying to understand: What does this mean? Who am I? Where do I come from? Is there anything I need to be aware of? What if I don't want to be a U.S. citizen? Am I one anyway?

For some, it might raise other questions: So I am a U.S. citizen? Does that mean my children are too? Can they get U.S. passports? Once someone learns that one of their biological parents was a U.S. citizen, a whole range of questions comes to mind. They just want to understand what it all means.

Again, this was a phenomenon of that particular period. I imagine it will still happen from time to time, as long as people from different countries meet, have children, and later go their separate ways. But it won't be quite the same as in the aftermath of a war, where you have large-scale mobilization of military personnel into another country and all the human interactions that follow. That created a particular wave of such cases.

At that time, there were also evolving discussions around human relationships more broadly. In both the U.S. and the UK, there was a rethinking of issues related to gender and marriage. In the UK, for example, civil partnerships were introduced — two men or two women could enter into a legally recognized partnership, with rights similar to marriage.

That opened up broader discussions about gender identity: Is it just male and female, or is there a spectrum in between? While such topics might seem academic in many professions, for consular work they had practical implications. Visas, for example, are often issued on the basis of marriage. I wasn't working in the visa section, but we saw cases where U.S. citizens were trying to sponsor their same-sex partner for immigration — and couldn't. At the time, U.S. law didn't allow for that.

There was, in fact, legislation — namely, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) — which defined marriage for federal purposes as between one man and one woman. So any services tied to marital status, including immigration, were limited to heterosexual couples.

This intersection of consular work and social policy was also visible in the area of passport issuance. Back then, a U.S. passport listed a person's gender as either male or female — period. Since then, we've moved toward allowing people to opt for a neutral gender marker or leave it unspecified. But at that time, if someone had transitioned, we did accommodate them — though the process was considered quite invasive. U.S. policy required that physical surgery be completed in order to recognize the new gender. The applicant needed to provide medical documentation confirming that.

Other countries were already moving toward accepting gender transition based on self-identification or early-stage transition, without requiring surgery. But U.S. policy then required surgical confirmation.

Again, consular services tend to mirror U.S. social policy. They reflect how we understand relationships, gender, and identity, and how we allow people to represent themselves when seeking services. For instance, on forms for registering a child's birth or applying for a passport, the lines used to read "Mother" and "Father" — and those

designations had to be filled in, regardless of how the individuals themselves identified in their parental roles. More recently, forms have shifted to say “Parent 1” and “Parent 2,” which reflects a broader understanding of family structures.

So these weren’t just abstract debates. They were real-world issues we faced in our work every day. And for American citizens abroad, they became a lens through which people came to understand American society and culture — not just as an idea, but in the form of policies that affected their lives directly. We weren’t just discussing these things over coffee — we were applying them in the services we provided.

It was, and still is, a time when social policy very directly shapes consular work. And we were seeing that unfold in Britain.

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: Do you have any questions on that?

*Q: No, because obviously, at various points, law and policy may change. And since the issuances of visas and passports are done under existing laws and carried out by the executive, those aspects of consular service may change over time.*

GOODFRIEND: They do. We've talked before about the relationship between the Consular Section and other sections of the embassy. This is a good example.

For instance, the Political Section might be actively engaging with foreign governments on issues like human rights — advocating for respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or how someone defines themselves in terms of identity. So on one hand, you're working toward a vision of universal human rights, trying to shape a forward-looking, inclusive approach in international dialogue.

But on the other hand, when it comes to implementation — how these values are reflected in actual services — we often find ourselves facing the same challenges as other countries. The policy goals and the legal framework we’re working within don’t always align. There's a gap between the ideals we promote and the laws or procedures we’re required to follow. So even as we encourage progress abroad, we’re sometimes constrained by our own systems at home.

*Q: Sure. One quick question about this, about all of these questions related to sexual orientation, gender identity and so on, does the Consular Section ever take into account local laws or local norms?*

GOODFRIEND: We’re certainly cognizant of them, but we apply U.S. law.

For example, I mentioned earlier that in the UK at the time, there were legal civil partnerships — recognized marriages under British law. We were aware of that, of

course. But regardless of local laws, our own legal framework at the time was different, and that determined what services we could or could not provide.

In other countries, there might be very different legal norms — say, where a 12-year-old can legally marry a 30-year-old. In such cases, we not only had to be aware of foreign laws but also of differences among U.S. states. For example, in fiancé visa cases, we had to know whether a couple could legally marry in one U.S. state but not in another, because marriage laws — including age of consent — differ from state to state.

So yes, we're aware of local laws and we take them into account when reviewing documentation and evaluating whether a relationship meets the criteria for the U.S. government service being requested. But ultimately, we apply U.S. federal law and policy

*Q: Very tricky because a couple of that nature, the younger person and the considerably older person may say, Oh, we're going to establish our home in New York, where it's permitted or Kentucky where it's not permitted or so on and move.*

GOODFRIEND: Exactly. And that raises broader issues within the U.S. too. When two American citizens marry and there's a significant age gap — and it's a marriage that might not be permitted in one state — they have to be aware that there are states where they simply can't reside as a legally recognized couple.

And, as you said earlier, U.S. policy evolves over time. This touches on our own history — consider race relations. There were times when interracial marriage was prohibited in certain states but legal in others. If you crossed a state line, it didn't matter if your marriage was legal where you came from — it could be illegal where you arrived.

These are the kinds of issues the United States continues to grapple with. And if I haven't said this already — I probably have — but I see the work we do in consular services as a form of applied humanities or applied sociology.

We take concepts from the social sciences and humanities — questions about identity, morality, history, culture — and bring them into a practical setting. It's not just about discussing them in an academic context. It's about asking: How do we view relationships between people? How do we understand our own history? How do we relate to other cultures and their practices?

It's not only for personal enrichment or philosophical reflection. We actually have to translate that understanding into daily practices — into decisions we make in the workplace, with real consequences for people's lives.

*Q: Just one question that does take us a little bit forward. I don't know if you had experience with it. But the UK recently, I think, within the last few years, began to permit transsexuals and people who have transitioned from one gender to another, to change their birth certificate. And once that foundational document is changed, and they come to the embassy for a visa, they're going to show you a birth certificate or a passport that*

*shows them as whatever their claim gender is, would that create a problem for a Consular Officer considering granting a visa?*

GOODFRIEND: It's definitely something that would have to be taken into account. I don't know whether a formal policy was in place at the time, but it's the sort of issue where one would certainly be developed. Let me give you a related anecdote from my time in Syria.

There, it was common among certain communities to alter a child's birth date slightly on the birth certificate. It wasn't done maliciously, but more as a cultural practice — a "gift" of sorts. For example, if a child was born on November 15, 1967, the parents might register the birth as January 1, 1968. It wasn't a huge change, but it gave the child a few extra months of "youth."

So we would regularly see birth certificates listing January 1 as the birth date. If there was no conflicting evidence, we'd accept the document. But sometimes, other records — such as hospital documentation — would reveal the actual birth date, creating a discrepancy. Now you had a genuine birth certificate, but with inaccurate information. That raised the issue of how to handle such cases, especially since the date on that certificate would appear on any U.S. visa or passport.

In those cases, the guidance was to seek accuracy. We'd ask the applicant to correct the birth record with the issuing office, which often meant they had to admit they had originally submitted false information — something that could be quite sensitive. We discussed these situations with Washington to determine the appropriate approach.

Now, bringing that back to gender transition: if someone has legally changed the gender on their birth certificate, then a consular officer has to decide how to reflect that in any document we issue. Does the fact that the original record has been changed matter? Should we still ask about the person's prior identity — perhaps along the lines of the question we already ask: "Have you ever had any other passports?" Or, more generally: "Is there any other relevant information we should be aware of?"

It might not be necessary to focus on the change itself, but it could be relevant for the sake of consistency, especially if prior documents — school records, police certificates, travel history — were issued under a previous name or gender. The goal is not to undermine someone's identity, but to ensure that we can trace and verify their information across systems.

It's similar to how we handle prior criminal records. Say someone was convicted of a crime of moral turpitude twenty years ago, and the record has since been purged. If the visa application asks, "Have you ever been convicted of such a crime?" The expectation is that the applicant still answers yes. A purged record doesn't erase the fact that the conviction occurred.

If the person says no, and we later find a news article or some other evidence indicating the conviction, that raises questions of deception. Were they trying to obtain a U.S. government service through fraud?

So, in the case of gender transition, the key policy question becomes: How does U.S. law view this? How do we integrate that understanding into consular practices? What level of transparency do we expect from applicants?

There's a difference between someone saying, "That past identity never existed," versus, "Yes, that was me, but I've transitioned, and I'd like my current records to reflect who I am today." That's a conversation we need to be ready to have — respectfully, and with appropriate policy guidance.

And again, these were very much the kinds of issues we were encountering in the UK. While our societies are different, the social questions we were dealing with — about identity, gender, family structures — were very similar. We observed how British society was addressing them, and in turn, thought about what lessons we might learn, and how U.S. policy might evolve in the future.

That's part of what we do as diplomats — we're not just there to represent the U.S., but also to learn from the societies in which we serve. And hopefully, those societies learn something from us as well.

