

Taking Risks in Diplomacy: Finding the Right Balance

By: Margalit Murray

Counterterrorism and Public Policy Fellow

Sanford School of Public Policy

Duke University

Mentor: Dr. Corinne Krupp

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Per U.S. Department of State 3 FAM 4170, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and not necessarily those of the United States Government.

Introduction

What are acceptable risks? Society and individuals grapple with this question in every aspect of our lives. Risk is defined as “the effect of uncertainty on objectives,¹ or “anything that has the potential to negatively (threats) or positively (opportunities) impact the...capability to achieve objectives.”² In order to offset the negative aspects of risk, we insure our bodies, our lives, our homes, our vehicles, our pets, our mortgages, and even small purchases of electronics. We live in a constant state of risk identification, analysis, assessment and then either risk taking or risk aversion. Even after taking risks, we seek to mitigate the probability that a negative outcome occurs instead of the desired positive one. The world of diplomacy is no different. Diplomats face unique risks overseas to their personal safety, but the same process occurs: identification, analysis, assessment and then a decision to either take or not take risk.

Diplomats obviously do not conduct their craft purely as individuals. They belong to organizations, and these organizations create norms and rules under which risks are taken. This can be referred to as risk culture, and this culture develops over time, influenced by endogenous and exogenous factors. Some people or organizations take more risks, and others prefer to avoid them. Some assume risky behavior such as base jumping or mining for oil in dangerous areas. Others will never partake of these endeavors, preferring to minimize the chance of physical harm or financial loss. Risk can apply to physical, emotional, financial, political and psychological acts.

In this study, I focus on the physical security risks that diplomats and the U.S. Department of State (State Department) take on a daily basis in the conduct of diplomacy overseas. These are negative risks to personal safety and to the secureness of diplomatic physical structures such as embassies, consulates and other diplomatic facilities. As this paper seeks to understand the dynamics at play between risk and the conduct of diplomacy, I primarily concentrate on those negative risks to physical security that diplomats face during their day-to-day work. The State Department faces risk in many aspects of its business—information, cyber, public relations, political—but none are as prescient or critical as the physical risks taken daily by practicing diplomats. The loss of life or injury to a diplomat is not only a personal safety matter, it is a political one, with political consequences, as history has shown. However, taking risks is an inherent part of diplomacy, especially for a global power with diplomatic presence in almost every country in the world, dangerous or not.

In the last two decades, the State Department, via legislative requirement or internal policy decisions, instituted higher risk mitigation standards that have impacted the ability of diplomats to freely conduct their work. From limiting diplomats’ movements to closing embassies during dangerous times, the State Department approached risk at times in a counterintuitive manner—fleeing from risks in some areas yet taking greater risks in others. Critics of the State Department opined that by avoiding risks and reducing risk tolerance, the State Department was losing its effectiveness. Various Members of Congress, former Foreign

¹ ISO Guide 73:2009

² 2 FAM 030

Service employees, and foreign policy organizations have called upon Congress to ease risk mitigation legislative requirements and for the State Department to adopt a higher tolerance for risk. Others oppose such moves, advocating for less high-risk diplomatic engagement, assuming the State Department would still be able to achieve foreign policy goals with a less risk-taking culture.

This study seeks to answer this question: Is the State Department assuming the appropriate balance of risk in order to achieve its foreign policy goals? I approach this question by understanding and quantifying the sentiments of the Foreign Service itself on issues of risk tolerance, risk mitigation and security restrictions, and how these all impact the ability of the Foreign Service to achieve day-to-day operations and accomplish strategic goals. Through understanding the sentiments of the very people who take these risks to their physical safety, and comprise the organization which manages and mitigates these risks, I have started to answer my thesis question.

Overall, I find that while the State Department is protecting Foreign Service employees and mitigating risk well, it is not balancing risk appropriately to achieve its foreign policy goals, mostly in high and critical threat environments. I also conclude that risk tolerance and risk acceptance is not homogeneous throughout the State Department, often differing by gender, career type and length of service. Most importantly, there is no consistent senior-level guidance on risk tolerance and no consistent application of risk calculation policies in the field that combine both *negative* and *positive* aspects of risk.

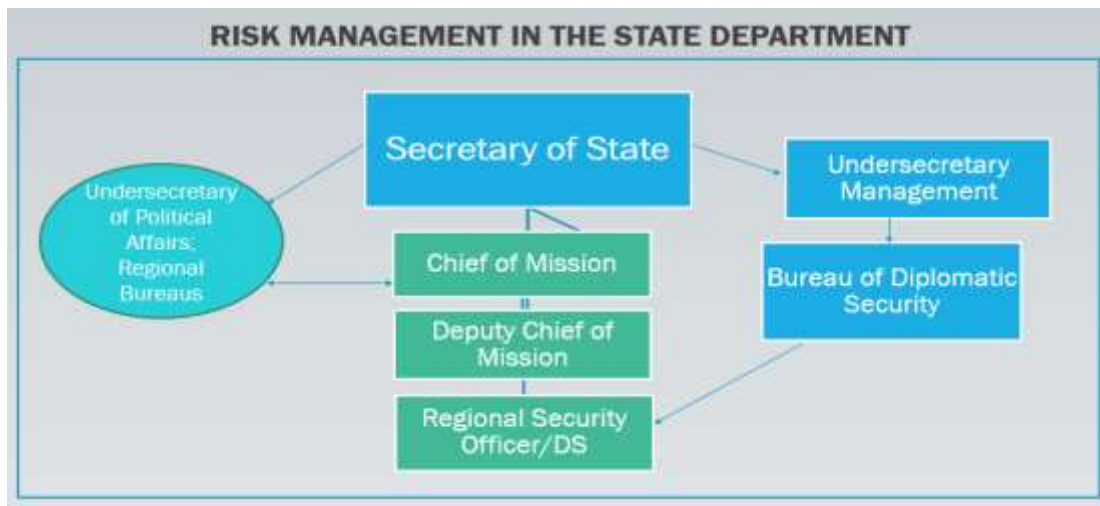
In conducting this research, I incorporated the use of literature and historical reviews, a survey of active Foreign Service employees, and structured interviews of senior leaders in the Foreign Service. In Section I, I outline the State Department's risk management apparatus. In Section II, I briefly dive into the histories of three major attacks against State Department facilities and personnel that led to a shift in the State Department's risk paradigm. In Section III, I provide an overview of my survey of Foreign Service employees and the structured interviews with Foreign Service leaders (ambassadors (AMB), deputy chiefs of mission (DCM) and regional security officers (RSO)). In Section IV, I review and analyze the results of the information gleaned from both the structured interviews and the survey of Foreign Service employees, juxtaposed against historical and theoretical concepts. In the final section, I provide conclusions and policy recommendations for the State Department on how it may improve its risk analysis, assessment and decisions of how and when to assume more risk.

