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AMBASSADOR J. ANTHONY HOLMES

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is July 14, 2022. This is ADST's Interview with Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes regarding his tenure as President of AFSA. Ambassador, when did you enter the Foreign Service?

HOLMES: My entry class began on my 28th birthday— June 13th, 1979.

Q: When you entered, what were the motivating factors that led you to the Foreign Service (FS)?

HOLMES: I had just gotten a second master's degree – this one in international business to complement the one I had in economic geography. I thought it was time to quit being a student and get to work. I was determined to work internationally and was interested in living overseas. I had a couple of other job offers: one from an international money center bank and one from a mid-size international nongovernmental organization. My ambition then was to see the world, unlike a number of my entering classmates who were very policy focused. They wanted to get in there and direct or at least influence US foreign policy. I didn't have such presumptions. I was just interested in getting experience, seeing the world, and learning as I went along. Over time I too became very interested in the policy aspects, but that came slowly and wasn't my motivation from the beginning.

Q: Did you enter with any previous overseas experience or with a foreign language?

HOLMES: I had studied French at university, but not as a major. I had traveled some, but I didn't have any sort of overseas background. Just a few overseas trips that totaled about seven months.

Q: When you began work in the Foreign Service in 1979, how did you learn about AFSA?

HOLMES: My first post was Cairo, which was our biggest mission in the world at that time. There was a huge USAID [United States Agency for International Development] presence, along with representatives from virtually every other US government agency with international responsibilities. Embassy Cairo was really a microcosm of Washington. Several people I worked closely with were AFSA members. I heard many references to AFSA. I had joined already, I believe during my A-100 course, so I had learned a bit about AFSA during my orientation course. However, I had previous experience with labor unions before I joined the FS, when I worked in jobs that were union shops during summer holidays or part-time. I had a good feel for what unions were and what they did. And this was in the 1960s and 1970s. Union walkouts and even prolonged strikes were common and there was a normal level of labor conflict. Tension between unions and management was something that I was not averse to and saw as a natural part of working life. Only as the years passed did I come to fully understand and appreciate AFSA's role as a professional association.

A galvanizing factor in my engagement in AFSA was the fact that Congress was then considering legislation to reform the Foreign Service (FS). It passed and was called the Foreign Service Act of 1980. It made major changes to the FS, particularly regarding the "up or out" promotion system, and seemed aimed at increasing the FS as a meritocracy. Shortly before the legislation passed one of the candidates in the 1980 presidential election was John Anderson. He was a member of the House, a Republican from Illinois, but was running for president as an independent (eventually winning 6.6% of the vote). He came to Cairo and met with the embassy staff members who were interested and was questioned by some of my colleagues about his position on the proposed Foreign Service Act. He wasn't particularly knowledgeable, and it didn't reflect well on him. The discussion made me more aware of the significant changes in the Foreign Service Act of 1980. I began to feel that I was in on the ground floor of these changes. It wasn't that I had any pre-existing knowledge of them, but I intuitively knew that they were something I needed to be on top of, so I did that.

Q: As you arrived in Cairo, did you have a family yet? AFSA would eventually press management for better opportunities for spousal employment and other family benefits.

HOLMES: No, I was single. I met my wife six weeks after I arrived, at a Consular Corps luncheon. She was a Foreign Service Officer herself, the consular and management officer at the Swedish Embassy. This played into my natural inclination to understand the State Department's regulations because 18 months later I became the first case in the State Department's history of a FS officer marrying a diplomat from another country and both retaining their jobs and careers. Always in the past somebody resigned, almost

invariably the woman regardless of whether she was an American or a foreigner, and the couple would continue on one track rather than as in our case, on parallel tracks.

I also got some good advice. Some members of the embassy's senior management got interested and made sure that I understood the problems that we would be facing, particularly regarding the possibility that situations could arise that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest. So we were able to move forward one step at a time with our eyes wide open.

Initially in such cases one must ask for permission, or as the State Department termed it, give it four months' advance notice during which they could "interpose an objection." I did that, heard nothing back, and on the 126th day we got married. A few weeks later I got a long message that outlined what the Department's approach would be to dealing with us as long as my wife was working for her foreign ministry. Basically what they said was "both you and your wife need to be completely open with us about what each of you are or will be doing and what issues you are or will be working on, so that we can decide if there's any potential conflict of interest." And we always did that. We were not worried about any specific conflict of interest as my wife's career focus was management and consular issues and mine was economic diplomacy until I reached the Senior Foreign Service, when it became more political and program management oriented. The Department also said at the end of that message that, "as things stand now, we cannot imagine ever allowing you to serve in Stockholm." That led us for the next 15 years to serve overseas in third countries.

Several times during those 15 years I checked in with the senior people in the Human Resources (HR) bureau to see if things had softened a bit and if I might be considered for an assignment to Embassy Stockholm. During the remainder of the Reagan years (through 1988) I was told essentially "not only no, but hell no." During the George H.W. Bush administration it was more or less the same. Then the Democrats came to power in 1993 and the clouds lifted. In the meantime, Sweden was in the process of joining the European Union and it became our closest non-NATO defense partner in Europe. Of course, as we speak Sweden now is in the process of joining NATO. Anyway, I tried again in the mid-90s and got a more neutral response. The Department said, "Okay, as things stand now we don't see a problem. You can bid on any job you want in Stockholm, and if you're viewed as the most competitive person and the Ambassador wants to have you then you can do it. But we're not going to give you a job there. You must compete for one."

So ultimately that is what happened. From 1996 to 1999 I was the economic counselor at the Embassy Stockholm. That assignment was sort of the silver bullet that enabled us both to finish out our respective careers.

Anyway, that's all digression. After my first tour in Cairo, where I was a very small player in a very large embassy, I went to Damascus, which was much smaller. I'd had a tour of experience under my belt and I decided to become the AFSA rep there. After that we spent four years in Nairobi, after which my wife was told she had reached her limit of continuous overseas service and had to return to Stockholm to do a tour at her Ministry. By this point I had already been assigned to Embassy Singapore and our two sons were still quite young, so my wife chose to take leave of absence without pay. In both Kenya and Singapore I was the AFSA rep. With the exception of Ouagadougou, where I was Ambassador, I was the AFSA rep at every post I served at after Cairo.

Q: Let me go back just a moment. Given the arrangements you had to make regarding your wife's position with the Swedish Foreign Service, did you ever require AFSA's help in addressing issues with State Department management?

HOLMES: No, I never needed it. We were happy staying overseas. We had a couple of small kids. If the Department had said to me, "No, we are going to force you to come back to Washington. We're not going to let you serve overseas. You have served overseas for 15 years. You've exceeded the guidelines," that would have caused some problems. State did not have hard and fast rules about maximum time spent overseas, but there were guidelines. Typically, after eight years overseas it was expected you would return to Washington for a domestic assignment. But I learned quickly that if you were willing to serve in hardship posts, you got cut more slack than if you wanted to stay in Western Europe or posts that were widely popular.