We had a consular section in London that, thanks to good workload management, had the capacity to engage with these broader issues. Officers weren't stuck all day just processing paperwork. They could interact with other embassy sections, with the outside world, and reflect on how we might improve the services we provided. By this point, I was in my third or fourth year there, and that ability to think more deeply about our work was something I valued.

We were able to manage our workload effectively enough that we could engage more in consular outreach. As I mentioned in a previous discussion, we had a monthly newsletter that we distributed to American citizens. Many American organizations received the newsletter and often wanted their groups to be mentioned in it. We were in a good position to be an active part of the broader American citizen community in the UK.

We had the capacity to go out and speak to student groups and universities with significant American populations about the services we offered. We also engaged with regional American citizen groups throughout the UK to discuss many of the same issues you and I have been talking about — namely: What does the embassy do for you? How can we do it better? What do you expect from the embassy, and what can we realistically provide?

As we approached the 2008 U.S. elections, we made a concerted effort to ensure that Americans abroad understood their role in the U.S. democratic process. While we

couldn't promote one political party over another, we could take part in events where all parties had equal access and representation.

We promoted voter registration, informed people about upcoming events where they could register to vote, and worked with organizations like Republicans Abroad and Democrats Abroad — especially when they collaborated on nonpartisan registration events, which they often did. Those were the kinds of activities we could support and advocate for.

In a way, we served as advocates for collaborative, nonpartisan civic engagement. Similar to how we handled publicizing Thanksgiving meals or religious services — if there was more than one venue, we could present a full range of options. Likewise, if there were nonpartisan events where people could register to vote, we were happy to promote those and be involved.

We also helped explain the process: once someone registered, how would they receive their ballot? The embassy played a key role in ensuring that, if a person hadn't received their ballot by mail, they could come to the embassy. We had generic backup ballots (the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot) that could be submitted through our diplomatic pouch system. This allowed voters to send their ballots without paying international postage — only domestic U.S. postage was required.

We'd also try to estimate mailing deadlines based on when a ballot would need to be sent to arrive in the U.S. in time for Election Day. That way, voters would know when to come in and submit their ballots.

At the same time, we made it clear that people were not voting at the embassy. If someone came in on Election Day — say, November 2 — it was likely, depending on their state's rules, that their ballot would arrive too late to be counted. So we tried to educate voters about those deadlines and encouraged them to act early.

We played a big role in consular outreach, and that was an important part of our engagement with the American citizen community. This was distinct from the kind of work our officers did with the Public Affairs Section, which focused on engaging the broader British public — discussing U.S. political policy, the U.S.–UK relationship, or American history in ways that resonated with non-U.S. citizen audiences.

In contrast, our consular outreach was about engaging with our own citizens — ensuring we had an effective relationship with them and that they understood what their country could do for them. To riff off of John F. Kennedy, it wasn't "Ask not what your country can do for you," but rather, "Please, do ask — so we can try to help." We wanted to know how we could serve them better, and I think a well-managed consular section gave us the space and capacity to do that.

That was the situation as we moved into 2008. On a personal level, my youngest son was in his final year of high school at the time — toward the end of 2007. Back in 2006, I had

already asked to extend my tour in London by a fourth year so that he could finish high school there. The reasoning was that if we left after three years, as would normally be the case, he would still have a year to go — and that would have been disruptive for him. It also would have limited my bidding options to posts that had suitable high schools.

By staying for a fourth year and letting him finish school in London, I opened up the possibility of bidding on a much wider range of assignments — including more difficult or higher hardship posts — since my children would all be in university. I wouldn't have to factor in schooling needs anymore.

At that time, there was a push to staff up embassies in Baghdad and Kabul. The conversation was shifting from encouraging officers to serve there to potentially directing them. In that context, the ability to extend beyond a three-year tour in a non-hardship post like London was being reconsidered. From a practical and financial standpoint, extensions made sense — they allowed officers to reach peak effectiveness in their posts and reduced the cost of frequent transfers. But from the perspective of service needs, fourth-year extensions were seen as limiting the pool of officers available for one-year hardship tours — and complicating onward assignments for those returning from them.

In the end, I just managed to get that fourth year in London. Shortly afterward, the ability to extend in non-hardship posts was curtailed. I was lucky to get through before the policy shifted.

As bidding season approached, I reflected on my career. I'd been in several rewarding posts, had risen through the ranks, and felt it was time to give back. So I decided to focus exclusively on hardship posts — consular assignments at the FS-1 level in places where service was most needed. I looked at postings in Asia and Africa, prioritizing locations where either English was spoken or language requirements weren't a barrier.

One of the places I listed was Damascus. I didn't see it as one of the hardest hardship posts — it struck me as a fascinating assignment, steeped in history and socially complex. I assumed others would find it equally interesting. I wasn't lobbying for anything — I didn't reach out to anyone. I just let my bid list speak for itself and was prepared to leave it to chance.

Then, Consular Affairs reached out to me and asked, "What do you think about Damascus?" I said, "Actually, it sounds pretty good." I was surprised — I had listed posts that I thought would be much harder to fill. I explained that I no longer had the family constraints I once had, and that I was flexible and open. But I was curious — why Damascus? Why not one of the more difficult posts on my list?

I was a bit surprised to learn that the assignment in Damascus came with two full years of language training. But for me, that was great — two years to study Arabic. I've always enjoyed learning languages. Again, it ties back to what I mentioned earlier about the "applied humanities." It was a chance to study a language and then use it in a real-world, challenging environment.

But not everyone saw it that way. I was told that, for many officers, taking two years out of their careers just to study a language wasn't particularly appealing. Most would rather head directly into their next assignment or, at most, do a single year of language training. By the time you're an FS-1, you're no longer under tenure or language probation. If you can find a post where you already speak the language — or one that requires only a year of study — that's often the preference.

So from my perspective, I lucked out with Damascus. I had the freedom to accept it, and I saw it as a good opportunity.

As I mentioned earlier, my children were off at university, and I felt that a hardship post was what should come next for me. But this also brings us to the challenges of married life in the Foreign Service. Even in earlier assignments — like in Frankfurt, where I was traveling about half the time — the travel was disruptive. Even if I tried to schedule around important family events, being away that much puts strain on a marriage, and it certainly did in mine.

Our time in the UK was stabilizing in that sense. We were there for four years, which was helpful — especially as our children were transitioning from high school into university. My wife at the time was also employed at the embassy, which added a layer of routine and support. That platform of stability really helped in terms of the relationship.

I think many Foreign Service families talk about these kinds of issues — the disruption that comes with regular moves and how that impacts the professional life of the non–Foreign Service spouse. For a while, when my wife was focused on raising the children, the moves were manageable. But as the kids grew up and she became more interested in advancing her own career, the constant relocations became more difficult.

After five years in the U.S., we had gone to Frankfurt for two years. That was a relatively short posting, but there were job opportunities at the Consulate. Then we moved to London for four years, which allowed her to establish herself professionally again at the embassy.

Now, with Damascus on the horizon, the question came back up. The assignment included two years of language training — one year in the U.S. and one year in Tunis — followed by two years in Damascus, and then a new posting afterward. That meant moving nearly every year for the next four years. For my wife, that was too much.

So we decided she would stay in London for the full four years, and we'd reassess things after Damascus.

With that plan in place, I started language training in Washington. After two or three months, there was an attack on an arms pipeline inside Syria — a human or weapons trafficking route, possibly involving Taliban elements. Syria blamed the U.S. for instigating it and responded by shutting down the American school in Damascus.

That had a major impact. Many of our diplomats in Damascus suddenly found themselves without schooling options for their children. For me, this highlighted exactly why I had structured my career moves the way I did — I didn't want to be in a position where my children's education or wellbeing was vulnerable to these kinds of sudden shifts. It reaffirmed my decision to pursue hardship posts after my children had left home.

*Q: Just a very quick question, some hardship posts allow a separation allowance or some assistance to the spouse that does not accompany. But I think it's only with unaccompanied hardship tours. But did that apply in any way for you going to Damascus?*

GOODFRIEND: It wasn't something we were factoring in at the time. The language training in the U.S. was scheduled for a year, and it wasn't considered an unaccompanied tour. I went to the U.S. on TDY — temporary duty — for training. My household effects stayed in storage, and I just traveled with airfreight and suitcases. I received per diem, or at least lodging allowance, while I was there. So no, a separate maintenance allowance wasn't something we were looking at then.

What changed the situation was when the Syrians closed the American school in Damascus. That created a real dilemma for many diplomats with school-aged children. Suddenly, families had to make a choice — typically one parent would have to leave with the children to ensure they could attend school elsewhere. Many families who had planned to stay in Damascus together found themselves unexpectedly separated.

My predecessor in Damascus was in exactly that situation. In response, Consular Affairs reached out to me to ask whether I'd consider giving up my second year of Arabic training and arrive at post early. I said that was fine — if they didn't mind that I hadn't yet met the required Arabic proficiency level, I was willing to go. They confirmed that they could waive the requirement.

My predecessor also mentioned that there were employment opportunities for spouses at the embassy. I passed that along to my wife, and it changed our thinking. Instead of one year in the U.S., then one year in Tunis, followed by two years in Damascus, the new plan became: I would complete the training year in Washington, and then my wife would come from London to join me in Damascus, where there was a job waiting for her. I would travel directly from D.C. to take up my post.