Section I: Risk Management at the State Department

Several major terrorist attacks in the last three decades on State Department facilities overseas have led to substantial changes in legislative requirements and internal policies on risk mitigation. Before delving into this history, it is important to briefly outline the risk management structure in the State Department.

The Secretary of State has security responsibility for all Department employees, domestic and overseas.³ At an overseas U.S. diplomatic mission (post), this responsibility extends to all U.S. government employees, family members, and contract employees. The Secretary of State delegates risk assessment and risk management responsibility to the Undersecretary for Management, who generally delegates that authority to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS). At the post level, the Secretary of State delegates security responsibility to the Ambassador or Charge d’Affairs. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) assumes much of this responsibility, as they generally manage much of post’s day-to-day operations. The Regional Security Officer (RSO) is a DS special agent with law enforcement authority. The RSO, as an extension of the DS bureau, is generally in charge of managing all risk assessment and mitigation portfolios at post. While not specifically involved in risk management, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, and other functional bureaus, craft policies for diplomatic engagement that will require risk mitigation and assessment interventions. (See below graphic and Appendix 3 for State Department Organizational Chart).

Figure 1: Author’s representation of risk management structure in the State Department



Up until 2020, the Department did not have an official policy or guidance on risk. Through a collaborative effort involving staff for the Undersecretary of Management and DS, the State Department recently published a section in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) that provides definitions involving risk and establishes the process and structure for setting risk tolerance levels.⁴ Notably, the Department adopted a newer definition of risk, accounting for gains and losses in decisions about risk. Section 2 FAM 032.5 defines risk as, “...(A)nything that has the potential to negatively (threats) or positively (opportunities) impact the Department's capability to achieve objectives.” Risk tolerance is defined as, “The acceptable level of variance

³ The State Department workforce is comprised of the Foreign Service, the Civil Service, contract personnel, locally engaged staff (LES), and eligible family members (EFMs). This study focuses on Foreign Service employees. Within the Foreign Service, there are generalists and specialists. Foreign Service generalists do not need preexisting skills and experience prior to entry and are structured into five cones: consular, public diplomacy, political, economic and management. Foreign Service Specialists require skilled knowledge or experience prior to hiring, such as medical, engineers, information security, and security/law enforcement. DS, the law enforcement and security branch of the State Department, is the largest specialist group.

⁴ 2 FAM 030-Enterprise Risk Management

in performance relative to the achievement of objectives. It is generally established at the program, objective, or component level.”⁵ There is no definition provided in the FAM for risk mitigation, but the two definitions for risk management and risk response cover the concept that risk mitigation is the process of developing options and actions to enhance opportunities and reduce threats to project objectives. This includes risk response, which is the action taken to manage the risk through acceptance, reduction, sharing and/or avoidance.⁶

Most importantly, this new guidance mandates that the Secretary of State set the risk tolerance and risk appetite levels for the entire State Department. In Section 2 FAM 030, the Department states, “The Secretary sets the risk appetite and risk tolerance levels and communicates them to staff. Department leadership must, within their areas of responsibility, set guidelines for risk tolerance and communicate it clearly to staff. Staff should make management aware when risk cannot be mitigated within the tolerance level.”⁷ It also authorized ambassadors to set the risk tolerance level for their posts. The FAM section encourages State Department leaders to work within existing risk management structures authorized by executive branch policy and previous legal authorities. This includes a diverse array of standards for cyber security, physical security, background investigations, medical clearances, crisis preparedness, border security, construction security and more. For the mitigation of risk to physical safety, the State Department relies on processes including determining the threat level of a diplomatic post, whether the post should open or close, physical security standards and waivers to those standards, security directives and changes to those directives, emergency action plans at the post level, and many more.

However, there are two issues that arise from this policy. First, there is no clear guidance on how and who will be specifically required to conduct risk calculations. Second, the section encourages different Department leaders to each pursue risk management for their own bureau/area of responsibility. This allows for highly varying attitudes and approaches to risk, dependent on the bureau and the person in charge. Lastly, while the FAM states that the Secretary of State will set risk tolerance for the State Department, it does not include information on when, how, and how often she or he will do so.

Section II: Changing Risk Paradigms Following Terrorist Attacks

Stories of diplomatic engagement from Foreign Service employees who served decades ago often sound fantastic and dangerous. Diplomats and their families served at embassies and conducted diplomatic engagement with seemingly little to no risk mitigation. This changed in the aftermath of three major terrorist attacks in U.S. diplomatic facilities in the last four decades.

⁵ 2 FAM 32.5

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 2 FAM 032.4

Bombing Attack on U.S. Embassy Beirut, 1983

Up until that time, risk management and security operations were conducted by the Security Office in the Department with very little organizational or decision-making power. This changed greatly after the terrorist attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. Hizballah-controlled Islamic Jihad carried out the attack.⁸ Sixty-three (63) people were killed in the explosion—32 Lebanese local embassy staff, 17 American diplomats and 14 civilian bystanders.⁹ ¹⁰ Following the attack, the State Department convened the Advisory Panel on Overseas Security to provide an assessment and recommendations. The Inman Report (or formally the Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security) named after Bobby Inman who chaired the panel, provided a series of security recommendations to the State Department.¹¹ Congress adopted one of the most significant recommendations and passed legislation authorizing the formation of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) in the State Department.¹² DS would have responsibility for security and law enforcement matters in the Department.

The Inman Report recommended changes in physical security standards for embassies and consulates, which led to a sweeping overhaul and replacement of older diplomatic facilities that could not meet these requirements. The Inman report identified 126 State Department diplomatic facilities overseas that needed replacement or significant upgrades. The report also recommended that another 210 facilities belonging to the United States Information Agency (which was subsumed into the State Department in 1999), the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) either receive physical security upgrades or be collocated within a State Department's diplomatic facility.¹³ The result of this report led to what are often called Inman embassies—hardened structures with a significant setback, often outside of the city center. As with any significant program, the State Department hired additional personnel and Congress appropriated a much larger construction and security budget for the State Department.

In addition to the Inman report recommendations, Congress also created a legislative requirement for the State Department to convene an external Accountability Review Board (ARB) for each incident overseas that resulted in the loss of life or grave injury to U.S. government personnel or significant damage to a diplomatic facility.¹⁴ Unlike other agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency or the Department of Defense who convened internal accountability review boards or panels, the State Department now legally faced an external

⁸ Pearson, Erica, "1983 United States Embassy bombing," Britannica, Last updated April 20, 2021. Accessed on May 1, 2021 at <https://www.britannica.com/event/1983-United-States-embassy-bombing>

⁹ Wikipedia

¹⁰ Terrorists also attacked the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks with a large-scale vehicle bomb within the same time frame. The attacks prompted the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Lebanon.

¹¹ The Inman Report, Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, June 1985, accessed on March 1, 2021 at <https://fas.org/irp/threat/inman/part12.htm>.

¹² Public Law No: 99-399; Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Anti-Terrorism Act of 1986; August 27, 1986, accessed on November 12, 2021 at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg853.pdf#page=45>.