My geographic focus was the Middle East and Africa. I spoke decent Arabic by the time I got to Cairo and that helped with Damascus. Then we opted for Nairobi, which had been my wife's first post in the Swedish service a few years earlier, so she went back a second time. African posts didn't attract the same interest as posts in some other parts of the world in our respective Foreign Services. Our willingness to serve in Africa and the Middle East made finding matching assignments a lot easier. But if I had had assignment problems AFSA could not have done much. It is important to note that specific assignments are specifically excluded from AFSA's purview in its certification agreement with the State Department and thus it would have been limited to giving me advice. But I was lucky because individuals who worked in Personnel were sympathetic and understanding and were quite helpful.

Let me add here that while AFSA cannot challenge specific assignments, the rules and processes that make up the assignment system must have AFSA's concurrence. That is an important distinction that, along with several decades of case law, gives AFSA considerable ability to influence the State Department's personnel operations at the systemic level, but not at the individual employee level.

There are other US government agencies, however, that were opposed to our arrangement as a matter of principle and were highly suspicious of it. In 1987, after we had been married for five and a half years, I got a visit out of the blue from the RSO [Regional Security Officer] He said, "I just got this message from Washington. They want to know if you're still married to a Swedish diplomat." I replied "yes, why?" "I don't know," he said. And then it came out that one of the Marine guards in Moscow had gone into the embassy's communications section while on duty, stolen a lot of highly classified documents, and given them to the Soviets. The Reagan administration's response was to batten down the hatches willy-nilly, regardless of whether they had any relevance to the problem. I never heard anything more after that, but a few months later the US government articulated a much stricter and more comprehensive policy for cases like mine. It said that if an employee's spouse worked for another government in foreign affairs, the military, or an intelligence agency, the USG employee would never be permitted to be assigned to his or her spouse's country. It took until the mid-1990s and a change to a Democratic administration before there was a return to a more flexible, case-by-case approach. As my case pre-dated these changes we were basically grandfathered.

Q: I want to take you back overseas for a moment in the earlier part of your career because you mentioned you were an AFSA rep in Syria, in Damascus. Did you undertake any activities on behalf of AFSA?

HOLMES: Not so much in Syria. It was a smaller embassy and after only a few months the 1982 war in Lebanon began. Much of that war took place only a few kilometers away, so the Israel/Arab conflict and the overall security situation dominated the embassy. Very few if any AFSA issues came up. The Israelis invaded southern Lebanon and proceeded north as far as the southern suburbs of Beirut. Then there were the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, the Palestinian refugee camps. Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia militia, invited the Iranian military to come to Lebanon to help them. I'd been in Syria maybe six months and all of a sudden the Iranians were marching around the Bekaa Valley, which is where Embassy Damascus personnel used to go for a bit of escape from Syria and for shopping. That became off limits for all of us. Damascus became a very tough place to work, but the issues we dealt with were not things AFSA got involved in.

Q: Moving to Nairobi and other places, you mentioned that you were AFSA in those posts. Did you take on any activities as AFSA representative?

HOLMES: Yes, in Nairobi there were lots of issues. It was a very big embassy. I don't remember now if it was our biggest embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa, but it was certainly close to that. Lots of different agencies, all of which had regional responsibilities. There were so many non-State US government employees there and the administrative burden of caring for them became so heavy that the embassy put in place an unofficial policy not to permit any more agencies to come in. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) wanted to set up an office there because Nairobi is a huge hub for general aviation, small aircraft serving missionaries, and NGOs throughout the region. The embassy refused to let the FAA come in, even though they had a very valid reason for wanting to be there. So, they had to continue service to the entire African continent out of Dakar.

One example of the type of issue AFSA got involved in was a long-running campaign to abolish the "Restriction S" limitation of the size of packages that the APO (Army Post Office) could receive. Nairobi, like probably 60-70% of US diplomatic posts in the world in those days, had an APO that fulfilled the function of a diplomatic pouch operation for the delivery of personal mail and packages. Only a handful of posts worldwide had this Restriction S limitation, which definitely increased the cost of living for all staff members because of severe limitations and/or excessive costs for imported items available on the local Kenyan market. This meant that the diplomatic pouches wouldn't carry big packages. Everything had to be sent in small boxes or envelopes. It took years of lobbying and several changes in front office management, but ultimately we succeeded in getting Restriction S lifted.

There were a number of other issues. Employees are by and large very cautious about approaching management with even suggestions, much less complaints. There's safety in numbers. AFSA can take the approach to management and basically depersonalize it. Everybody's much happier that way. Not always the manager, but all the members were. I would periodically get approached to do this or that. I was almost always happy to do it, or I would say "yeah, okay, but let me put it this way with them, or I think I can talk to this person, but I want to talk it over with the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] first," that sort of thing. I found that because people understood that I really wanted to help, knew the regulations, and had by then a fair amount of experience in how to operate they would come to me for advice about onward assignments or how to deal with their supervisors regarding what they thought was an unfair comment in an evaluation report. I became a reference point, something that while not in AFSA's bailiwick was complementary and made AFSA more relevant to them

Q: As AFSA became the sole representative for all the foreign affairs agencies – USAID, FCS, FAS, USIS (until it merged with the State Department) and so on, did your activity as an overseas AFSA increase?

HOLMES: Absolutely, although the significant majority of these non-State Department issues were with USAID. In part that also reflects my assignment pattern, as most of my posts were in developing countries and had USAID missions that in a couple of places were far larger than the Embassy contingent. USAID was particularly interesting not so much for the issues, which were quite similar to those in the Embassy, but because their missions always strived to be as autonomous as they could, and often achieved a great deal of that. Given this size and autonomy, they often had their own AFSA rep at post. I didn't really get very involved with AFSA representation for USAID in posts with large missions, but on occasion I could be helpful in double-tracking issues for them with the Embassy's leadership. USAID would typically have a higher percentage of its officers who were AFSA members than the Embassy did.

Q: From 2002 until 2005, as ambassador to Burkina Faso, you couldn't hold an AFSA position. But what about the period immediately before that, were you considering the possibility of running for an AFSA leadership position later on in your career?

HOLMES: No, while in Burkina Faso I had plenty of other preoccupations (e.g. the first two years of our war with Iraq). It didn't occur to me to get engaged with AFSA then. This was early in the George W. Bush administration and we had Colin Powell as Secretary of State. Colin Powell, from both the Foreign Service and AFSA's perspectives, was the dream Secretary of State, particularly in his first couple of years when he used his rock star status to successfully lobby Congress for huge increases in the State Department's budget, including a big boost in FS intake, a real effort to bring State's IT infrastructure into the 21st century, and to enhance physical security of embassies. All very expensive, multi-year propositions.