That became our plan moving forward. In a way, it was our first unaccompanied post — not in the strict sense, because we could have brought our children — but by then they were in university. So this would be the first time we were posted somewhere without them, which was going to be a new experience for us.

The Arabic training continued. The Arabic program at the Foreign Service Institute was expanding significantly — there was a growing recognition of the importance of Arabic language skills given our increased presence in the region. I personally valued the

training and, truthfully, regretted giving up the second year. Others might have welcomed the change, since it brought the post in line with others that required only one year of language training. But for me, it would have been rewarding to continue.

Our class had three students, which is quite typical of FSI's effort to keep class sizes small and discussions relevant. As with any institution that draws from a diverse pool of instructors, there can be inconsistencies, but overall the conversations were strong and valuable. I appreciated that.

As my departure date neared, it was time for a routine physical. I had recently turned 50, so the exam was more comprehensive. They found something they wanted to investigate further, and I ended up needing surgery. That meant I had to re-obtain medical clearance for Damascus, and that involved confirming the local medical facilities could support any necessary follow-up care.

Thankfully, the operation revealed nothing serious or long-term, but it did mean I'd need ongoing check-ins with a doctor over the course of the two-year tour. As a result, my departure was delayed by about a month.

During that time, I stayed engaged. My predecessor had already left Damascus, so there would be no overlap, but we were able to meet in the U.S. and talk. I was also in contact by email with the person who would be my deputy. Thanks to the digital environment, I was able to start reading in on the issues at post and be consulted, even if I wasn't yet officially in the role. I appreciated that. The section kept me in the loop on several cases I'd be inheriting when I arrived.

Once I received my medical clearance, I traveled to Damascus, arriving during Ramadan. It was a small post — relatively small and very personable. But I had to keep in mind that it had once been much larger. Before the school closed and families were separated, the post likely had a third more staff — maybe nearly double.

So the post I arrived at wasn't the one it had been a year earlier, when families with children were there, when the American school was active, and when there were events connecting embassy families from multiple missions. The closure of the school disrupted all of that and reshaped the community. It was, in many ways, a very different place.

The closure of that school had a broad impact. It affected not just American families but the entire diplomatic community. It also changed the nature of inter-embassy activities and social events, which had previously revolved around shared family life.

When I arrived, the embassy felt much smaller than it once had. There were almost no children. A couple of families were homeschooling or sending their children to other schools, but the sense of a family community had largely disappeared.

That said, one of the things I think we do well at our embassies is welcoming new arrivals. There was a strong sense of mutual support. Sponsorships were in place to help

incoming officers settle in, make arrangements, and feel connected before arrival. People really tried to look out for one another.

Before reaching Damascus, I stopped in London. My wife and I met up there and traveled together — though actually, I should correct that. Because of my surgery, she had come to the U.S. for a couple of weeks beforehand. Then she returned to London for work. I later joined her there, and from London, we traveled to Damascus together.

In some ways, arriving in Damascus felt like stepping back in time — not because of the city itself, but because of the embassy's physical setup. Unlike most U.S. embassies today, which are set back from the street behind a perimeter wall for added security, the embassy in Damascus was right on the sidewalk. You'd walk directly from the street to the entrance, and the outer wall of the compound was flush with the sidewalk.

Most modern embassies are designed with a buffer zone between the building and the street to better protect against physical attacks. Damascus didn't have that.

Internally, many of the systems and processes that had become standard in other posts were also missing. The workflow innovations I'd worked on in London — things like scheduling appointments, off-site fee payments, using courier services to pick up applications or deliver passports — were not in place.

There were serious concerns about engaging with the local banking system, and uncertainty about whether we could establish contracts with local service providers that met U.S. standards for transparency and accountability. As a result, we didn't use couriers or electronic payment systems — services that had become common elsewhere. You want to ask something?

*Q: Yeah, since you briefly mentioned an issue about security. Go back for a moment to describe why there was a differential there, and how you were advised without going into confidential issues, how you were advised on personal security and so on?*

GOODFRIEND: You make an assumption there. You say why there was a differential? What type of differential are you talking about?

*Q: Ah, well, I don't know.*

GOODFRIEND: There was no danger differential in Damascus. There was a hardship differential, which reflected various logistical and infrastructural challenges. For example, the mail system was unreliable. Since we didn't have our own APO — our own military postal system — we had to rely on alternative channels to receive mail, and that often led to delays.

We had a commissary, but we couldn't bring in goods duty-free directly into it. That, too, added to the sense of limitation. The process of entering and exiting the country

presented additional difficulties, and the inability to cross borders easily and visit neighboring countries contributed to the hardship designation.

But in terms of danger pay, there was none. In fact, Syria was the only country in the region at the time without it. All of the surrounding countries — Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel — had danger pay. Syria did not. That really stood out. The assignment in Damascus was classified as a two-year tour, rather than the standard three years you would see at a non-hardship post.

That issue also connected to how the Consular Section engaged with the American citizen public and how we framed the environment we were operating in. Was it considered hostile or not? For instance, we did not direct our consular clients to local banks to pay their application fees, which would have been typical practice in many other countries. That gives you a sense of the broader atmosphere and how the post operated differently from others.

Before arriving in Damascus, I had worked extensively on improving consular systems — whether in London, in smaller consular posts in Africa, or back in Washington. The focus had been on modernizing service delivery and incorporating digital tools. By 2009, the typical process for applying for a visa or passport had been moving toward a more streamlined, technology-based model.

At most posts, someone applying for a visa or a passport would begin by going online to make an appointment. While we were still in transition from paper forms to digital forms, in many places you'd still have to fill out the paperwork by hand. Then, before coming to the embassy, you'd pay the application fee — either at a bank or through another designated payment system — and bring the proof of payment with you to your appointment.

Once at the embassy, the applicant would have an interview. If the application was denied, the consular officer would return the passport and that would be the end of the process. If the application was approved, the passport would be retained, since most embassies no longer issued visas on the same day. Typically, the visa would be printed the following day, and rather than make the applicant return to collect their passport, there would be an arrangement with a courier service to have it delivered.

The same was true for passport applications. The applicant would book an appointment, come to the embassy, pay the fee — usually at the cashier — and then receive the service. But the passport would not be issued on the spot. With the transition to digital passports, which include an embedded chip, the actual passport would be produced in the United States. The application would be transmitted electronically, the passport prepared there, then shipped back to the embassy, and from there sent to the applicant, typically also by courier.

That was the standard across most posts by the time I arrived in Damascus.

But in Damascus, it was different. If you wanted to apply for a visa, you had to come to the embassy in person just to make the appointment.

*Q: Oh, wow! There was not even-*

GOODFRIEND: Not even by phone.

*Q: Certainly not by email.*

GOODFRIEND: Not by email, not online, not by phone. As I mentioned earlier, in places like Saudi Arabia, appointments were already being scheduled by phone, and we were trying to move toward online systems. But in Damascus at the time, the very first interaction had to be in person. You had to physically come to the embassy just to make an appointment.

Now, a person could send someone on their behalf — a surrogate — to make the appointment, but someone still had to be physically present at the embassy to set it up. Then, prior to the actual appointment, the applicant had to return to the embassy to pay the application fee at the embassy cashier. The cashier was handling significant amounts of money — collecting all the fees directly from applicants.

On the day of the interview, applicants would bring their receipt and their appointment confirmation, and they'd be interviewed. If the visa was approved, they wouldn't get it that day. Instead, they'd be told to return in about a week — or more commonly, they'd be told the embassy would contact them when it was ready. Then we would call them by phone and tell them to return to collect their passport with the visa.

It was a highly manual, labor-intensive process on both sides. There was a great deal of human interaction. These systems that were becoming standard elsewhere — online payments, electronic appointments, courier services — simply didn't exist in Damascus at that time.

Visa recipients had to come in person to pick up their passports. The same went for Americans applying for passports — they had to come in person, pay in person, and come back again to physically collect the passport once it arrived. This wasn't just a matter of preference — it was tied to concerns about the kinds of contracts we could or couldn't enter into with local banks or service providers.

There was skepticism about the reliability of the commercial environment in Syria — particularly when it came to courier services or bank partnerships. There was also the perception that the general public didn't have sufficient access to the Internet to support an online appointment system. So we operated based on those assumptions.

It wasn't just consular appointments. In most countries, if an American citizen needs a doctor or an attorney, the embassy maintains and provides access to lists of

English-speaking doctors and lawyers. Like with our newsletters in London, we never promote just one service, church, or restaurant — we offer a range of options. The same goes for medical or legal referrals. We compile lists, we don't guarantee the quality of service, but we do vet the legitimacy of the professionals included — they are licensed, they've asked to be on the list, they speak English, and they're willing to see American citizens.

But in Damascus, there was a concern that publicizing those lists — especially online — could put the listed doctors or lawyers at risk. The environment was such that we didn't feel it was appropriate to distribute those lists widely. So the section made a judgment: we would not provide those lists publicly, and certainly not online.

If someone contacted the embassy asking whether there was a doctor or lawyer they could see, we would tell them to come in person. Once at the embassy, we'd show them the list privately, and then put it away again. That was the level of caution we operated under.

And it extended beyond that. As I was saying, the same mindset applied to how we handled the warden system.