¹³ The Inman Report, Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, June 1985, accessed on March 1, 2021 at <https://fas.org/irp/threat/inman/part12.htm>.

¹⁴ Public Law No: 99-399; Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Anti-Terrorism Act of 1986; August 27, 1986, accessed on November 12, 2021 at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg853.pdf#page=45>.

process of review, assessment and determination of accountability for each security incident resulting in harm—whether to personnel or property, and regardless of the cause of that harm.

The tragic Beirut bombings of the U.S. Embassy and the Marine Corps Barracks, the Inman report, the creation of DS within the State Department, an increased budget for security, and the requirement for an external ARB signified a new paradigm for risk-taking or risk tolerance in diplomatic engagement: one that prioritized a much stronger focus on risk mitigation than in previous decades.

Bombing Attacks of U.S. Embassies Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam

In 1998, al-Qaeda terrorists attacked two U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam with large vehicle-borne bombs. The attacks resulted in 224 deaths and over 4000 injured, mostly in Nairobi. Kenyans and Tanzanians comprised the majority of the victims. 12 American embassy staff died in total. The bombing destroyed major portions of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, which was subsequently rebuilt entirely in another location. The U.S. Embassy in Tanzania required significant reconstruction.¹⁵

Per the 1986 DS Omnibus Act, the Secretary of State convened an ARB. The ARB for the bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania released its report in 1999. In its findings, the panel found there was no dereliction of duty by any State Department officials, but that overall, the Department failed to understand the threat posed by global jihadist terrorism. The panel also found that the State Department met security standards to “only the maximum extent feasible” which led to a high number of waivers to these standards.¹⁶ The panel also slammed Congress, as well as the National Security Council, the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget for failing to properly allocate resources for security. This led to Congress swiftly authorizing an additional \$1 billion supplemental funding for embassy physical security upgrades.

As in its findings, the panel’s recommendations focused on physical security standards and policies and procedures for security, threat assessment and reporting. This led to the adoption of more physical security standards, an increase in personnel and training for DS, and a focus on global terrorism as an overarching threat to all diplomatic facilities. The panel included other security recommendations such as the need for increased demarches¹⁷ to foreign governments to remind them of their security responsibilities to protect U.S. diplomatic facilities. Finally, the panel recommended a ten-year plan to reconstruct or provide physical security upgrades to all embassies and consulates that had not yet received Inman upgrades.

Congress also created additional requirements. First, Congress required that the State Department submit reports to Congress on waivers to the collocation requirement for diplomatic

¹⁵ Wikipedia from archived reports

¹⁶ Report of the Accountability Review Boards, Bombings of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on August 7, 1998, Dar es Salaam: Discussions and Findings accessed on March 1, 2021 at https://fas.org/irp/threat/arb/board_daressalaam.html

¹⁷ Demarche is a formal diplomatic term meaning to dispatch a diplomat to express “the official position, views, or wishes on a given subject from one government to another government or intergovernmental organization.” Source: Wikipedia.

facilities. Congress also amended the 1986 Omnibus Act in 1999 that stipulates that an ARB must convene within 60 days of a security incident. This created an extremely tight timeline, especially if an ARB focused on a large terrorist style attack which usually required months to investigate. Internally, the State Department adopted most of the recommendations from the ARB, and with a large budgetary infusion, could financially support the new or heightened physical security standards. The outcome of the East African bombings was another shift towards a lower threshold of risk tolerance. While no State Department official was deemed accountable for preventing the attack or its damage, the message from the ARB was clear: The Department needed to mitigate risks to its physical presence globally, regardless of the threat environment.

Armed Attack on U.S. Special Mission in Benghazi

The attack on the U.S. Special Mission in Benghazi is the most recent large-scale terrorist attack against a U.S. facility. The terrorist group Ansar al-Sharia launched an attack on the annex on September 11, 2012, killing U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and an information management officer. Later that night, the terrorists continued their attack on the Central Intelligence Agency facility, killing two CIA operatives. Unlike the attacks in Beirut and East Africa, the Benghazi attack involved a temporary diplomatic facility that did not need to meet physical security standards as set forth by law.¹⁸ The Libyan government (which was engaged in internal conflict) did not issue a diplomatic accreditation for the facility, so it did not provide standard host nation security support to the mission. While the State Department attempted to provide additional security upgrades to the small compound, senior officials, including Ambassador Stevens, accepted the risk of operating in a highly dangerous threat environment with less than standard security and risk mitigation requirements.

After the attack, the Secretary of State convened an ARB in 2012, and the panel submitted its report containing findings and recommendations in 2013. However, at the same time, the Senate and House Intelligence Committees also held hearings, subpoenaed State Department witnesses and issued its own findings. The ARB concluded there were systemic leadership and management failures in the State Department that contributed to an inadequate security posture in Benghazi. It also concluded its recommendations by stating:

“Unsatisfactory leadership performance by senior officials in relation to the security incident under review should be a potential basis for discipline recommendations by future ARBs, and would recommend a revision by Department regulations or amendment to the relevant statute to this end.”¹⁹

Despite this finding and recommendation, the ARB panel concluded that no one State Department official was accountable for the failure to foresee or prevent the attack or its outcome.²⁰ However, the State Department terminated four senior level officials—the Assistant

¹⁸ Accountability Review Board Report, Benghazi Report of December 19, 2012 accessed on December 6, 2020 at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/202446.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibid, page 11.

²⁰ Ibid, page 7.

Secretary for DS, the DS Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Programs, another DS senior official, and the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary for North African Affairs. Both the recommendation by the ARB panel and the termination of four senior leaders sent a clear signal to FS employees that accepting risk in a high threat environment could have personal career consequences.

The ARB provided 24 separate recommendations. First, the ARB underscored the need for increased risk mitigation measures for diplomatic facilities, mostly for diplomatic missions in high or critical threat environments. More importantly, the ARB stated that the State Department “urgently review the proper balance between acceptable risk and expected outcomes in high risk, high threat areas.”²¹ The ARB also recommended that the DS bureau control all security planning and policy worldwide—a critique of the current organization structure in the State Department which continues to place its security branch at the Assistant Secretary level. Most of the remaining recommendations focused on detailed risk mitigation countermeasures and training, as well as the common recommendation to increase budget and budgetary flexibility for security and protection.