Condoleezza Rice, on the other hand, was very much an unknown person to the vast majority of State Department employees when she took office. Everyone knew that she was close to the White House, that she had spent the previous four years as the President's National Security Advisor, and that she had a good personal relationship with him. A much closer personal relationship than Colin Powell had. Thus, we hoped that She would be able to lead the State Department into a fuller integration into the White House's (and Congress's) concept of its national security team. We wanted all this to lead to more adequate budgetary funding. The US military and intelligence agencies received about 95 percent of U.S. national security expenditures during the period of the Iraq war

and the foreign affairs agencies (State and USAID) had become almost budgetary afterthoughts.

It was ironic that the war in Iraq turned the White House's and indeed the Pentagon's expectations of the civilian agencies upside down. In 2003 the war in Iraq caused the White House and then NSC head Condoleezza Rice to demand far more US government civilians to work with the US military there. But diplomatic service in war zones, to the extent it had been permitted, had always been voluntary and the vast majority of American diplomats opposed the war in Iraq. After an initial rush of volunteers for short-term stints there during the first few months after the invasion until the dust settled, there were few who wanted longer term subsequent assignments in Iraq. But from the White House's and military's perspectives this was woefully insufficient. In 2005 Condoleezza Rice became Secretary of State and after a few months she made a well-publicized speech in which he revealed what would become a mantra during her four-year tenure, namely the concept of "expeditionary diplomacy."

Thus began a transition away from normal State Department practice toward a seat-of-the-pants and mainly unplanned scramble to reverse decades to accepted practice in filling positions at war zone posts in particular and more generally at all extreme hardship posts. Not only did State not draw down its personnel in this war zone, it created several new consulates in Iraqi regional capitals and vastly increased head-count in the embassy. It also created a number of "provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), mixed military and civilian groups with State and USAID personnel being important parts of them.

The pressure on State's HR bureau to staff all these newly created positions had been building for two years and they had tried all sorts of creative measures to generate volunteers. Then under Secretary Rice they proposed to AFSA a direct linkage between service in Iraq and subsequent promotions, which AFSA rejected outright. Their idea was that the mere fact of spending a year (less several generous R and R trips home at regular intervals) would warrant a promotion – regardless of the quality of that service. The linkage of promotions to outstanding performance that was the cornerstone of our promotion system would have been destroyed. We foresaw the next step being political appointees being able to hand-pick those who they wanted promoted based on personal loyalty displayed and the employee's willingness to kowtow to them. And very few people were or are aware of just how many mid-level Schedule C political appointees the State Department had been stuffed with over and above the more senior (Deputy Assistant Secretary and above) level appointees that outsiders are generally aware of. Supervisory hierarchies were established in which mid-level political appointees were supervising much more senior FS officers. For my two years at AFSA we asked HR

repeatedly for the number of Schedule C employees there were in the State Department and it never provided an answer. The reason was obviously that the truth would have been very embarrassing to the Department and the White House.

Another significant problem in generating volunteers was how professionally unprepared virtually all State FS personnel were for war zone service. Reports came rolling back from Iraq about what work and life were really like, how one couldn't travel or even get out of the embassy complex, security was smothering, and one could hardly meet Iraqis much less have normal social relations that are so important in doing a normal diplomatic or development job. We in AFSA tried hard to have a balanced approach to the Department's myriad proposals. We understood the pressure they were under, but at the same time we were absolutely determined to not let that pressure undermine completely the idea that our system was a non-political meritocracy. And there was no way we were going to allow the destruction of decades of hard-won rights that AFSA had earned vis-à-vis State Department regulations and practices. This was the situation, and the atmosphere, that I came back from Burkina Faso to in August 2005.

Q: During your time as Ambassador, nevertheless, were you in contact with people who were in Washington and letting you know what was happening with AFSA and AFSA's approaches to this issue of Iraq staffing and pay issues and so on.

HOLMES: Not directly or in any sort of offline communication. AFSA was pretty good about reporting to the field about some of these developments. I didn't have any problem with that. I didn't need to know any AFSA specific details. On the contrary, the perspective I had from a 25 percent hardship post was what AFSA and the Department wanted us to know. We had a fairly small staff that was quite junior. They were mainly first and second tour officers, as many came via HR's junior officer division directed assignments for untenured officers. They tried to balance it out. If you went to a consular job in Europe or someplace considered desirable for your first tour, you were guided to the hardship list for your second. For financial reasons or just a sense of adventure, there were enough who were interested in Ouagadougou. Those people also are the ones most likely to volunteer for the unaccompanied tours. Many were younger and still single, and the salary bonuses were very attractive. Right from the very beginning, the State Department really piled on the incentives. They did everything they could possibly do to entice the volunteers. But I departed Burkina Faso and arrived at AFSA in the normal FS mode, namely I had minimal time to read in and prepare for it. I just jumped in. This pattern is the usual one in the Foreign Service.

Q: Before you ran for the position of AFSA President, what was it that made you decide to run?

HOLMES: I wanted an interesting and challenging follow-on assignment coming out of Burkina Faso. I thought I should have been offered another ambassadorship. With minimal support from Washington I succeeded in transforming our bilateral relationship with that country. Within a few years we were positioning US government air assets there based on my work. But the official articulated position of HR was that the State Department needed these ambassadorships in smaller countries to reward people who had volunteered for Iraq. I think there were about a dozen ambassadors in 2005 leaving African posts at the end of their assignments and we were all told that we were on our own and had to find onward assignments largely without HR's help. Clearly the decision had been made that the State Department's need to be seen rewarding senior level officers for volunteering for Iraq was more important than our need to strengthen regional and substantive expertise and to develop the strongest contingent of senior officers possible.

So I sat tight to see what the outcome would be in the November 2004 presidential election. About a week after I made my decision to pursue the AFSA presidency I got approached to serve in Iraq as the economic minister in Baghdad. In reply I said, "I'm sorry, I've already committed myself." It was a legitimate excuse. But if John Kerry had won the election, I would have probably not run for AFSA president. But with President Bush's reelection there would be no wholesale changeover of administration and thus far fewer interesting possibilities. I didn't want to be an office director again. I had done that. And virtually all of the Deputy Assistant Secretary positions, for which I was eligible, were based on personal connections. I felt like I'd be better off with AFSA. I would have more flexibility and going back and taking my chances with a Bush team that I didn't feel as comfortable with wasn't attractive.

Q: Did John Limbert encourage you or were there others who did?

HOLMES: Not until I initiated contact and expressed cautious interest, which I did completely on my own. John was very encouraging once I contacted him. To my knowledge, I was the only Ambassador-level person who had expressed an interest, so I ran on a slate that my vice presidents and holdovers from the previous AFSA board put together. John emphasized the gravitas of the organization and the profile of the position.

Q: You could hardly choose a better candidate for president of AFSA than someone who had the breadth of your experience, who was an AFSA rep overseas, and had just come from an ambassadorship.