*Q: Yes, here it is just as a quick question of context, roughly how large was the American resident population there and what in general drew them to Syria?*

GOODFRIEND: I'd need to check the exact figures, but for some reason, the number 18,000 sticks in my mind. I could be off, but it was somewhere around there. Not anywhere close to the 250,000 American citizens we served in London or throughout the UK, but still a significant number. The American population in Syria was diverse — made up of tourists, students, dual nationals, retirees, and families.

There were students studying in Syria, and a steady stream of tourists as well. In 2009, Syria was beginning to open up a bit more to visitors. There were still concerns, particularly following the closure of the American school and the strain in U.S.–Syrian relations, but generally, it was no longer especially difficult to travel there. Flights were operating, the tourism sector was gaining momentum, and hotels and restaurants were opening. Syria was becoming more accessible.

People were drawn to Syria for many reasons. It was seen as offering an authentic experience of the Arab Middle East — something that was disappearing elsewhere. The old city of Damascus, its markets and bazaars, the historic bathhouses — all contributed to a sense of timelessness. I know I sound like a tour guide, but it really did offer a traditional image of the region that many visitors found appealing. There were also remarkable archaeological sites across the country, and each city had its own character.

In addition to the tourists and students, a large portion of the American population in Syria consisted of dual nationals — people who had emigrated to the U.S., become citizens, and later returned to Syria. Many of them were in their 50s or 60s and had

chosen to settle down there again, either to be closer to family and childhood friends or because they found life there more affordable and relaxed. Their money went farther in Syria than it would in the U.S.

Some parents had moved to Syria specifically to raise their children in what they considered a more traditional environment. Concerns about secular education in the U.S., a perceived lack of discipline in American schools, or the prevalence of school violence all led some to seek what they saw as a safer, more grounded upbringing for their children in Syria. There was a sense — rightly or wrongly — that "the old ways were the better ways."

So the American community in Syria was a mix. There were dual nationals who had reestablished themselves with no ongoing ties to the U.S., retirees living on their pensions, families prioritizing a traditional upbringing, students, and tourists. And we worked to serve them all.

We had a warden system in place — American citizens living in Syria who acted as our points of contact in different parts of the country. These were individuals who were well-connected locally and proud of their relationship with the embassy. We respected them and relied on them.

But just as with our doctors' and lawyers' lists, there was concern about sharing their names publicly. That confidentiality extended to wardens. And for me, arriving in that environment, I found myself wondering how we could effectively safeguard the welfare of American citizens if we were so concerned about the safety of the very people we relied on to help them.

If we couldn't publish the names of the doctors or lawyers who were willing to assist Americans, how effectively could those professionals do their jobs? How could a lawyer represent an American in court if he or she was afraid of being known as an American's lawyer? How could a doctor confidently treat Americans if doing so might be a security risk?

And with wardens — how could they serve their purpose as liaisons between the embassy and the American community if we wouldn't even tell the community who they were? In some cases, we weren't even telling the broader embassy staff who the wardens were.

At the same time, I didn't want to walk into the section and upend everything — to throw caution to the wind and say, "We're going to do things differently now." There may well have been valid and serious reasons for that cautious approach. We didn't want to put anyone at risk. But if those concerns were as significant as they seemed, then they should have been clearly communicated. If the situation in Syria was so precarious that providing services to American citizens placed local professionals in danger, then that reality needed to be reflected in the country-specific information we were sending to Americans.

We should have been saying: if you come to Syria, understand that the situation is such that doctors who treat you may be at risk, lawyers may be reluctant to represent you, and our own ability to stay in touch with you may be limited because we have to protect the identities of those who serve as our wardens. That would have been an honest message.

But that wasn't the message we were sending.

So what I asked was simple: let's talk to the attorneys and the doctors. Let's ask them how they feel about their names being public. Let's see if they're willing to be listed. Not only would it make the list more usable, but it would also give us a better understanding of how they themselves saw the security environment.

And the same went for the wardens. Let's talk to them directly. Let's ask: do they actually feel at risk if their names are known? And if so, what does that say about the conditions we're working in?

We began to have those conversations — and maybe that's a good place to stop for now. It's getting close to nine o'clock.

*Q: Let me pause.*

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*Q: Okay, today is August 5, 2022. We're beginning session eleven with André Goodfriend. And André, you're still in Damascus. So we'll pick up there.*

GOODFRIEND: All right. I had just arrived in Damascus — we're in the summer of 2009 — after a year of Arabic language study. I'd actually arrived earlier than originally planned. I was supposed to arrive in 2010, but came in 2009 because the Syrian government had shut down the Damascus Community School. That was the international school where many diplomats' children were enrolled.

My predecessor left a year early to follow his family, as did a number of other diplomats, since their children could no longer attend school there. Those who stayed were essentially living apart from their families, or at least without their children. It made for a much less joyful atmosphere than the year before. It was a strong signal the Syrians were sending.

But for most people in the country — tourists, people passing through, people working there — the situation remained more or less the same. In fact, many tourists felt relatively safe because Syria was a police state. As I think I mentioned in our last discussion, Syria was the only country in the region where American diplomats weren't receiving danger pay, because daily life outside the embassy was perceived as relatively safe. People could travel throughout the country without worrying much about terrorist attacks, theft, or other issues that might concern travelers, diplomats, or foreign workers.

It was a strange environment. On one hand, there were strong political sanctions. We didn't have an ambassador. The Syrians were taking political actions that affected all embassies, not just the U.S. — the school closure, for instance, impacted children from many different diplomatic missions who wanted an English-language international curriculum. Yet daily life, in many respects, continued as normal.

So when I arrived, that was the political landscape: a much-scaled-down embassy, largely without families. There were maybe one or two children who remained, either homeschooled or enrolled in Syrian schools. The consular section was operating, but there was a general sense that it was hard to engage with Syria's infrastructure for basic services.

For example, we didn't have arrangements with banks like many other consular sections did, so members of the public couldn't pay consular fees through the banking system. We didn't use courier services to return passports to applicants. We didn't rely on the Internet for appointment systems — people had to come in person just to schedule an appointment. There was also a general feeling of caution, almost a looming threat, which made us hesitant to publish the kinds of information that embassies usually share — like lists of doctors and lawyers available to American citizens.

Similarly, our wardens — who act as intermediaries between the consular section and the American citizen community, especially for conveying security messages — had their names kept confidential, as much as possible.

In that environment, I was asking myself: How do we effectively provide consular services? If we can't use the commercial infrastructure, if we can't share useful information with the American public in Syria, how do we support them? And are we being honest with ourselves about the safety of the situation? If we're so concerned about naming doctors or lawyers, is it really as safe as it seems for tourists or other Americans to be here?

Now, to be clear, there was a travel warning in place at the time I arrived. Alongside the usual country-specific information — about the government, infrastructure, and what Americans could expect — there was a formal warning advising U.S. citizens not to travel to Syria. The justification was based on government-sponsored protests and the fact that it was a police state, combined with tensions between Syria and the U.S.

But the actual nature of the threat wasn't entirely clear, and frankly, many people ignored the warning. As I mentioned, there was no danger pay for diplomats. So, on the one hand, we were saying it was relatively safe — our diplomats were traveling throughout the country. On the other hand, we had an official warning that people were disregarding. That would make it harder to issue a stronger warning if a real threat materialized later.

So I began looking into how our doctors and lawyers felt about being listed publicly. Was there a genuine concern on their part? If so, we might need to respect that. But if they were comfortable with having their information made public, then we needed to make

that information available — to publish it online so that Americans could more easily access it in emergencies. Where can I find a doctor who speaks English? Where can I find a lawyer who's willing to represent American citizens and who speaks English?

We surveyed the doctors and lawyers on our existing list. None of them objected to having their names made public. So we published those lists. We also spoke with our wardens to assess whether they felt their names needed to remain confidential. For the most part, they understood that their role was already known, and there was no need for secrecy.

What I was trying to do, then, was to make our consular role — and the role played by the Consular Section — overt and clearly understood by all parties. I wanted it to be understood within the consular section itself, and also by the Syrian government, that our provision of consular services was not something hidden or secretive. We were not trying to keep anything from anyone. We were providing services openly, in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, and that was our responsibility. We were committed to doing it transparently.

To that end, I arranged meetings with the head of consular services at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with the Chief of Protocol, to make clear what we saw as our role and how we intended to carry out those responsibilities.

As I think I mentioned previously, we didn't have relationships with local banks, and we didn't use the Internet for appointment scheduling. Syrian citizens had to come to the embassy four times to complete a visa process: once to make the appointment, once to pay the fee, once for the interview, and once again to collect their passports. Four separate visits for a service that ideally should require only one.

We were able to improve this. We established a contractual relationship with a local bank in Syria to collect visa fees, and also entered into an agreement with one of the major international courier services, DHL, to deliver passports containing visas back to applicants. Eventually, we expanded this to include delivering passports to American citizens as well. We also set up an online appointment system, allowing people to schedule their appointments without having to appear in person just to get on the calendar.