The Congressional Committees were also fairly scathing in their critique of the State Department’s security management and decisions in Benghazi, as well as of other more senior State, NSC and White House officials. As Benghazi occurred in an election year, the attack and the issue of whether or not the State Department failed to protect U.S. diplomats and personnel overseas became a hotly contested, newsworthy item. Media coverage was intense. Partisan bickering reached a fevered pitch. Mid-level career diplomats testified before congressional committees eight months after the attack about the tiniest details of risk management and security planning.²² Committee Members referred to the witnesses as whistleblowers repeatedly. Members of Congress maintained that the State Department and the Obama administration were hiding the truth about the Benghazi attack. Eight separate congressional committees launched investigations on the Benghazi attack and its aftermath. The political nature of the debate placed the State Department in the crosshairs of a partisan battle, and placed a microscope on each security policy and decision taken in Benghazi.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) released its own findings and recommendations. The SSCI report acknowledged that diplomatic engagement overseas was inherently risky, however it also recommended that the State Department close embassies and consulates if they could not provide adequate security, without explaining what that meant. Additionally, the report indicated SSCI’s disapproval of the State Department’s risk management in Benghazi. SSCI found that the intelligence community had produced and disseminated a significant amount of threat intelligence on Benghazi, all of which was available to the State Department. The committee asserted that the State Department should have augmented its security posture prior to the attack, and that the facility lacked adequate security staff and

²¹ Ibid, page 8.

²² “Benghazi: Exposing Failure and Recognizing Courage,” Hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, 113th Congress, First Session, May 8, 2013.

security countermeasures.²³ The SSCI also repeated a recommendation from the East African bombings ARB—that the State Department elevate the DS Bureau to the Undersecretary level, giving it clear and definitive responsibility for decisions on security and protection in the State Department.²⁴²⁵ The committee believed this would eliminate the confusion among decision makers in State Department headquarters on who was ultimately responsible for security and risk management issues.

Changing Risk Paradigm

The risk paradigm in the State Department changed in the last four decades. Part of this change is due to increasing terrorist threats against U.S. diplomatic facilities overseas. However, even the increased threat of terrorist attacks is not the sole reason for a paradigm shift. Following three major terrorist attacks against U.S. diplomatic facilities in Beirut in 1983, East Africa in 1998, and Benghazi, Libya in 2012, accountability review boards, Congress and the American public have demonstrated increasingly conservative beliefs about risk tolerance and risk taking in diplomatic engagement. While Congress and the ARBs all rallied around the concept that diplomacy is inherently risky and necessary, the findings and recommendations from ARBs show a continuing slide towards risk aversion in high and critical threat countries.

Similarly, Congress established increasing requirements for risk mitigation and security standards. While providing additional funding, the cost of these standards is extremely high, and risk elimination is impossible in some of the most volatile environments. Continuing to place additional legislative requirements, oversight and scrutiny sends the message to leaders in the State Department that they should not take any unnecessary risks. Internally, the burden to manage and mitigate risks increases. No senior leader in the State Department wants “another Benghazi” on their watch. Yet at the same time, the need for expeditionary diplomacy is paramount. Most senior State Department and White House policy makers want diplomats in the field globally. Strategic goals and foreign policy commitments require continuous diplomatic presence and engagement in low-, medium-, and high-threat environments. This places the State Department and FS employees, especially leaders, in a confusing and difficult position: expected to take risks to achieve goals, yet understanding that risk takers may face punishment if there is a negative outcome. So how does this impact the perception and beliefs of FS employees, at entry, middle, or senior levels on taking risks in diplomacy? This research seeks to understand this within the current risk paradigm: is the State Department taking the right amount of risk in the conduct of diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy goals?

²³ Review of the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, September 11-12, 2012 together with Additional Views; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 15, 2014.

²⁴ Review of the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, September 11-12, 2012 together with Additional Views; U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 15, 2014: Author Note: The State Department has not accepted this recommendation and the DS Bureau still remains at the Assistant Secretary level.

Section III: Methods

In order to determine if the State Department is appropriately balancing risk and still accomplishing its strategic goals, it is imperative to know what the actual practitioners of diplomacy experience and believe, specifically U.S. Foreign Service employees. I used a survey and structured interviews to elicit *detailed* beliefs and opinions of FS employees on risk management and mitigation, risk tolerance, risk calculation, security restrictions, safety, and the ability of the FS to achieve day-to-day work and accomplish strategic goals.

Survey Design

The survey contained 37 questions and required approximately seven and a half minutes to complete. Three of the questions asked for biographical information—gender, age and race. Twelve questions focused on the survey taker's experience and position in the Department—career type, time in service, time at current assignment, and information about their current assignment. Seventeen questions focused on FS employees' attitudes and beliefs about risk, risk management and mitigation, risk tolerance, security restrictions, security management, and personal safety. Lastly, five of the survey questions asked about beliefs about risk and security before and after the 2012 Benghazi attack. Only those FS employees who answered that they served in the State Department for more than 10 years were offered these final set of questions.

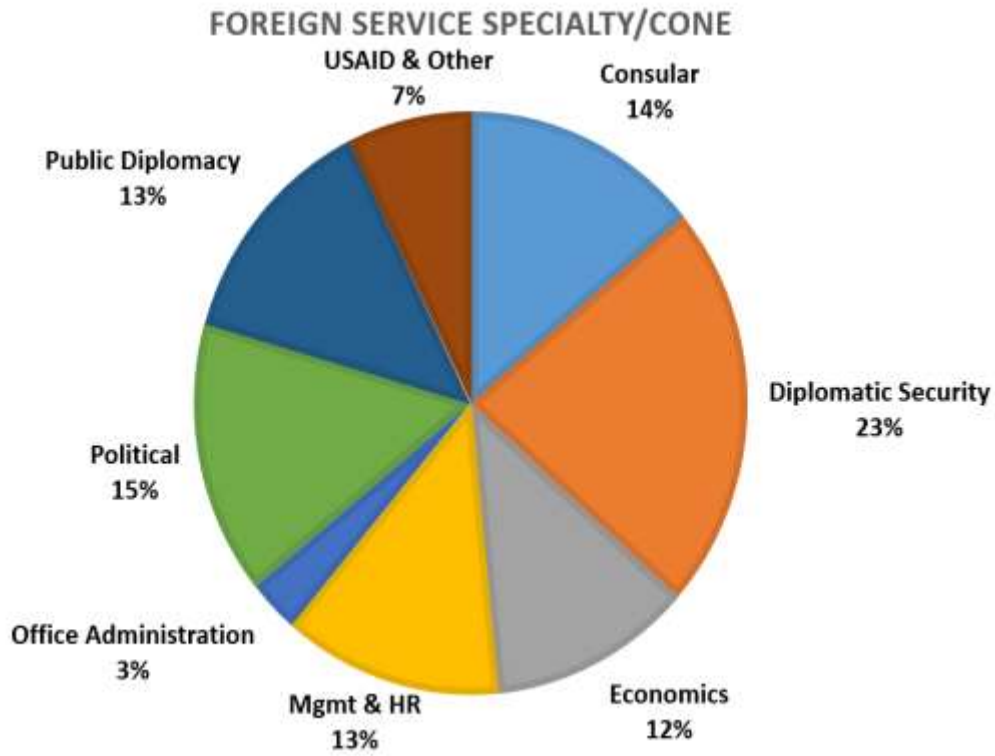
Respondents were asked to answer to each question (posed in the form of a statement) on a five-point Likert scale with the following options—strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Some questions were similar, but framed differently. For instance, the survey asked takers to respond to questions that were phrased in the positive or negative interrogative (e.g. see Questions 20 and 21 in Appendix 1). This section of the survey was also randomized, so that no respondent answered these questions in the same order.