HOLMES: I think that's generally true. I don't know that I ever articulated this at the time, but my attitude was certainly, if push comes to shove, I could take the gloves off if

necessary. I'd already accomplished more in my career than I'd originally expected. And if there were to be any negative career repercussions, I thought I'd be able to land on my feet one way or the other. Indeed that's exactly what happened. I got declared persona non grata by the Department, the soon to be Director General of the FS, Ambassador Harry Thomas, told me in mid-2007. I would have to wait for the next administration in 2009 before I could come in from the cold, he said. I had to go out and find my own follow-on assignment after AFSA, but actually it worked out pretty well. Although things did not work out the way I'd expected, I had gone into AFSA with my eyes open and was prepared to fend for myself afterwards. I then spent two years as the Cyrus Vance Fellow in Diplomatic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City, where I was able to assemble some of my thoughts in a *Foreign Affairs* article titled "Where Are the Civilians" in its January/February 2009 edition.

Q: It is a sad fact that George W. Bush administration, under Condoleezza Rice, created a kind of a seed of distrust that grew into a "fleur du mal" under the Trump Administration that ended up defining the Foreign Service as a part of a disloyal "Deep State" determined to undermine Trump foreign policy.

HOLMES: I think you're not giving sufficient weight to the fact that there was nothing new in this view of the Foreign Service. This was a long-standing Republican approach, probably since the beginning of the Reagan administration. I met Richard Nixon at Anwar Sadat's funeral in Cairo in 1981. He was just lyrical about the Foreign Service and his experience with career State Department people. I think it was the movement conservatives coming in with Ronald Reagan and their subsequent taking over the Republican Party that has been most damaging. Condoleezza Rice was not a movement conservative, but she and particularly those around her, with strong pushing from the neo-conservatives at the White House, tried very hard to politicize the Foreign Service and indeed the civil service government wide. Their distrust just grew deeper and deeper from the 1980s right up through Trump.

Q: Two quick questions that do jump around, but I think are significant for what you just described. The first relates to constructive dissent, which is something you mention in your 2009 Foreign Affairs article. Specifically, during the tenure of Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State, it became almost impossible to award anyone with AFSA's yearly recognition of constructive dissent. In essence, dissent had dried up because officers had a fear of retribution if they submitted even a modest recommendation for change. That would be something AFSA would want to address as part of its mission to protect the professional quality of the Foreign Service.

HOLMES: That's basically true, albeit a broad generalization. The administration just wanted people to shut up and snap to, just do what you're told and don't try to come up with plausible creative alternatives. But more than discouraging dissent, they politicized the Service to an extent not seen since the spoils system. There always have been political assistant secretaries and at least one political deputy assistant secretary (DAS) in every bureau. But under Secretary Rice the number of political appointees was greatly increased in two ways. First, among the higher-level positions, they packed many bureaus with political appointees at just below the level where Senate confirmation is required. These are called Schedule C appointees and their tenure is limited to the president's term. Then there's also an almost invisible layer, historically not big in numbers. These include a number of mid-level Schedule C jobs, as well as the almost unknown Schedule B ones. There's a provision in the law that enables political appointees to get limited appointments at quite a low level. And the Condoleezza Rice group pushed to greatly increase the number of people in both of these categories. It was not unusual under Secretary Rice for political appointees to function as thought police or a political intelligence system. Think of the Communist Party commissars in the Soviet military, something akin to that but unofficial and much less intrusive.

It didn't take long for career officers in both the Foreign and Civil Services to figure out where they were coming from and who they were. In some cases, they basically lorded it over more senior career people who held positions above their rank. There arose a palpable fear of them, which of course created a poisoned atmosphere and stifled dissent. The Middle East Bureau was particularly heavily staffed with them. In other parts of the department less so. So, during this period, the lack of respect and the suspicion by the political appointees of the Department and the career service was a common topic of discussion among officers AFSA had contact with. Things came to be centered on AFSA because it was really the only place people could turn.

Q: The second is a particular event that drives home your point. It happened at the end of your tenure as AFSA president in 2007. There was a department-wide town hall meeting where assignments to Iraq were discussed. A few Foreign Service Officers who were there stood up and said, "Iraq assignments are a death sentence." There was a reporter there who recorded the whole thing and then put it out in the media.

HOLMES: Harry Thomas was the Director General at the time. He led the meeting. It was not long after I finished my AFSA tenure, but as you note it was widely publicized and discussed. I used this incident to open my "Where Are The Civilians?" article in *Foreign Affairs*.

Q: It resulted in a storm of anti-Foreign Service reactions on Capitol Hill and in the media. You indicated that you felt this was a set-up, that there was a desire to demonstrate that Foreign Service officers were not loyal, that they were afraid to take on serious, high-threat jobs, etcetera.

HOLMES: I have no proof that it was a set-up, but it could well have been. The Foreign Service had no expertise in active conflict areas and the State Department none in post-conflict reconstruction. I'm not sure about today, but there was really no training then on how to do work in war zones or in the midst of intense military conflict. USAID often had operated in post-conflict situations with national governments, other donors, and NGOs, but in Iraq there were no credible counterparts.

Basically, the Foreign Service was political cannon fodder because the military was bearing all the burden in Iraq. Of course, it also had virtually all of the money. But they didn't have much expertise or training in post-conflict work either, and the fact is that Iraq in these years had not yet entered the post-conflict stage. Nobody knew what they were doing in Iraq from 2005-2007 in the realm of creating sustainable support for the Iraqi government. We threw tons of money at the problems there and simply hoped that things would work out.

Iraq was a tribalized society and the Shia were dominant. The Foreign Service shouldn't have been there, but there was this political imperative for the White House and Pentagon – and Condoleezza Rice – to greatly increase the US government civilian presence. The US militarily was even less qualified than the Foreign Service and they knew it. They didn't want to be in this business. But most fundamentally, you can't start rebuilding something until the war is over and this war never ended.

Q: We've gotten quite far afield. Let's return to the beginning of your presidency at AFSA. What were the key topics that you needed to address? Please describe the overseas locality pay (OLP) issue that was such a rallying cry for the Foreign Service.

HOLMES: Overseas locality pay was indeed the big issue and had been for years. Congress passed a law in 1990 that carved out a certain percentage every year of the annual salary increase for US government civilian employees. This portion of the annual increase was then apportioned across the United States to essentially top up salaries of employees in high cost areas. The areas with the largest "locality pay" rates were NYC, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, of course. Over the course of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, this premium grew to quite significant levels. But this pay was not a benefit, but rather it was basic pay differentiated based on where one lived in the US. However, when US government civilians got transferred overseas the locality pay

portion of their base pay fell away, leading to not only a sizable decrease in salary, but also this lower base salary was what things like hardship pay and other benefits were based on.