So, when I met with the head of consular services at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an introductory meeting, I was able to clearly lay out what we were doing. I explained that we provided services to our citizens in cases of arrest, passport issuance, and other matters related to their welfare. I noted that we had a warden system in place, with wardens located throughout the country, who helped us communicate important information to the American citizen community. I emphasized that this was standard practice for U.S. embassies around the world. And that, just as the Syrian government looks after the welfare of its citizens abroad, we do the same for ours — and part of that involves publishing information about available medical and legal assistance.

I made clear that this was overt information, not something we were trying to conceal. At the same time, I highlighted that we were improving services for Syrian citizens as well, modernizing the visa process to make it easier — so that instead of four trips, they could ideally complete it in just one.

This, I think, was a good starting point. It allowed us to move forward with modernizing our services and to speak more openly about them. After these changes, we were able to publish more of our information online. We were engaging effectively with the Syrian government on consular issues, and they seemed willing to assist us in carrying out our responsibilities.

I did raise one area of concern: the amount of time it was taking to be notified when an American citizen was arrested. Consular officers have a duty to ensure the welfare of citizens who have been detained, and under the Vienna Convention, we have the right to visit them — but only if we are notified in time. Often, it was taking over a month for us to receive notification. In some cases, we would only find out about an American's arrest after they had already been released. That was not acceptable.

I made it clear that we needed to work together to improve this. Again, it was a constructive and friendly meeting — meant to lay out our approach and invite cooperation from the Syrian government, in the spirit envisioned by the Vienna Convention, so that we could effectively fulfill our consular duties and safeguard the welfare of American citizens in Syria.

I believe I arrived in Damascus in August — though I don't recall the exact dates — and I think that meeting with the Syrian authorities may have occurred in September or October. At that point, we were beginning to normalize our consular operations. But we still had a Travel Warning in place advising Americans not to travel to Syria.

The justification for that Travel Warning didn't reflect the actual concerns of most tourists visiting Syria. It didn't give a clear sense of what travelers should be worried about. For instance, if the threat was government-sponsored protests, those weren't targeting private American citizens — they were directed at embassies and could be turned on or off by the government at will. That's not something a tourist would likely encounter. Similarly, the closure of the international school wasn't relevant to tourists either.

So I stepped back and asked: What would actually affect a tourist in a police state?

As I've mentioned, if you're sightseeing and staying away from politics, you may feel fairly safe. That's the nature of a police state: the security presence is everywhere — though you may not notice it, they're noticing you. Everyone is under observation. And that's the key point: American travelers needed to know that they were entering a country where their phone conversations might be monitored, where the police had the right to enter and search their accommodations at any time, and where there should be no expectation of privacy.

While most visitors might not experience direct problems with authorities — because Syria wouldn't want to provoke an incident with a foreign tourist — the people they interacted with could be placed at risk. So it wasn't just about personal safety. It was also about not endangering others. Americans needed to be aware that engaging in sensitive conversations could have consequences — not for them, necessarily, but for the Syrians they were speaking to.

So I began reviewing how we, as the U.S. government, described such risks to Americans visiting other police states — like Cuba, for example. What language did we use? What cautions did we offer? And then: should this guidance go in the Travel Warning, or would it be more appropriate to include it in the Country Specific Information?

Every country has a page on the State Department website with basic information — form of government, security conditions, what to expect. That's the Country Specific Information. The Travel Warning, on the other hand, is something added when we want to tell people not to travel at all — or to exercise serious caution.

So around December 2009, in consultation with the regional security officer, the chargé, and others from the political, economic, and commercial sections, I proposed removing the Travel Warning and instead inserting more detailed cautions into the Country Specific Information. That way, if conditions worsened, we could reissue a Travel Warning. But if they remained stable, we wouldn't be overstating the risks.

The problem with a standing Travel Warning is that you can't adjust it incrementally. Either there is a warning, or there isn't. So if the situation worsens under an existing warning, while you might note the increased risk in the warning, the threshold of having issued a warning had already been crossed. The warning had real-world implications: universities couldn't send students to Syria, and tourists couldn't get travel insurance because insurers wouldn't cover travel to countries with a U.S. Travel Warning. But tourists were coming anyway, and without insurance, the risks to them — and to us — were higher.

So we proposed to Washington that we let the current Travel Warning expire (I believe in February or March 2010) and simultaneously update the Country Specific Information to include the new cautions — particularly around the lack of timely notification when Americans were arrested. Washington agreed, and we moved forward with that plan.

This led to another meeting with the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly with the Head of Consular Affairs and the Chief of Protocol. Because we didn't have an ambassador at the time, the Chief of Protocol was the highest-level Syrian official we could routinely meet with. An ambassador could meet with the foreign minister, but without one, our points of contact were more limited.

When I met with the Syrian officials, I explained that we were trying to provide accurate, up-to-date information for our citizens. I also made clear that there were still concerns —

chiefly, the delay in being notified of Americans in detention. We needed to be informed promptly — within a day or two — not weeks later. A month-long delay was unacceptable. I emphasized that we'd be tracking this and would update the Country Specific Information accordingly. If things improved, we would note that. If not, we'd reflect that reality as well.

This created a framework for engagement. It gave us something concrete to work on together — ways to measure progress. At the same time, we were improving access to consular services for Americans and modernizing the visa process for Syrians. It was a very positive step forward. Removing the Travel Warning helped reopen the door for tourism, educational exchanges, and student travel to Syria.

This was all happening around February 2010. We were also in the process of remodeling the Consular Section to make it more accessible and functional.

And I may not have mentioned this before, but one of the things I did after arriving in Damascus was to establish a framework in which members of the Consular Corps from different embassies in Damascus could meet regularly. There hadn't been one before. I reached out to my counterparts at other embassies to propose regular meetings, so we could share information, compare experiences, and coordinate best practices. This kind of coordination existed in other places where I'd served — Britain, India, Moscow — but not in Syria.

We invited local contacts to join our meetings — people from police services, public health, and so on. By summer 2010, even the former head of Syrian consular services came to speak with us. That was a strong signal of willingness to engage. It showed that Syrian authorities were open to constructive dialogue. They shared contact numbers, and when we needed to verify information — like the whereabouts of an arrested American — we could call them directly. The notification times were improving, down from a month to maybe two weeks. Not ideal, but better — and something we continued to track and report.

More often than not, we'd hear first from families that a U.S. citizen had been detained. But once we informed the Syrian authorities, they would often confirm or try to locate the individual. In some cases, simply alerting them that we were aware of an arrest seemed to expedite the release. They wouldn't say so directly, but the next update we'd receive was that the person had been released. That sometimes meant we couldn't visit them in prison — but only because they were no longer in custody.

Still, we did carry out prison visits. That was our duty under the Vienna Convention. And we continued to look for ways to carry out all our responsibilities in an environment where information was tightly controlled, but where, crucially, we weren't being prevented outright from doing our work.

One additional area of concern was children of American citizens — either those abducted by one parent or simply living in Syria with a Syrian parent. That was another context in which consular access, communication, and oversight were crucial.

The approach prior to my arrival had been that we needed to contact the Syrian government and request permission to visit American citizen children — families we were aware of in the Damascus area, and sometimes just outside it. I believe we had about ten such cases. These were situations where one parent, usually Syrian, had brought or kept a child in Syria, and the other parent — often the custodial parent — was back in the United States.

The problem was, we were having difficulty obtaining authorization from the Syrian government to visit these children. But there is no requirement — neither from the American side nor under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations — that a host government must provide specific authorization for a consular officer to visit and check on the welfare of their citizens, including children.

So, after internal consultations at the embassy, we decided: we're just going to go. If we knew where the child was living, we would simply go to that location, knock on the door, introduce ourselves as consular officers from the U.S. Embassy, and explain our purpose clearly. This was not a covert operation — no subterfuge involved. We made it clear that we were there to check on the well-being of the child — saying, for example, "We're just here to make sure little Sayid is okay" — and to relay any information back to the family in the United States. In some cases, we'd also talk about the fact that the U.S.-based parent had legal custody, and that if the child or the parent in Syria wished to return to the United States, we could help facilitate that process.

That approach actually proved successful. We had addresses for many of these children, and we began visiting them. We gathered information and relayed it back to families in the U.S., updating them on their children's welfare.

In some cases, this led to real breakthroughs. There were even a few instances where the taking parent voluntarily agreed to send the children back to the U.S. — or, in one case, agreed to return to the U.S. with the children and face the American justice system. They saw that doing so was ultimately in their own and their child's best interest.

This was part of our broader effort to normalize the consular role — to carry out our responsibilities as we would in any other country, and not operate on the assumption that the environment was necessarily as hostile as it had once seemed.

We extended that approach to our relationship with the wardens. We began holding open gatherings with them. I invited wardens to my residence. We held a group event at a restaurant just to say, "You're our wardens. We value you." It was important to make clear that this wasn't a secret network. The Syrian government was aware of the role wardens played. And we wanted the wardens to feel empowered to carry out that role — as long as they felt safe doing so.

But we also emphasized that if they didn't feel safe, they needed to let us know. That feedback would inform how we engaged with the broader American citizen community. If our wardens were telling us they no longer felt safe conveying messages or information, that was a sign we needed to reassess the environment. And if our regional security officer was also picking up on signs of growing hostility, we needed to reflect that in the guidance we were giving Americans in-country.