The survey instructed respondents to answer the questions based on their current assignment, and if serving domestically, to answer based on their most recent overseas assignment. This design allowed a more randomized and holistic response about FS employees' experience, as it aimed to preclude respondents from answering the questions based only on their time in a dangerous assignment. As the survey focused on risk, respondents may have been tempted to answer based on previous assignments which were riskier, even though they currently serve in a low-threat environment. While it is impossible to know if the respondents adhered to this instruction strictly, the responses did represent a diverse and representative sample of overseas posts with different threat environments (low, medium, high, critical). See Graph 3 for breakdown of respondents' post threat level.

The survey was shared on four Facebook private groups for Foreign Service employees with information about my research and the nature of the survey, with a link to the survey on Qualtrics and instructions that respondents should be FS employees. I also shared the survey with approximately 100 colleagues, asking them to send it out to their FS staff, supervisors, and colleagues. Based on the dissemination method used, the survey may have reached a

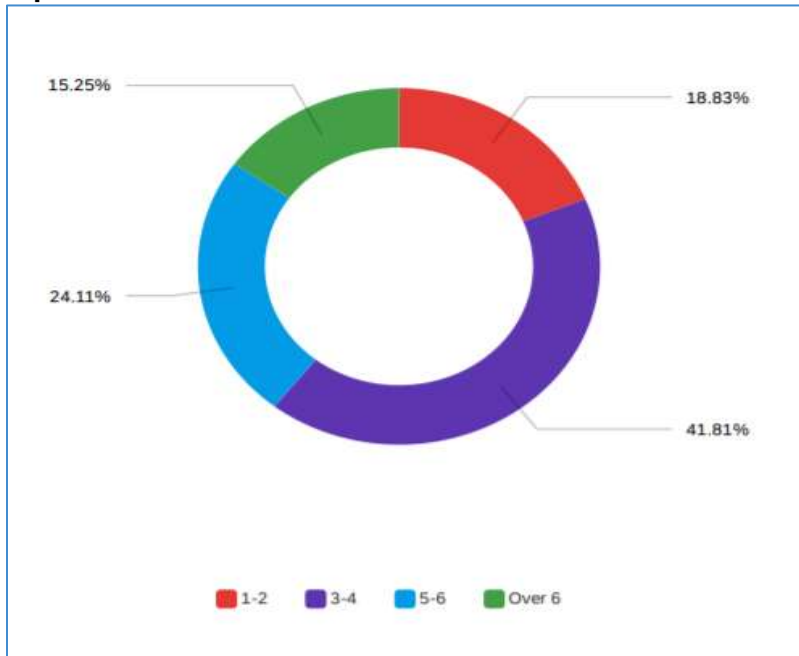
disproportionate number of women and DS special agents. One of the private Facebooks group's membership is female-only and another is restricted only for DS special agents. In the survey results, 64% of the responses came from women. Finally, DS special agents represented the largest group of respondents (23% of the respondents). This is somewhat disproportional to their percentage in the FS.

Graph 1: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Foreign Service Career Type

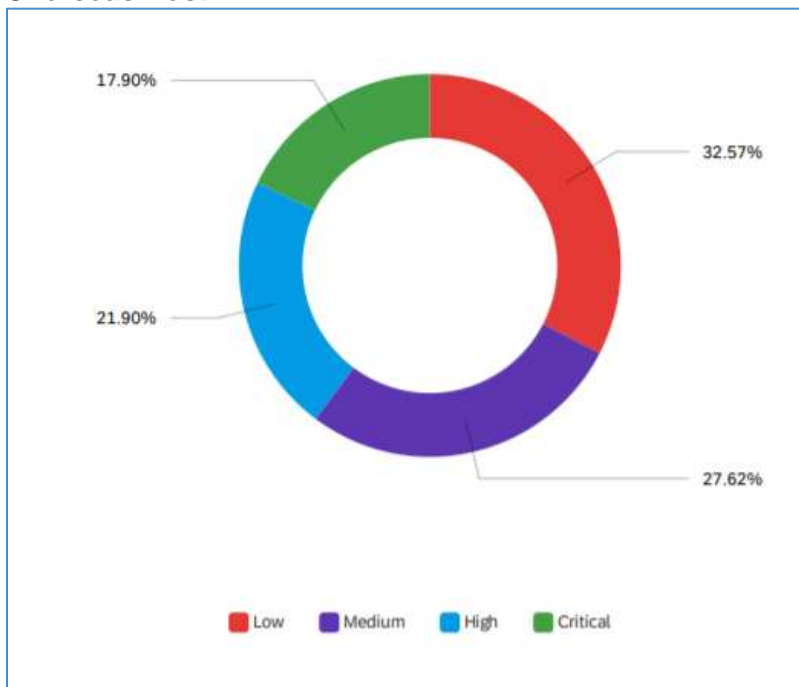


The survey also contained questions about respondents' career type, age, time-in-service, the threat level at their current or most recent overseas post, whether they could drive a vehicle at their post, and whether they have family at their post (or most recent overseas post). (See Appendix A for full survey).

Graph 2: Distribution of Survey Responses of FS Employees by the Number of Diplomatic Posts Served



Graph 3: Distribution of Survey Responses by Threat Level at Current/Most Recent Overseas Post



In order to obtain a 95% confidence level with an error margin of five per cent, approximately 375 respondents needed to complete the survey. This calculation is based on current FS employee numbers of approximately 15,000 which includes USAID foreign service officers (however this survey did not include the Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign

Agricultural Service and U.S. Agency for Global Media which have approximately 420 Foreign Service personnel).²⁶ 492 respondents completed the entire survey. 585 responded, however some respondents submitted incomplete surveys, and others answered one or two questions and closed the survey. With 492 complete responses, the survey's confidence level rests between 95% with a five per cent margin of error or 92.5% with a four per cent margin of error. Overall, the number of full survey responses provide me with a fairly high confidence level that the results are representative of Foreign Service employees.

One shortcoming in this research relates to definitions. For expediency's sake and to ensure a higher number survey responses, the survey never provided FS employees with specific definitions of terms. This allowed respondents to interpret words such as risk, risk mitigation, security restrictions, and personal safety based on the context of their own experiences and memories. This may allow for a respondent to misinterpret a survey question and lead to variances in answers that could have been different if definitions were provided. This leaves room for additional future analysis of beliefs and opinions on risk, especially risk tolerance (risk taking or risk aversion).