When I arrived in 2005 the unions that represented US government civilian employees had had a conceptual breakthrough with Congress, which legislated a partial fix in 2003 for non-senior level employees, and a second one that a bit earlier took care of the Senior Foreign Service. But FS employees below the senior ranks who were leaving Washington took about a 16% pay cut in addition to the added costs of living outside the US. And each year the locality pay grew by a percentage point or two and thus the size of the penalty our people overseas were subjected to got larger and larger. This was particularly important for people considering retirement because a Foreign Service annuity is based on your salary for the last three years of service. So, if you were serving overseas for your final three years of service, you would take a hit that people serving in Washington would not and that hit would never be made up as one got older.

And a lot of influential people in both houses of Congress were interested in eliminating this problem, but there were only a few Republicans among them. And it wasn't just the Republican White House, but Republicans who controlled congressional committees also opposed it. It became an ideological issue fought under the cover of a simple budget priority mantle. They had an antipathy for government employees in the first place. In their view, government employees were overpaid compared to the wages in Idaho or New Mexico or Mississippi, and almost out of principle, using budget balancing justifications, they prevented Washington locality pay from being paid overseas. And so it became the rallying cry for the entire Foreign Service.

One positive aspect of this campaign was that it revealed just how many excellent relationships we had with members of Congress, from both parties. I had no real understanding of just what high regard the Foreign Service was held in by many key people in Congress. Now, for some, the representatives or senators from Maryland and Virginia or the House members from the Washington area or any place where there were significant numbers of government employees, this was no surprise. But others, for example Senator Richard Lugar, the Republican from Indiana who was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee for a number of years, were very supportive. Also, former AFSA President Tom Boyatt and previous leaders of AFSA had done an excellent job of cultivating and reinforcing good relations with all the key committee members and representatives. AFSA's legislative affairs director at the time, Ken Nakamura, had superb relations with all the key congressional staffers. Ken was instrumental in finally pushing this issue across the goal line.

During my two years, I led two delegations of retired AFSA members, as well as some of my own board members and other interested members who were in Washington, on lobbying visits to Capitol Hill using Foreign Service Day for appropriate timing. We would make appointments and visit Capitol Hill offices to talk about our issues. Invariably overseas locality pay was at the top of our list, followed by adequate financing for not just the State Department but for all of the other Foreign Service agencies as well. We always got very sympathetic hearings and the doors were always open. We did get very frank assessments of the likelihood of being able to get overseas locality pay through, but ultimately we kept adding new straws to the camel's back. It was very unfortunate that the Bush White House had this antipathy for Foreign Service and federal governmental employees in general and was more interested in projecting a balanced budget image to the nation.

At one point in 2004 or 2005 the White House offered us what seemed to be a poison chalice option. They decided that they could kill two birds with one stone by demanding a quid pro quo for the implementation of locality pay. This tradeoff was that the entire Foreign Service would move to a pay for performance remuneration system. This offer never went anywhere, of course, as it would have politicized our system beyond any doubt. During my tenure I kept prompting Secretary Rice to get personally involved in solving this problem. Congressman Frank Wolf told me several times that if she could be personally seen as connected to the issue that would be very persuasive with other Republicans on his committee. But she chose to not engage herself on our behalf. She had a different style of leadership, I guess.

Q: The interesting thing is that the administration proposed that overseas comparability pay be linked to pay-for-performance. A poison pill in a golden chalice. Initially as AFSA president, in your statements in the Foreign Service journal, you were hesitant to oppose it outright and immediately. It was still under consideration. It hadn't been applied yet. But at some point, you changed your mind. What happened there?

HOLMES: There were two reasons to be very circumspect about the Department's offer. The first was to simply examine it in detail so we could both explain it fully to our members, some of whom were more inclined to see the dollar signs first and less likely to understand the tradeoffs. We were cautious to not just blow it out of the water and dismiss it straight away. Secondly, it was our understanding that this proposal came from Clay Johnson, a senior budget official at the White House and a close friend and adviser to George W. Bush. He was very political and ideological. The basic message was that: okay, if you want OCP so much, we have a way for you to get it. We will change our recommendations to Congressional Republicans on all the relevant committees and say that OCP can be paid at the Washington level to overseas civilians, but we want a *quid*

pro quo for that and it is the implementation of a performance pay system at all levels of the Foreign Service.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to see the implications. But this was an offer that needed to be treated as if it were made in good faith and one that we could try to view as a matter of give and take. We had some very good relationships with Republicans on Capitol Hill and we didn't want to burn any bridges. We couldn't afford to offend Republicans who had urged the White House to find a way to implement OCP by just dismissing it out of hand. So we set off a slow evolution of our public position while at the same time working with the undersecretary of management, Henrietta Fore, who had good political connections and truly wanted to find a mutually acceptable solution. We were really trying to get her to walk this back and ultimately we succeeded in unraveling the two issues. But it was a long, hard road.

Q: There was also a fear, with regard to staffing Iraq, that if there were not enough volunteers, the Department would rely on directed assignments, essentially, telling someone to go to Iraq whether they wanted to or not, for national security reasons.

HOLMES: Directed assignments were always a threat. However we took this threat with a grain of salt because we knew that for domestic political reasons, in terms of all the dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq throughout the United States, that the White House could not afford to be seen putting a gun to diplomats' heads and forcing them to the war zone of a war they did not support. That would have among other things revealed a depth of antipathy toward our Iraq policy among the career professionals that would have been a real embarrassment. The potential for a huge political fiasco for the White House meant that they just couldn't risk it. But the State Department did have the statutory power to invoke directed assignments, there was never any question about that.

My biggest concern about this, which was also my biggest fear during my entire two years, was that the White House would try to use AFSA opposition to many of the State Department's Iraq staffing proposals as a pretext to decertify AFSA as the Foreign Service's exclusive bargaining agent, i.e. the FS union. This was their ultimate weapon, the equivalent of going nuclear. There would have been a hue and cry from many in Congress, but not everywhere. There were a lot of anti-union people in the US government, and particularly in Congress. We just had to tread carefully so that we didn't go over the line too far. AFSA has a team of excellent lawyers and has an excellent institutional memory. We knew that we had the legal means to stop many of the Department's more objectionable proposals. And basically, they knew it as well. The reason is that there is a long history of legal cases that establish AFSA's bargaining rights. AFSA doesn't decide and State management doesn't always have to take us into

consideration. But they do have to negotiate with us on many institutional issues and they do have to be seen as negotiating in good faith. We were able to use this. There was no controversy about most issues, but this right to negotiate was such a fundamental issue for AFSA that we felt that we could not jeopardize it by not cooperating at all on Iraq staffing issues.