We also worked closely with the local business community through the Overseas Security Advisory Council, or OSAC. It's an advisory group coordinated by the Regional Security Officer, and it includes American companies operating in the host country. That was another venue for information-sharing and coordination.

*Q: It's not the Business Council for International Understanding?*

GOODFRIEND: No, no — it's the Overseas Security Advisory Council, OSAC. The word "business" isn't in the name, but it's made up of businesses. The Regional Security Officer (RSO) coordinates with American companies in the host country through OSAC. These companies share information about the guidance they're giving their employees, and what they're hearing about local security threats. In turn, the RSO shares information from the embassy, so that everyone has a better understanding of the security environment. It helps ensure we're all on the same page.

While we use the warden system to convey security information to private American citizens, OSAC serves the corporate community — American companies with a presence in the country — helping them stay informed and coordinate on safety issues.

By 2010, the embassy was beginning to run more and more like a "normal" embassy. We had formal engagements with banks and courier companies. We were using the Internet to engage with the public. We began issuing a monthly newsletter — similar to what we'd started in London — to create a regular channel of communication with the American citizen community.

This newsletter also helped us keep our mailing lists up to date. If a message bounced back or we received no reply, we could follow up and check whether someone had moved. The content included useful information — how to apply for a passport by mail using courier services, updates to the appointment process, reminders for those traveling back to the U.S. in the summer, and so on. The idea was to make communication routine — so that people heard from the embassy not only in emergencies, but regularly, as part of a healthy, ongoing relationship. Think of it more like wellness care rather than emergency treatment.

By late spring or summer of 2010, this regular engagement had become the norm. The Travel Warning had been lifted. More students were arriving. More tourists were visiting. And our consular operations were running more effectively.

Previously, as I've mentioned, people had to call the embassy to make an appointment, which took up staff time. Then they'd have to come in four times — once to make the appointment, once to pay the fee, once for the interview, and again to pick up the passport. But by outsourcing some services and implementing online scheduling, we were able to save time and reallocate staff to more substantive work.

One of the things we did was digitize our case files. That's something I'd brought over from London — reducing paper, scanning what needed to be retained, and discarding the rest. At the same time, Washington was transitioning visa processes to digital systems. Non-immigrant visa applications were moving online, and immigrant visa processes were beginning to go digital as well. So we were keeping pace — and even pushing ahead a bit.

I was also traveling to Washington periodically to participate in panels on modernizing consular services, offering insights from our experiences in London, from my time as a regional consular officer, and now from Damascus — especially on how to use emerging technologies more effectively.

In Syria, we began celebrating whenever we could eliminate a file cabinet — because that meant another batch of records had been digitized. This freed up physical space in the Consular Section and made records more accessible. It was all part of modernizing how we worked and served the public.

By the summer, we were positioned to offer a truly modern service. We even launched a Facebook page, which let us communicate both with American citizens and with the Syrian public. Alongside the newsletters, this helped us establish a consistent, approachable presence.

We were also working to better codify our internal knowledge — especially around complex legal matters. One area of focus was adoption in Syria, which is governed by different laws depending on the religion of the child and family. Muslim and Christian adoptions follow different rules, and in divorce cases, custody arrangements can vary significantly based on religious affiliation. This had real implications for our consular work.

To tackle this, we brought in one of our interns — who was also an attorney — to study Syrian adoption law: how it worked, how it could be interpreted, and how we might apply that knowledge effectively in our consular services.

There was one especially complicated case we encountered. It involved a child who had been adopted through a Catholic process, prior to my arrival, under a new law that had just been passed to address non-Islamic adoptions in Syria.

The challenge in the adoption case was that although a new law had been passed allowing for non-Islamic adoptions, there was no implementing legislation. The procedures for how to implement it remained vague.

In the case we were dealing with, a family had adopted a child, but they didn't have official documentation from either the Church or the State. The state, in fact, had not yet developed the mechanisms to issue the legal documents that we required. So we found ourselves in a legal gray zone — trying to navigate the situation as responsibly and humanely as possible.

The child was already living with the adoptive parents. The issue wasn't the child's well-being in the home — that seemed fine — but we couldn't issue a visa to allow the child to travel to the United States until we could verify that the adoption had been completed in accordance with Syrian law. One of our interns, who was a lawyer, put together a legal analysis of the adoption framework in Syria. This was useful not only for our internal decision-making but also for communicating back to Washington and helping them understand the legal environment within which we were working.

At the same time, we were starting to take advantage of newly available online tools from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to analyze visa fraud more systematically.

Traditionally, the standard method for detecting visa fraud involved selecting a random sample of previously issued visas — often from six months or a year earlier — and contacting the addresses or phone numbers listed on the applications. The goal was to determine whether the applicant had returned to Syria after their travel. If 5% hadn't come back, that might indicate a manageable overstay rate. But if 50% hadn't returned, then it pointed to a serious problem that required corrective action.

The process was, however, very labor-intensive and difficult for many embassies with limited resources to carry out effectively.

With the DHS data, we were now able to check whether exit records existed for visa recipients — digitally, and often within a day. Instead of calling individual applicants, we could analyze an entire batch of issuances and get a response quickly. That allowed us to conduct broad studies of our applicant pool and look at trends by gender, geographic location within Syria, even ethnicity — without relying on anecdotal assumptions or stereotypes, which had been quite common when I arrived.

The result was a far more informed view of our visa landscape. We could make decisions based on data, not guesswork. It allowed us to refine our approach where needed, and to identify areas of vulnerability with more precision.

By summer 2010, not only were we offering more efficient consular services and expanding our digital operations, but we also had a better understanding of our applicant base and the Syrian legal and administrative environment. And we were engaging with the Syrian government about these developments — keeping them informed, explaining what we were doing and why.

One area where this relationship with the government was especially tested was again in 2010, sometime after the summer. As I've mentioned before, one of our consular responsibilities is the protection of children, especially in abduction cases.

There was a long-standing case involving two children who had been abducted by a parent and taken to Syria. One was an infant at the time, and the other was slightly older — maybe around five — old enough to have some awareness of their surroundings when the abduction occurred. I believe their ages were about two and five when it happened.

Now, it was a decade after the original abduction, and we had indications that the children were indeed in Syria. We even thought we knew where they might be. But this wasn't a situation where we could simply go and knock on a door — this was far more complex, involving serious security considerations. We would need the active cooperation of the Syrian government.

Over the years, there had been formal correspondence from the U.S. to the Syrian government regarding this case. At one point, a letter had been signed by then-Senator Barack Obama, along with about ten other senators, appealing to the Syrian authorities for help in locating the children. The Syrian government had pledged that it would assist — that it would do everything possible. But as we often say: words are words, and actions are actions. Every time we followed up, we got the same response: "We don't have any information."

Then, one day, something remarkable happened. I was attending a concert or some kind of evening event when I got a call from the duty officer. He told me that a child had called the embassy. He gave me the child's name and said the child believed we were looking for them — that their parent in America was looking for them.

As it turned out, one of my predecessors — maybe two predecessors back — had circulated age-progressed renderings of what the children might look like now. Someone had seen one of these images and said to the child, "This might be you. Maybe your parent is looking for you." And that prompted the child to call the embassy and ask to speak with their parent.

We've spoken before about the role of duty officers — how they don't always need to be consular officers themselves, but they do need to know when something is above their level and requires immediate referral. In this case, the duty officer passed the call to me, and I recognized the case immediately. I contacted Washington without delay and informed them that we had one of the children on the phone. We were then able to put the child in contact with their left-behind parent, the parent who had been left behind in the U.S.

Over time, that connection was reestablished. The children — when the taking parent was not present — were able to speak with their parent in the U.S. several times. Eventually, the children indicated they wanted our help in being repatriated to the United States.

We had anticipated that this might happen. So we had already begun coordinating with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, the Syria Desk, and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. We told them: this long-standing case is showing signs of movement, and we need to be ready. If things progressed and the children actively sought U.S. assistance in returning to their U.S. parent, we needed a clear and approved plan in place.

This included the possibility that the children might seek shelter at the embassy. So we worked to make sure everything was coordinated in advance: what we could do, what support we could provide, and how we would respond if the situation developed quickly. That way, when the time came, we could act swiftly — and within an agreed framework — to support the children.

*Q: Just one question here: was the Syrian parent a dual citizen? Did they have any rights over preventing the children from leaving?*

GOODFRIEND: I'm trying to avoid revealing personally identifiable information. But I can say this: the taking was not Syrian. That parent was in Syria under false pretenses. The taking parent was a dual national, one of those nationalities being American. There were false identities and false documentation involved — really, everyone in the family that was present in Syria had a false identity in some form.

One of the children eventually contacted us and said, "I'm ready to go." The sibling wasn't ready — at least not at that moment — but we began coordinating for the one who was ready to go.

We received the necessary authorizations and prepared the embassy. We arranged a space to provide shelter for the child, so we could support the child while we worked to ensure a safe and legal repatriation to the United States.

Coincidentally, the day this all came together, I was serving as both Consul General and Chargé d'Affaires — wearing both hats due to overlapping absences or transitions. So when the child was with us at the embassy, I contacted the Chief of Protocol at the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As I've mentioned, he was our highest-level interlocutor in the absence of a U.S. ambassador.