Structured Interview Design

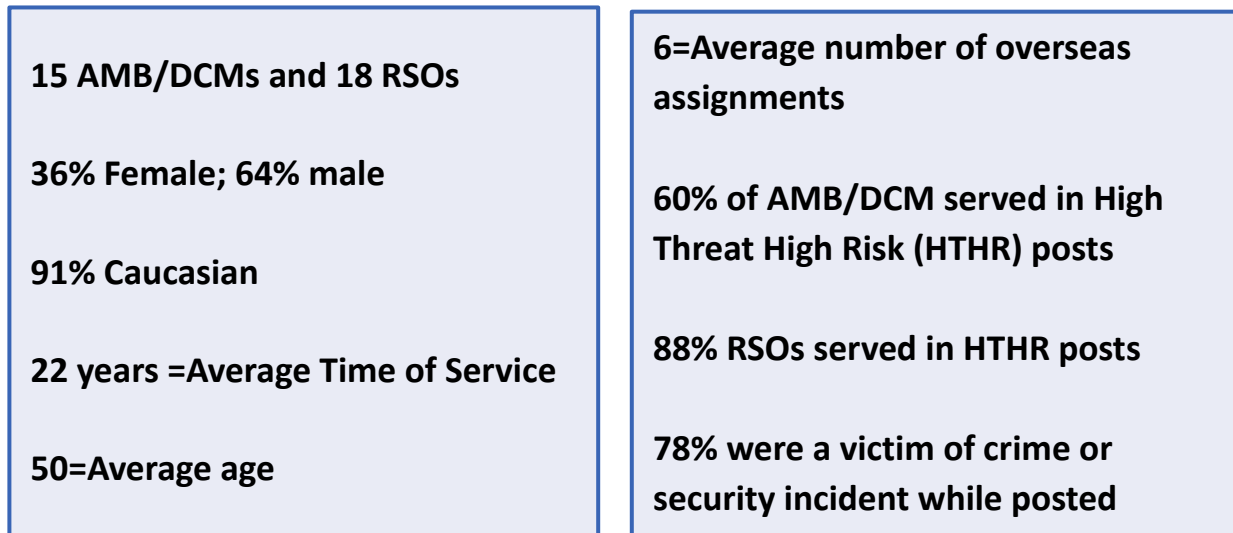
As a complement to the survey, I also conducted structured interviews to gain quantitative and qualitative data from senior Foreign Service employees' views on risk management and mitigation, risk tolerance, risk calculation, security restrictions, and performance/task accomplishment. Each structured interview contained 38 questions. The first section covered basic demographic information and general professional background (position, time of service, service in a high-threat, high risk environment, victim of crime, etc.) The second two sections focused on substantive questions related to the research topic. Most questions utilized a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). Unlike in the survey, the interview respondents were asked to provide more detail about a response if they chose, and many did. Several questions were open-ended, and several were a yes/no format followed by a request for more information. The interview concluded with an open-ended question as to whether the respondent wanted to provide additional thoughts on the research topic, and most did.

All respondents in the interview were specifically chosen for their position type. At the diplomatic post level, ambassadors (AMB), deputy chiefs of mission (DCM), and regional security officers (RSO) make security and risk management decisions. While the RSO runs risk management and risk assessment programs at post, the AMB, as the ranking officer at a diplomatic post, has official security responsibility for all mission personnel—FS, other U.S. government agency personnel, local staff, and diplomatic family members. Therefore, it was important to gather thoughts and experiences from this group of FS personnel.

²⁶ Nutter, Julie. "Where We Stand," Foreign Service Journal by the American Foreign Service Association, January/February 2020.

In order to attract as random a group as possible, I submitted a request for volunteers on two Facebook private groups for FS employees, specifying that respondents needed to have served as an AMB, DCM or RSO. I also sent the request to approximately 100 colleagues, asking them to forward it to other FS personnel who had served in these positions. I also included retired AMB, DCM, and RSO personnel. About half of the interviewees responded from the Facebook group announcements, one quarter from known FS colleagues, and another quarter from referrals from colleagues. I deidentified all interview responses, and the results do not include names, service locations or responses that could be directly attributed to one person. Thirty-three (33) people volunteered—15 AMBs and DCMs, and 17 RSOs. Five (5) interviewees had retired from the FS at the time of interview. Some respondents had served in several posts in a leadership position. Others were serving in their first assignment as an AMB, DCM or RSO. The below graphics illustrate the demographic and career experiences of the respondents.

Figure 2: Demographic and Career Statistics of Structured Interviewees



Section IV: Findings and Analysis

The survey and structured interviews revealed areas of consensus and areas of division among FS employees. FS employees showed a strong consensus on: 1) Feeling safe overseas while conducting work inside and outside a diplomatic facility; and 2) Valuing risk management and mitigation policies. FS employees demonstrated a moderate consensus on: 1) Risk tolerance attitudes, and 2) Valuing security restrictions that limit freedom of physical movement (both personal and professional). FS employees displayed areas of division in their beliefs about: 1) The ability to achieve work with risk mitigation policies, and 2) The ability of the State Department to accomplish its strategic goals with current risk mitigation policies.

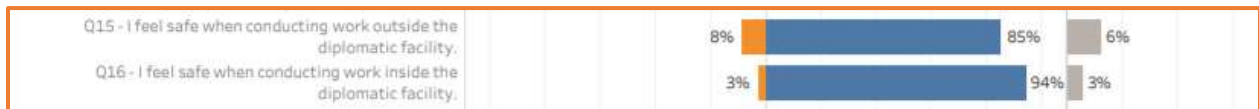
The structured interviews of senior State Department leaders also exposed common themes on risk, risk tolerance, risk mitigation and management, and challenges to taking more or less risk in diplomatic engagement. As in the survey, the interviews revealed converging or

differing beliefs and perceptions on these themes. Uniformly, most senior leaders expressed feeling a great deal of stress to ensure no harm befalls FS employees under their watch. As well, senior leaders were very clear: they had not received Department guidance on how to conduct risk calculations. There were clear divisions among senior leaders about whether the Department is risk averse, and whether the Department needed to take more risks in diplomatic engagement to achieve its goals. However, every senior leader understood that by taking less risk in diplomatic engagement, the State Department and U.S. national security would suffer.

Finding #1: Safety and Risk Mitigation Policies

Both the structured interviews and the survey demonstrated that FS employees in general feel safe at work and value risk mitigation policies that offer additional physical protection. FS employees indicated they overwhelmingly feel safe when conducting diplomatic engagement (work responsibilities) inside and outside their diplomatic post. 94% of respondents in the survey answered “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked if they feel safe when conducting work responsibilities inside a diplomatic facility. 85% also indicated they felt safe working outside a diplomatic facility (41.5% agreed and 43.7% strongly agreed with this statement.)

Table 1: Response to Survey Questions 15 and 16



Note: Author’s representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

FS employees also strongly valued risk mitigation and security programs, with 92% indicating agreement or strong agreement. FS employees also perceived that their colleagues valued risk mitigation and security restrictions at a diplomatic facility, with 74% signifying agreement or strong agreement.