Overseas comparability pay didn't have the same political sensitivity as Iraq staffing. The State Department wanted to link promotion to service in Iraq. We told them that promotions were based on basic precepts that were occasionally adjusted and were published every year – and are negotiated with AFSA. We had negotiated many such agreements with the State Department and the precepts of promotion always focus on performance. And there were lots of people in FS, people in Iraq who weren't doing very much, mainly sitting around and hunkering down, trying to survive until their year was up and they'd ticked that box. It didn't make any sense to us to just say "if you volunteer, you get promoted." But we were forced to compromise and acknowledge that there was some sentiment within the Foreign Service that we should really maximize everything that could be gotten for the people who did volunteer. So we tried to find the fine line between enhancing those incentives as much as we could without undermining the credibility of the system.

Q: In your Foreign Affairs article of 2009, you mention that eventually all 327 State Department Iraq positions were filled. However, even that was not enough. A GAO (Government Accountability Office) audit of the personnel in Iraq found that the DOD (Department of Defense), which had the lion's share of the budget to run the Iraq activities, hired 862 Schedule C political appointees. These were often young or inexperienced employees chosen for their loyalty to the Republican Party, and not for previous international service or expertise in the work of nation-building. Many career officers I've interviewed found it difficult to both carry out their assigned jobs and clear their actions with these Schedule C appointees. Moreover, GAO found that 263 of them were hired, essentially illegally, because there was no audit trail of their hiring, their pay and so on. It was really a mess for a long time in terms of staffing, even beyond what the State Department was doing. You note in your article that even after the State Department filled all its staffing targets in Iraq, there was still a gigantic need for more.

HOLMES: When you've got such a decrease in quality, you try to make up for that by increasing the quantity. I don't think it was anything more than that. And the other thing is, even though the State Department and USAID managed to fill the Iraq positions, it did not benefit from taking on new hires to back fill positions around the world that were left vacant. This was called the "float" – having enough officers to staff all required positions so that all personnel can temporarily get training, use annual and sick leave, and so that

management can staff unexpected needs like Iraq. During this whole period, the foreign affairs budget hardly increased. This meant the military was forced to take on many jobs that it did not have trained people for. There was a book that I mentioned in my article written by the Washington Post Iraq correspondent Rajiv Chandraseka. It was titled *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside the Green Zone*. He talked about Jerry Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority and how the young Republican party members worked on policies that were not what you would typically expect in getting a country on its feet. Things like installing a flat tax of 8% and setting up a private medical system rather than one run by the state. These people arrived with right-wing ideology, not experience or expertise.

Q: You also mention in your Foreign Affairs article the refusal of management to take on new hires to give the State Department enough personnel to do the jobs required by Congress and the administration in other parts of the world.

HOLMES: Those 329 positions weren't new positions. They were positions that were clawed out of the 250 Foreign Service posts around the world. The European Bureau, for example, which in the 1990s had to get lots of new positions to establish proper relations with all the new countries that emerged after the Cold War, were stripped of many positions to staff the embassy in Baghdad or Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Teams. That was because Congress wasn't providing the money. The answer to your question depends on what you want the Foreign Service to do. There has never been a clear answer to that. In some cases, it's very clear, for example in providing consular services. But for political, economic, and public affairs sections, it's very much based on local decisions made by the ambassador and post management. So, if you want 329 new Foreign Service positions in Iraq, it won't come from fat, it will come from muscle. It's just common sense. I don't view this as anything new in principle. This had gone on before. It's just that with Iraq the size of the cuts in staff was considerably larger than in other moments in history.

Q: Another topic that you raise is Condoleezza Rice's 2005 speech in Georgetown, where she outlined her view of the Foreign Service. She saw it as administering programs. She criticized the Foreign Service for being passive observers of what was going on in the field and said that they needed to be far more active. How did you and AFSA regard this policy?

HOLMES: It was just a hatchet job. It was contrived. She was looking for a foil, a label, and a catchy phrase. I'm not sure where it came from, but she came up with "transformational diplomacy." In my first meeting with her, which must have been in September 2005, I introduced myself and we talked a little bit about my background.

Basically, I said, what you characterize as transformational diplomacy is something I've been doing for the past twenty years. She just smiled and didn't respond verbally. She didn't want to have a substantive discussion and had no interest in my views about how to move ahead in the direction she wanted.

Condoleezza Rice had four years as National Security Adviser before she came to State. She had tremendous respect for and a real affinity for the military in spite of the turf battles she had with Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld. I'm not sure why, but her attitude bordered on contempt for the Foreign Service. I don't think she ever really knew what most Foreign Service officers did overseas. I am not aware that she ever had any personal experience or interaction with the Foreign Service that would have led her to this negative view of the career service. And I was with her several times at various events, like Foreign Service Day when we dedicated the inscription of new names on the memorial plaque of State Department people who died overseas in the service of their country. She just didn't seem to like us, and it was a gut feeling, you could read it. She was never relaxed. She never sought out the Foreign Service that I was aware of beyond members of her immediate staff.

To return for a moment to the Georgetown speech, she did mention that she would seek additional personnel from Congress. Whatever she asked for, and whatever Congress eventually provided, was far below the need. We still faced huge staffing gaps in early 2009 when Rice left. Although Congress did increase hiring in 2009 and 2010 by 17%, these new hires would not have the experience needed for mid-level work, which most of the positions shifted to Iraq were. In 2012, the GAO found that, "...28 percent of overseas Foreign Service positions were either vacant or filled by up-stretch candidates—officers serving in positions above their grade—as of October 2011, a percentage that has not changed since 2008. Midlevel positions represent the largest share of these gaps. According to State officials, the gaps have not diminished because State increased the total number of overseas positions in response to increased needs and emerging priorities. State officials noted the Department takes special measures to fill high-priority positions, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan." But then again, Condoleezza Rice never showed any real interest in increasing overall FS staffing, only in shifting a much larger percentage of it to her war zone.

Q: Also in the 2005-2007 period, AFSA would continue to advocate for the needs of spouses and families. How did AFSA engage in these issues during your presidency?

HOLMES: There was never any controversy or disagreement with management about that. This support for Foreign Service families has been a continuous priority articulated as such going far back before my presidency of AFSA, and will always continue to be. I

believe that management gives the issue the same priority AFSA does. The only significant issue in many of the specific measures proposed was their budget cost, although sometimes agreements with host countries also had to be worked out. I mean, it's just motherhood, apple pie, and baseball.

Also, it is extremely important to note that, like American society writ large, the Foreign Service has changed greatly since the early 1970s. The percentage of officers or specialists who have a traditional nuclear family is a lot smaller than it used to be. There are now lots of single parents, same-sex marriages and partnerships, and a much broader age range of new entrants. These changes have combined with the more recent increase in severe hardship posts. To clarify, hardship posts can be defined as remote, unhealthful, high-threat because of crime, terrorism, or civil conflict, or a combination of all of these, as well as the more traditional burdens of poverty, isolation, and unhealthful living conditions and poor local medical care. With the changes in assignment rules after Condoleezza Rice became Secretary of State in 2005, State FS employees had to fulfill their “fair share” of staffing one of these posts every eight years or so. Moreover, many of these hardship posts were “unaccompanied,” which meant that one could not bring spouses or dependent children. What was a single parent to do? It was simply too difficult and dangerous to have them with you. AFSA was quite limited in what it could do to ameliorate these changes, other than to maintain its dialogue with management and serve as a mouthpiece for Foreign Service members.