I told him: "We've spoken to you before about this case. We've repeatedly asked for your assistance in locating the children. We no longer need that assistance — we now have one of the children with us. What we do need is your assistance, as previously pledged, in facilitating the child's return to the United States."

The Chief of Protocol acknowledged this and said he would take it under advisement.

At the same time, I was trying to communicate all of this back to Washington — but our communicator was having trouble with the system. We were unable to get a message out

through our usual channels at that critical moment, which added another layer of complication to the situation.

*Q: Oh, my God!*

GOODFRIEND: We were taking care of it. Fortunately, I was able to get some communication out — on the low side, through whatever channels were available at the time. But still, we couldn't get the full message through in real-time.

About an hour or two later, I got a rather concerned call from the Deputy Assistant Secretary, asking, "What's going on over there?"

*Q: Here's one more question, given the sensitivity and the need for all due haste, were you in contact with the operation center?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, we let the Operations Center know as well. As I mentioned, we had worked all of this out in advance. And maybe that's a recurring theme you'll see here: I like to follow the plans we've set out. That's why we make them.

You'll see it in other situations we discuss later, and it applies to what we'd done before, too. Your point about "all due haste" is important — because yes, there were voices saying, "Just get the kid out — put the child in the trunk of a car and drive him across the border." But that wasn't the plan. There were good reasons why that approach wouldn't work, and why it could have gone badly.

There were also people saying, "Why did you even tell the Syrians?" And my answer to that was simple: we told the Syrians because we needed them to be with us on this. The longer we delayed, the more it might look like we were trying to hide something. The earlier we brought them in as a partner, the more likely we were to get what I believed was the best outcome — what I called the "agreed result."

So yes, we were ultimately able to restore communications. And I still remember — when I close my eyes and think back — how frustrating it was that, at that critical moment, we couldn't communicate as effectively via the classified systems. But we were able to stay in touch through the unclassified side, and that allowed us to engage in real-time, getting guidance and keeping Washington informed about every step.

When the taking parent realized that one of the children was with us and came to the embassy, that parent began pounding on the door, demanding to see the child. This was another moment where we needed — and had — Washington's full support. We made the decision not to allow this American citizen parent in to see the American citizen child, and we were all aligned on that. We had to be.

Over the next few days — and in fact, a couple of weeks — we did everything we could to care for the child inside our small embassy, to safeguard the child, and to ensure that

there wasn't a risk of the child being taken again. We were concerned someone might try to abduct the child even from within the embassy.

But then, after a couple of weeks, the Syrian government said, "Okay, we'll work with you." They agreed to help safeguard the child's departure. The plan was for the child to be transferred to Jordan, where the left-behind parent would be waiting. The left-behind parent didn't want to come into Syria, and we understood that.

And to their credit, the Syrian government did what they said they would do. They provided an escort to the Syria–Jordan border. We accompanied the child to the border, crossed with him into Jordan, and there — after more than a decade — parent and child were reunited.

So in many ways, all the groundwork we had laid over the previous year — the relationships, the transparency, the normalization of our consular role — all of that was, in the end, rewarded through this one act of cooperation.

*Q: Only one child went, the other stayed?*

GOODFRIEND: Yes, the other child chose to stay. That decision also brought in some legal nuance, particularly regarding adoption and custody law.

The left behind parent had obtained legal custody not only in the U.S., but also in Lebanon. And that was significant, because Syria recognized Lebanese court rulings — especially when they aligned with principles of Islamic law. In this case, because the Lebanese custody ruling had taken Islamic legal considerations into account, and because the child's age fell within the period where Sharia law would have granted custody to the left behind, the Syrian government was able to cooperate without contravening their own legal or religious frameworks.

So they were able to assist us in this case without violating Syrian law, without creating issues under Sharia, and while honoring a commitment they had previously made. That became a key point — something we could look to and say: *we actually worked together effectively on this*.

After that, we began seeing more positive outcomes in our other cases involving abducted children. We were conducting visits to check on these children, and we started to see a success rate in repatriations — not by force, and not even necessarily with the direct assistance of the Syrian government, but through consistent engagement.
In fact, as we began to share our experiences and strategies with colleagues at other U.S. embassies in the region, we realized we were having more success in facilitating the voluntary return of abducted children than many of our counterparts in neighboring countries. That was somewhat surprising, given the widespread perceptions about Syria. We also began handling cases of adult American citizens — particularly women — trying to leave abusive relationships.

*Q: Let me just interrupt one second, we have another kind of product that we do out of full oral histories. When there's a particularly salient example of what diplomats do, we have moments in diplomatic history. And so far in your oral history, this particular description of how you managed to return an abducted child would be an excellent example of a moment in diplomatic history where working behind the scenes with very careful and detailed attention to every possible hurdle. You basically accomplished a very important and humanitarian end. As you're editing your oral history, please keep that point in mind that we might want to ask you to set that piece into a particularly interesting, separate episode.*

GOODFRIEND: Sure, absolutely. That really was a key moment. You could say that it marked one of the closest points — at least on the consular side — of progress in the U.S.–Syrian relationship during that time. I'd be happy to help frame it as a standalone piece.

And it wasn't just that one case. Like I mentioned earlier, we were also facilitating the repatriation of Americans — often women — trying to flee abusive relationships. We had developed a good working relationship with the manager of a local women's shelter. The shelter was primarily for Syrian women seeking refuge from abuse, but they agreed to help us in urgent cases by accommodating American citizens temporarily — just for a few days — until we could arrange travel and documentation.

Most of these cases involved women. The shelter wasn't authorized to house men, but it provided a safe place for abused women — and occasionally daughters who had just reached adulthood and were now legally free to leave, but needed logistical help to do so. We handled several such cases. In others, we assisted Americans who had simply fallen on hard times and needed temporary shelter before we could arrange their return.

Of course, in those situations, it wasn't just about having a place to stay. We also had to coordinate with Syrian authorities to secure exit permits. That required having good contacts across various government offices — people we could turn to in order to resolve these humanitarian cases quietly but effectively.

Sometimes the cases were more complex — for example, a mother traveling with her children, but the husband had since remarried and was now trying to keep the children. In those cases, it might not be possible for the mother to leave with her children, but we could at least ensure that she could leave safely herself.

All of this took place in 2010, during a period when we were operating as effectively as any fully staffed embassy might — even though we had not received additional personnel. What changed was how we used the resources we had. We took more initiative. We moved into the field more. And we were mindful of safety, of course — we wouldn't send officers into dangerous situations. But we had a good understanding of the environment, and we planned accordingly. If a consular officer went out, they were accompanied, and we always had a Plan B in place.

We also expanded our engagement. We began visiting American citizen communities throughout Syria. We coordinated with our wardens in different regions to organize community visits, where a consular officer would travel out to meet local Americans, listen to their concerns, and answer questions. On these visits, we also started taking passport applications in the field — recognizing that it wasn't always easy for people to come to Damascus. These remote visits helped ensure that Americans were appropriately documented with valid U.S. passports, especially in case of emergency travel.

And to give you an idea of the scope of our outreach, and how we understood our role under international law: We were operating under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which gives consuls the right — and responsibility — to provide services and maintain contact with their citizens. That's different from the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

So, we used this framework to justify our visits to American communities throughout the country. While most of these cities were on the western side of Syria, closer to Damascus, there was one major exception: the city of Al-Hasakah in the northeast, located in the Kurdish region.

Getting to Al-Hasakah required a couple days of travel by car. And because of its location and political sensitivity, the embassy had a broader interest in understanding the local dynamics. However, none of our political officers had been able to visit — because every time we requested permission from the Syrian government, it was denied.

But then, in the fall of 2010, we submitted a new request — this time as a consular visit. We made it clear that our purpose was to visit American citizens in the area. We grounded our request in the rights established under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. We explained, truthfully and clearly, that a consular officer would be traveling for the sole purpose of meeting with the American citizen community.

Initially, the request was denied. But we submitted another diplomatic note — this time firmly invoking our rights and obligations under international law. We emphasized that the visit was strictly consular in nature.

We had initially been denied authorization when we submitted our first diplomatic note requesting permission to visit the American citizen community in Al-Hasakah. That note stated our intention clearly: we wanted to send a consular officer to check in on the community and provide consular services. The request was rejected.

So we submitted a second note — this time explicitly citing our rights and responsibilities under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. We invoked the principle that consular officers have the right to access their citizens and that this was a standard, lawful function of our embassy.

We don't know exactly what the decision-making process was on the Syrian side — but this time, the request was approved. We were able to send a consular officer to

Al-Hasakah. The American citizens there welcomed him warmly. They even hosted a dinner in his honor, and shared with him what life was like in that part of the country.

After the visit, we wrote a report that offered both a sense of the environment and insight into what the American citizen community was experiencing there. We took full, appropriate advantage of our role under the Vienna Convention — not in any covert way, but as a clear and legal assertion of our duty to understand and support the Americans living throughout Syria.

If you look at what we had accomplished over the course of 2010, it was a year of consistent and meaningful progress. We had built a working relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring they understood who we were and what we did. We improved the mechanisms through which both American and Syrian citizens could interact with the consular section — whether to make appointments, apply for services, or receive them more efficiently.

We broadened our communication channels: we sent out monthly newsletters via email; we launched a Facebook page; we made ourselves available in person, traveling to different parts of the country to meet directly with citizens and understand their situations.