Table 2: Response to Survey Questions 26 and 27



Note: Author’s representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

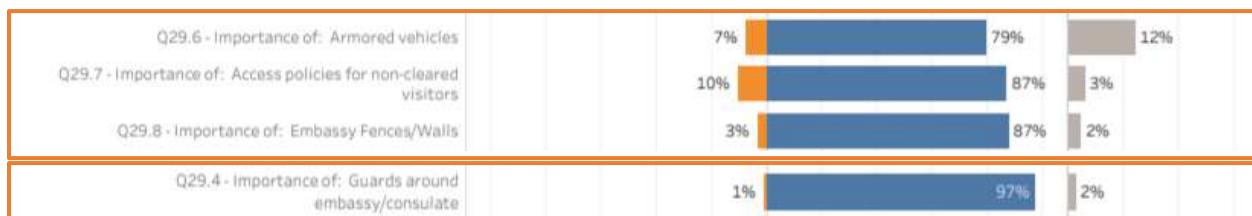
Interestingly, based on a comparison of means by position type, DS agents were more inclined to perceive their colleagues as not valuing risk mitigation and security restrictions at post. This theme also emerged in the structured interviews, when there was a split between AMBs/DCMs and RSOs on how often FS employees at a post complained about risk mitigation policies. AMB/DCMs in general felt that there were some (but not a large number) of complaints about security restrictions. On the other hand, RSOs were more inclined to believe that FS employees complained about security policies. This may be due to the function of positions. The

RSO is the first official to hear about a complaint or lack of compliance with a security or risk mitigation policy. That information may never reach the AMB or DCM if it does not merit their review. Therefore, AMB and DCMs may simply not know about an FS employee’s complaints about security policies.

Structured interview responses echoed some of the survey responses: 99% of interviewees felt safe or very safe in their offices and 96% felt safe in their homes. However, only 67% of them felt safe when working outside the embassy. This may be due to the fact that ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission have a slightly higher profile in any country of their diplomatic assignment. Also, RSOs manage the security and risk mitigation portfolio at a diplomatic facility, so they are more knowledgeable about current intelligence, threats, and recent security incidents. This could impact their perception of safety outside the protective constructs of a diplomatic facility or residence. Overall, both survey and structured interview respondents felt safe conducting their work responsibilities while overseas.

When asked about the importance of a number of risk mitigation policies, FS employees placed strong importance on those that provided additional protective security to the diplomatic mission or to their bodies. For instance, 97% of FS employees strongly agreed or agreed that the local guards were important to their physical security and safety. Additionally, 87% of FS employees believed that access control policies and embassy fences/walls were important for their protection. 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the use of armored vehicles was an important risk mitigation policy. (12% neither agreed or disagreed with this question, which may possibly indicate an employee has not served at a post that uses armored vehicles).

Table 3 and 4: Survey Responses to Q29.6, 29.7, 29.8 and 29.4



Note: Author’s representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

In the interviews, respondents showed strong support for risk mitigation policies and a strong majority felt these policies protected their lives and others at their diplomatic post. Therefore, in general, FS employees feel safe in their diplomatic post environment and value protective security measures that mitigate risks to their physical and personal safety.

Finding #2: Restrictions on Movement

FS employees are less inclined to support risk mitigation policies that constrain professional and personal movement within the city and country of the diplomatic post. While the majority still agreed that these policies are important for protecting diplomats overseas, there was a recognizable minority that disagreed with these policies. For instance, FS

employees were somewhat divided on the importance of curfews as a risk mitigation tool.²⁷ Generally, curfews are used as a risk mitigation tool in high or critical threat diplomatic posts, and temporarily in low to medium threat posts if there is an event that would trigger the need for it, such as a natural disaster, political violence, or protests. 25% of FS employees disagreed or strongly disagreed with these measures, and only 47% believed that curfews are important to risk mitigation. Among FS employees, political and public diplomacy officers were twice as likely to disagree on the importance of curfews for risk mitigation. Female FS employees were twice as likely to disagree with the use of curfews compared to their male colleagues. Lastly, 27% of FS employees neither agreed nor disagreed with this belief, possibly because they might never have served at a diplomatic post that imposed curfews on professional or personal travel.

Table 5: Response to Survey Question 29.5



Note: Author's representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

The majority of FS employees also saw travel restrictions in the city and country of a diplomatic post to be an important risk mitigation tool. However, a consistent 18% of FS employees disagreed that they were valuable, and approximately 10% neither agreed nor disagreed about the value of travel restrictions. When comparing variances in means between career types, FS political officers disagreed with the value of travel restrictions in the country and city of a diplomatic post twice as much as their colleagues. Economic and public diplomacy officers were also more likely to disagree with travel restrictions as an important risk mitigation tool compared to other FS employees. This disagreement may be attributed to the nature of the work of certain types of FS employees. Those with work requirements that are carried out primarily inside an embassy or consulate may not be as greatly impacted by travel restrictions as an economic, political or public diplomacy officer whose portfolios generally include a large amount of liaison outside the office.

Table 6: Response to Survey Questions 29.2 and 29.3



Note: Author's representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

Senior leaders also found the curfews and travel restrictions somewhat onerous and restrictive. They recognized that the majority of complaints they received about risk mitigation policies related to travel restrictions and curfews. However, there was no consistent agreement among interviewees about the frequency of these complaints. Generally, RSOs felt that FS employees complained more about travel restrictions than other risk mitigation policies, whether

²⁷ Curfews generally refer to a time-of-day requirement to return to one's official diplomatic residence, or if in a critical threat post, to the diplomatic compound.

for personal or professional reasons. Also, those serving at a high or critical threat post agreed that FS employees disagreed with travel restrictions for professional reasons.

While most interviewees did not necessarily disagree with the importance of these policies, there was a common theme that these policies had become entrenched and were difficult to change. For instance, one interviewee spoke about a travel restriction at their post for a popular shopping mall with restaurants that FS employees used for professional and personal lunches. Criminal gangs attacked the mall three years ago, shooting and killing several bystanders at an outside café. The embassy then prohibited travel to the mall for all FS employees for the foreseeable future. No other incidents had occurred at the mall or restaurants, and the location remained a vibrant location with shoppers and diners. The interviewee explained the difficulty in changing the prohibition on travel to this location from a procedural standpoint, as well as the personal career concern if any violence occurred there after they made the decision to allow work meetings at the location. Similar anecdotes cropped up throughout many of the interviews, with both AMBs, DCMs, and RSOs facing pressure to maintain stricter risk mitigation policies on “movement,” yet also pressure to allow for travel to locations that had once been deemed too unsafe for diplomatic engagement.

Finding #3: Risk Management

There was moderate consensus among FS employees, both from the survey and from the structured interviews, that the Department manages and mitigates risks well. Among FS employees, 68% agreed or strongly agreed that the Department mitigates risks to physical safety. When evaluating differences in means among job functions, political and economic officers were more likely to disagree with this statement. There were no significant variances in means between gender, threat level at current post, or time in service. In the structured interviews, 31 out of 33 interviewees also believed that the State Department mitigates risk well in order to protect FS employees from harm.