I would also like to highlight the extremely helpful roles played by the Community Liaison Officer program (originally called the Family Liaison Officer, but changed in response to the changes in the Foreign Service’s demographic profile noted above), and the individuals who served as CLOs and FLOs. There was a systematic world-wide effort to expand the CLO program over many years, increasing not only the number of such positions but also the number of hours they could work. The FLOs or CLOs not only provided guidance for where to shop and how to enjoy the country, they helped identify safe housing, good schools, sources of special needs services, and were part of all emergency and evacuation planning. It’s a role that grew to include many aspects of life and was usually filled by a spouse.

Q: Moving on, as president of AFSA, you had a board of vice presidents representing each foreign affairs agency. How did you interact with them?

HOLMES: Quite collaboratively but not particularly closely. By and large I followed the standard AFSA practice of having the VPs of each FS agency handle AFSA related issues with his/her own agency and having the AFSA President available to weigh in as they believed most effective. In practical terms that meant that probably 80 plus percent of the

time I spent on other FS agency issues was devoted to USAID. This reflects, I think, both the relatively large number of AFSA members at USAID, as well as my own background in which there had been a USAID mission at virtually every post I had served at and thus I was quite familiar with both USAID issues and its leadership. Moreover, the USAID vice president was a full-time position with an office and small staff in the Ronald Reagan building, so they were very well positioned to deal with virtually all of the agency specific issues that arose.

The Vice President at the Commerce Department worked half time for AFSA and did a regular job half the time. At the other agencies all the AFSA VPs did their AFSA work on their own time.

I should also point out that all of the FS agencies faced the same challenges at the macro level. They had personnel and assignment systems that were not as transparent or efficient as the State Departments. For example, in the 1990s USAID suffered a reduction in force as part of the foreign affairs budget-cutting “peace dividend.” Then, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the foreign assistance budget for project work increased significantly, but it had fewer people to run those projects and spend that money than they had had 10 or 12 years earlier. And that was absurd. I worked both the Bush administration and Capitol Hill practically unceasingly and a whole lot of our legislative outreach dealt with adequately funding USAID. But I'm not talking about program money, I am talking about personnel, administration, and operating costs.

Q: You mentioned your initial meetings with Condoleezza Rice. Were there other meetings with top State Department officials that also stay in your mind, that are demonstrative of what you were dealing with during your presidency?

HOLMES: There were weekly meetings between AFSA and senior officials (deputy assistant secretary and office director level) of the Department's Human Resources (HR) bureau. Sometimes I attended these but the AFSA Vice President for the State Department, who was Steven Kashkett during my time, was our main interlocutor and set our agenda. We took up individual specific cases at these, as well as went over the gamut of topical issues. Relations between us were usually quite friendly and constructive.

By way of background to AFSA-HR engagement, I'd mention that in the months before I became President in August, 2005 there had been several high-profile disputes that had become bitter and public. During my first few weeks in the job I came to realize just how much the State Department wanted to be seen as working hand-in-hand with AFSA and having AFSA's blessing on the host issues that were being undertaken by the Department as it was trying to come to grips with the recent marked changes in the administration's

views of the role of diplomats in support of U.S. national security and foreign policy. Senior State Department officials knew that having AFSA support if not co-sponsorship would make general acceptance throughout the FS much easier. This was a particular priority of Undersecretary for Management Henrietta Fore.

I met with the Director General regularly but not frequently, and I also met once or twice with the deputy secretary of state, most State Department undersecretaries, and the heads of the other Foreign Service agencies for which AFSA was the exclusive bargaining agent. The new Director General, Ambassador George Staples, who came on board several months into my tenure in the late fall of 2005, had been my DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] for three years when we were in Zimbabwe 10 years earlier. He was hand-picked by Condoleezza Rice. We knew each other well and worked closely together on a number of issues. However, there were other issues in which an initiative or a decision came directly from Secretary Rice or the White House, giving him little flexibility in diverging from the party line. Ultimately, as I understood it, the two of them had a major disagreement on how to get to the staffing levels she wanted at our missions in Iraq, and thus he departed abruptly and retired not long thereafter. He had been trying to walk a fine line and, I think, to do the best he could. But it wasn't enough. He was succeeded by Ambassador Harry Thomas, who arrived shortly after my tenure ended.

Q: What about your interactions with the rest of the AFSA staff? Once again, were there any that really stand out as important as examples of how the organization developed?

HOLMES: I had an excellent 25 person staff at AFSA and there were no problems with any of them. I had a great relationship with Executive Director Susan Reardon, who for most of my tenure was in charge and who adeptly led these employees. They were all dedicated and energetic. I attributed their sustained excellent performance overwhelmingly to Susan's expert and gifted management.

Q: I meant perhaps more with the vice presidents representing the various agencies.

Not with the vice presidents of the other FS agencies, but there were a few other members of the Governing Board, who did not represent particular constituencies, with whom problems arose. But you are obviously referring to the hullabaloo over the assignment to the position of head of the newly created Brussels public diplomacy hub. This issue came storming up in the late winter of 2007. By that time I had become fed up with how the State Department's leadership dealt with both AFSA generally and me personally. On this one issue in particular I decided the only way to deal with a conspiracy of outright lies and systemic manipulation by State Department management was to go public with our case and reveal the State Department's blatant breaking of not

only its own rules but also the thrust of its public calls to respond to the needs of the Foreign Service in Iraq war-related assignments. I'm talking about blatant lies about both personnel decisions and the processes behind those decisions.

Q: The director of the Brussels hub was basically a public diplomacy job. The hope was that it could provide public affairs guidance more quickly to European posts since it was in their time zone. But instead of a seasoned career officer, the Department assigned a political appointee.

HOLMES: It did. They contrived a search process, but there was nothing to it. The Department didn't advertise the position and didn't try to recruit from within the Foreign Service. It just appeared on the Open Assignments list one day and two weeks later it had disappeared. The Human Resources leadership told us that they had contacted several qualified senior Foreign Service officers, but no one was interested. This turned out to be an absolute lie, which we learned when we followed up and contacted several of those officers, all of whom told us that no one had ever approached them about the job. The Department, led by the PDAS working for the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, was a close friend of the mid-level Schedule C civil service employee who got the job. This civil service employee also happened to be the wife of a prominent neoconservative "terrorism expert" who was well-connected in Washington. This job was wired even before it was created.