We also worked collaboratively with consular officers from other embassies in Damascus. We shared what was working for us, learned from their experiences, and applied those lessons in our own operations.

Throughout 2010, the general atmosphere seemed to reflect this progress. Our ability to deliver results — repatriating abducted children, assisting abuse survivors, modernizing services, expanding outreach — gave a sense of real accomplishment. And relations between the U.S. and Syria, while still fraught at the political level, appeared to be improving at the working level.

I noted in the chronology you sent that sanctions were reimposed during 2010. That was a significant development, yes — but from a consular perspective, part of our role was to explain what those sanctions meant in practical terms. How would they affect the transfer of funds? What did financial sanctions mean for private citizens and American businesses operating in Syria?

We made clear that while those sanctions stemmed from broader government-to-government issues — state sponsorship of terrorism, concerns about regional security — our duty was to focus on safeguarding the welfare of American citizens on the ground. Despite those tensions, we were still committed to providing accurate information, reliable services, and personal engagement.

The underlying question was always: Do we have the relationships we need? Do we understand the environment well enough to protect and support our citizens?

That was the guiding principle behind our work in 2010.

And to some extent, the improvement in relations was recognized at the highest level. After five years without one, the U.S. government made the decision to send an ambassador to Syria again.

*Q: Interesting.*

GOODFRIEND: We hadn't had a U.S. ambassador in Syria since the assassination of a former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Harir — this was, I believe, in 2005. It was a high-profile car bombing in Beirut, and there was strong suspicion that Syrian forces had been involved.

After that, the U.S. recalled its ambassador for consultations, and no new ambassador was appointed. From that point on, the embassy was led by chargés d'affaires.

But by 2010, relations had improved enough that the U.S. government made the decision to appoint a new ambassador. That was a significant step — a public signal of renewed engagement.

Another sign of improving relations came during the summer of 2010, when the Syrian government agreed to allow the Damascus Community School to reopen. The school had been closed since 2008, and now it was scheduled to reopen in September 2010. That, too, suggested that things were starting to return to a more normal diplomatic footing.

At the same time, we had begun scouting locations for a new U.S. embassy building. The current embassy had been in the same location — right in the center of Damascus — for at least fifty years. It was not an ideal site from a security standpoint. There was no setback from the street at all. If you were walking along the sidewalk, you could literally place your hand on the embassy wall — it was that close.

And yet, that vulnerability also underscored a certain logic of how security functions in a police state. The assumption was that the government had tight control over everything that happened inside the country — including potential threats to the embassy. In theory, that control provided a kind of security buffer, even without the physical distance that modern embassies are designed to have. Of course, as you'll see later, that assumption plays a role in what happens down the line.

But for now, at the end of 2010, things were looking good.

We were expecting the arrival of a U.S. ambassador at the beginning of the next year — early 2011. At the same time, Lebanon was the major issue occupying our attention. The Lebanese government was collapsing. There was serious instability, and we were wondering whether Lebanon might completely fall apart in the coming months.

Then, in December 2010, what came to be known as the Arab Spring began in Tunisia. It started when a man — an educated young man who had been forced to sell vegetables on the street for lack of other opportunities — was publicly humiliated by the police. An officer kicked over his cart, shamed him in public. He saw no future, no dignity, no path forward. And so, in desperation, he set himself on fire.

That moment became symbolic. It was a microcosm of the frustration of so many young people across the region — educated, ambitious, and utterly disillusioned. People saw themselves in that man. His act sparked protests in Tunisia, which soon escalated into a full uprising.

From there, the unrest spread — first to Egypt. And by late December and January, events were unfolding rapidly across the region. But not yet in Syria.

In Syria, the Arab Spring didn't seem to catch hold initially. There was still a sense — perhaps even some hope — that Bashar al-Assad, as a younger leader, might be more attuned to the mood of the people. He was, after all, a Western-educated ophthalmologist. He hadn't been groomed to rule; his older brother had died in a car accident, and he had been brought in unexpectedly. There was this lingering hope that he would bring a more modern, maybe even more European sensibility to governance in Syria.

He and his wife were carefully crafting a modern, Western-facing image. She had been raised in Britain, and somewhere around that time — maybe in December 2010 — she appeared on the cover of Vanity Fair. The article portrayed her as a stylish, worldly, compassionate first lady — a woman of the people. Many saw it as a puff piece, given the regime's authoritarian track record. But in terms of image management, it seemed to be working.

So as we moved from 2010 into 2011, there was a lot in motion. The stage was being set for a new phase in U.S.–Syria relations: a new ambassador was on the way, the school was reopening, the government was trying to rehabilitate its image internationally — and seemed to be succeeding, to a degree. Meanwhile, the Arab Spring was igniting the region.

In February 2011, I took a vacation to Thailand. From that distance, we watched events unfold in Egypt. Mubarak, long considered a U.S. ally, was rapidly losing American support. It was astonishing to witness how quickly things turned. Suddenly, he was on trial, held accountable for past actions. Governments across the region were watching closely, taking note of how the United States responded to mass protests and regime collapse.

Inside Syria, however, the Arab Spring still hadn't taken root. Any protests that occurred were small, scattered, and never reached the critical mass seen elsewhere. It seemed, for the moment, that Syria might be immune.

But then, in March, everything changed.

I was on an outing organized by the Community Liaison Office — a walk through an archaeological site in central Syria — when my phone started to ring. The calls were about helicopters arriving in Daraa. Protests had erupted there, and now they were being brutally suppressed by the military.

It's worth noting: the initial protests in Daraa weren't directly linked to the Arab Spring. They came from something more local, more immediate. But they struck a chord — and they quickly became something larger.

*Q: Daraa, it's a suburb of Damascus?*

GOODFRIEND: No, it's not. Daraa is in the far south of Syria, right on the border with Jordan. In Damascus, it was often characterized as a more conservative, more tribal region — which had implications for what unfolded there.

From what I understood at the time, what sparked the protests in Daraa was not some organized political movement or ideological campaign. It started with a group of high school boys. Inspired by what they'd seen happening in Egypt — protests, slogans — they spray-painted similar anti-regime graffiti on a wall in their town, calling for the overthrow of the government.

They were arrested. The extent of what happened to them wasn't known immediately, but the children were held by police — and they were tortured. The parents went to the authorities and demanded their release, saying, "They're just kids." The response from the police was brutal. They taunted the parents: "We'll do to you what we're doing to them."

That's when the protests began — not primarily as part of the broader Arab Spring narrative, but as a call for justice. Each country in the region had its own dynamic. In Tunisia, it was youth unemployment and hopelessness. In Egypt, it was a deeply entrenched authoritarian regime. In Libya, it was longstanding repression. Syria's catalyst wasn't quite the same. It wasn't necessarily about Assad himself, or regime change. It was about local abuse — about how lower-level officials wielded unchecked power.

The people of Daraa were demanding the release of the children. They wanted the head of the local police to be held accountable. They wanted dignity, respect, and justice.

And that was a decision point for Bashar al-Assad. How would he respond?

Would he take a reconciliatory approach — acknowledge the abuse, investigate the police and municipal authorities, show that all Syrians deserved to be treated with dignity? That likely would have calmed the situation. It might have contained it.

But there was a complication. The mayor in Daraa was a relative of Assad's — possibly a cousin. Like many senior figures in Syria, he had familial ties to the ruling elite. So the

question became: would Assad hold his own cousin accountable? Would doing so be seen as weakness? Would it embolden more demands?

And perhaps Assad was also watching what had happened in Egypt — watching Mubarak make concessions, only to lose power and be put on trial. Maybe that was in his mind, too.

Whatever the internal calculus, the decision was made to suppress the protests forcefully. I remember getting the call while I was out on a Community Liaison Office-organized excursion — a walk through an archaeological site in central Syria. My phone rang: there were reports of helicopters over Daraa. Troops were being sent in. Live fire was being used against protesters.

And that changed everything.

Again, Daraa was a tribal area. Family and honor played a central role. And once blood had been spilled, it was no longer just a protest — it was a vendetta. And these tribal networks extended across Syria. So once people were killed in Daraa, the movement stopped being about justice for detained schoolchildren. It became a call for vengeance. The message wasn't "reform the regime." It was: avenge the blood of Daraa.

And that was March 2011. That's when we realized that everything we had built in 2010 — the progress, the sense of cautious normalization — was coming undone. A new U.S. Ambassador had just arrived. He was making senior-level contacts, building relationships at the highest levels of the Syrian government. That itself was a major gesture of re-engagement.

Even before his arrival, there had been senior-level visits. Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns had visited Syria in 2010. There were also senior tech and communications officials from the State Department — digital diplomacy people — who came to promote U.S.–Syrian cooperation in the tech space. I remember one of them posting something upbeat on Facebook or Twitter about having a great cappuccino in Damascus — he later got chided for that.

There were also several congressional delegations — senatorial visits — throughout 2010. All of that had indicated an uptick in engagement. It felt like the U.S. was rebuilding its relationship with Syria.

And now, in the space of weeks, it was all about to change.
We're at 9:25 now.

*Q: Right. And this is an excellent place to pause because we can pick up with how 2010 ended and moved into more unsettled conditions. So let me pause.*

*End of Part 1*