They, and I'm talking about a number of quite senior career FS officers in more than one bureau, simply lied. The Human Relations Bureau had manipulated the personnel system to achieve its desired outcome. This was far from the first time, of course, but what made this case so exceptional was that this position had such a high profile. It was a proud achievement of Secretary Rice's team, which trumpeted it. But all of the sudden we started getting heads-up messages from several different quarters, both in the department and from overseas, from seasoned officers involved in the process who came to AFSA because they were so appalled by what they saw happening. So we had firsthand information, eyewitness testimony. When we first raised the issue with the director general's senior staff they began by dissembling. Shortly thereafter they began to spin an obviously false narrative of how and why this assignment took place. The more we asked for details the more spurious their answers became.

After going back and forth with the Department for several weeks we reached a stalemate. The AFSA board unanimously decided to file an institutional grievance against the State Department and quickly did so. But the Department did not feel sufficiently threatened by this, as grievances tend to be low-key, often legalistic processes that move slowly and attract little attention. Because the Department's behavior was so egregious

and because we had proof and no doubt that we were correct, I was inclined to go public about this case and the Department's actions. I was certain that going public was the only thing that would get the Department to back down, which was the solution the AFSA board wanted. But there were three other leading board members who didn't want to go that far. They argued that they were not comfortable being what they considered to be so confrontational and wanted to pursue some quiet, behind the scenes lobbying to get the Department to relent. So I agreed to hold off for a while.

But nothing happened. After a couple of weeks I decided that this had gone on long enough and that I would no longer tolerate the blizzard of lies. So I sent out a telegram that went to all AFSA members, something that I had done on a number of occasions and issues in the first 20 or so months of my tenure, which explained the disagreement and the impasse. A day or two later it ended up in the Washington Post, which took particular pleasure in my use of the word "unfathomable" to characterize the Department's assignment decision. I did find it unfathomable (and bone-headed, politically tone-deaf, and counter-productive to its own goals) that at a time when the Department was trying to reward people who volunteered for Iraq, they took this high-profile senior position in Brussels and gave it to an unqualified mid-level non-FS political appointee. Someone who had been in Brussels to look at housing before the position was even put on the Open Assignments list.

My sending that telegram caused a breakdown in my relations with the governing board's Secretary, Tex Harris, and its Treasurer, Andrew Winter. State VP Steve Kashkett wasn't happy either, but sat more on the fence at this point. He was aware that my ultimate successor, John Naland, had already sounded out Harris and Winter about forming a joint election ticket with him to oppose my reelection later that spring. At this point, though, it was not yet clear where the chips would fall and Steve wanted to keep all of his options open. But the disagreement did lead to Harris and Winter breaking their previous commitments to me and abandoning my intended reelection slate. Then I ran for reelection as an independent, opposed by John Naland who had a slate of vice presidents running with him. It would be difficult to win without my own slate, but I had committed myself to continuing and I did not have any plan B about what would happen when I lost.

But let me conclude this long answer to your question by relating how the issue got resolved. A couple of months later I got a phone call on my direct line from George Staples, the Director General of the Foreign Service. He was almost gleeful on the phone and said that he wanted to be the first person to tell me that the Department had reassessed the situation and decided to break the Brussels PD hub assignment that it had made several months earlier. He congratulated me on AFSA's big win. My understanding subsequently was that the Department had been following closely as the AFSA grievance

over the assignment wound its way through the adjudication process and it realized that it had zero chance of winning. The evidence against it was overwhelming, just as I had told him and others repeatedly months before. So the Department decided to get ahead of the issue and publically announce that it was pleased to have finally come to agreement with AFSA on this issue.

Q: Similarly, you had a few DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] posts, that you also insisted should be filled by career Foreign Service Officers.

HOLMES: Yes, that is true, For AFSA this is an article of faith, as well as something articulated in the Foreign Service Act of 1980. But such assignments of outsiders to DCM jobs were not unique to the State Department under Secretary Rice. She got off to a particularly bad start, however, months before I began at AFSA by putting into very senior positions three mid-level FSOs who had worked on her staff at the National Security Council during President Bush's first term. She came in with the idea that she could choose whoever she wanted for any job she wanted, without regard to State Department rules and systems. My predecessor, John Limbert, and his VP for the State Department, Louise Crane, made a big public deal out of this both because it was so blatant and because it set a horrible precedent (as can be seen by the Brussels public diplomacy hub case described in the paragraphs above). I merely kept the fires burning for another couple of months, which definitely did not please the State Department leadership.

Regarding non-FSOs assigned to DCM positions, I don't remember any that were nearly as blatant as the PD hub in Brussels. They put a career *civil* servant in Baghdad as DCM. He had excellent credentials and lots of experience in Iraq. So we had an internal discussion in which we basically agreed that what was offensive was just the fact that he wasn't a Foreign Service Officer. So we warned HR that while we didn't intend to oppose this one, they should not take our passive reaction now as one that we would have vis-à-vis possible such assignments in the future. And then they make this egregious assignment to Brussels of someone who wasn't even a senior level person in her Schedule C position and had little if any managerial experience.

Q: I have come to the end of the questions that I have for you, but would you like to sum up your AFSA presidency from the vantage point of 2022?

HOLMES: My overall goal during my time was that I wanted, in this politicized environment, to safeguard the core institutions of Foreign Service and to preserve it despite its flaws. It definitely has some flaws. It nominally is a meritocracy. But it is a

system run by real people and deals with the lives of real people. Those who work in it have real power and the temptations as well as the pressures to abuse the system are always there. But the bottom line is that the system has functioned reasonably well for a century, during which American society and American culture and legal structures have undergone tremendous change.

I thought things were pretty bad during my 2007-2009 tenure. But since then the State Department and the Foreign Service have been subjected to much worse. They have survived the trauma of the Trump years, incompetent secretaries of state and other top political appointees, and the increasing politicization of all of our government institutions. This politicization has become the rule rather than the exception. I hope that the career members of the FS will be able to ensure that it survives. I'm not tremendously optimistic that it will. But AFSA plays a very important role. I wish it well. I'm a lifetime member and at the end of my two years at AFSA and after almost 35 years in the Foreign Service I am pleased with what I was able to contribute in the interests of the United States and its national security, as well as to AFSA.

So I would like to conclude this interview with a thought about the nature of the AFSA president's role. Based on what I experienced in my two years I believe strongly that AFSA as an institution and the presidency as a role are best served by someone who has had a fairly long and successful career. It is best to have someone who is in the Senior Foreign Service, has been an ambassador, and has made Minister Counselor or higher in personal FS rank. I saw a lot of hesitation, second guessing, pulling of punches, and ass-kissing, all for fear that their AFSA roles could compromise their onward assignment chances or damage their relations with senior State Department officials who might have influence over them in the future. It is one thing to be thoughtful, measured, and open-minded in pursuing AFSA interests. But one has to be able to stand one's ground.

Q: It sounds like this is a good place to terminate our interview. On behalf of both AFSA and ADST, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your legacy of service to AFSA.

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