Table 7: Response to Survey Question 20



Note: Author's representation of Survey Responses in Aggregate Divergent Bars: Blue=Agree and Strongly Agree; Orange=Disagree or Strongly Disagree; Gray=Neither Agree nor Disagree

Additionally, in the interviews, respondents felt that the State Department in general has appropriate risk mitigation and security policies at a diplomatic facility based on the threat level (Mean=4.27/5, indicating agreement to strong agreement). As well, the majority of respondents believe that the State Department appropriately assigns the correct threat level to a diplomatic post based on threat intelligence and past security incidents (Mean=4.3/5, indicating agreement to strong agreement). A strong majority of interviewees thought that there was the appropriate number of risk mitigation policies in place based on threats. However, as stated above, interviewees expressed the common theme that risk mitigation policies became entrenched and hard to change over time. This speaks to a systemic risk management problem in which threats

are treated as fixed and stable, rather than fluid and changing. Senior leaders expressed frustration, yet hesitation, in confronting this problem.

The structured interviews also highlighted another risk management issue. Senior leaders indicated that at a diplomatic post, changes in risk mitigation and security policies are often discussed and decided during an Emergency Action Committee (EAC). The Ambassador or DCM leads the EAC, with all section heads from both State Department and other agencies represented. Often risk management decisions are made by what is commonly called the “core EAC,” which represents just the AMB, DCM, and State department section heads. The composition of the EAC (and core EAC) ensures that non-security and non-risk management professionals have a say in risk management decisions. Even AMBs and DCMs do not receive formal risk management training. This has both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, you have officials with less understanding of the procedures and logistics required for risk mitigation involved in determining the application of decision points, and therefore the changing of risk mitigation policies. Still, the inclusion of a diverse array of decision makers allows for varied thoughts and approaches to risk and a more comprehensive understanding of how risk mitigation policies may affect different sections at a diplomatic post. As the survey highlights, political and public diplomacy officers are more intolerant of certain risk mitigation policies than their other colleagues. This can impact the EAC process of making decisions regarding risk, with some sections advocating for taking more risk, and others wanting to take less risk.

Finding #4: Risk Calculation

One of the most important consensus findings from the interviews is that most senior leaders in the field neither receive clear guidance on how to conduct risk calculations that incorporate both possible gains and losses, nor understand what the risk tolerance threshold is for their diplomatic post or for certain activities at their post. Leaders clearly understand current risk management and mitigation policies, standards and requirements for physical and personal security. However, application of those risk mitigation standards and policies—and decisions to waive those standards—varied by post, even those with similar threat levels. As well, there is no guidance available to senior leaders at a diplomatic post on when it is tolerable to take additional risk to accomplish goals despite the threat environment. The State Department understands better how to calculate risks by focusing only on possible losses without also considering possible gains. Therefore, senior leaders in the field generally manage risk by analyzing and preparing for the negative outcomes (threats), and do not include a risk tolerance calculation that also focuses on positive gains (achieving strategic goals).

Interviewees all consistently stated that they conducted risk calculations on an ad-hoc basis at post, most of the time for a specific event or engagement. No interviewee described a uniform process. Many indicated that the personality of a leader could drive decisions of risk (either risk taking or risk aversion). Despite a lack of uniformity, many senior leaders used the mechanism of the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) for discussions and decisions on risk and risk mitigation. The EAC is an official group at each diplomatic post which is headed by the

Chief of Mission (Ambassador or Charge d’Affairs) and includes the heads of each section or agency at that post. Sometimes, senior leaders at a post held what is called a Core EAC meeting, which includes only a small number of FS section heads (and not other U.S. government agencies at a post). Senior leaders also used informal “hallway” conversations as an avenue for risk calculation discussions. All interviewees understood the importance of having good communication between the AMB, DCM and RSO in order to achieve effective risk management. Infrequently, senior leaders consulted with headquarters in DC for guidance or approval on higher risk activity. For day-to-day risk management, risk calculations fell to the AMB, DCM and RSO.

There are benefits to this arrangement, as well as weaknesses. In one sense, it allows senior leaders in the field a great deal of flexibility and discretion, which is very helpful in changing tactics and focusing where resources allow. It also allows for quick maneuverability when ground conditions change. However, it deprives senior leaders in the field of higher-level State Department cover or guidance. A diplomatic post may tolerate a high degree of risk to accomplish goals that State Department HQ may not support, or vice versa. The Benghazi case is especially telling. Ambassador Stevens decided about when and how he would conduct engagement in Benghazi, albeit with risk mitigation security procedures that in retrospect were deemed insufficient based on known threats. However, Ambassador Stevens and others in Libya, made the decisions that engagement, while knowingly and inherently risky, was valuable to achieve a certain goal. The fallout after Benghazi illustrates that perhaps accomplishing these goals despite the risk was not well understood or accepted by seniors in the State Department, or even the White House. It highlights the need for senior leaders in the field to understand both the risk involved due to a threat and the risk tolerated to accomplish goals.

Another weakness of this informal risk management and risk calculation process at diplomatic posts is that it fails to incorporate risk assessments and risk mitigation planning in the policy process. This results in retroactive risk mitigation and security planning, often leading to ad hoc risk tolerance levels for similar activities in different places/times. The same can be said for State Department headquarters. Policies are created, and then they are sent to DS to provide a risk assessment and risk mitigation plan. This creates inefficiencies, defensive bureaucratic battles, and can lead to acrimony or weakened, ineffective policies.

Finding #5: Risk Tolerance

There was moderate consensus among FS employees on risk tolerance attitudes. Mainly, FS employees are okay with taking risks with their personal safety in conducting diplomatic engagement. However, this consensus revealed differences in attitudes between women and men, certain career types, and those with more time in service.

Throughout the survey, FS employees answered four separate questions on risk tolerance attitudes. Each question elicited overall responses indicative of risk tolerance rather than risk aversion. However, the strength of agreement or disagreement changed for each question, perhaps due to framing issues. In one question, FS employees were asked to respond

to the following statement: “I am okay with taking risk to my personal safety in the course of my work responsibilities.” 75% of respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement. However, when the statement was framed in the negative— “I do not want to take personal risk to my physical safety in the course of my work responsibilities,”—53% of FS employees disagreed (thus showing risk tolerance not aversion). In the third question, respondents were asked to respond to the statement, “I want to take more physical risk in order to accomplish my work responsibilities.” In contrast to previous responses, only 40% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 36% disagreed, and 38% could neither agree nor disagree (women and DS agents were strongly represented in this neutral group).

Based on prospect theory, framing questions or options in different ways can lead to different decisions and choices on risk aversion or risk taking (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). It is possible that the framing of the survey questions led to changes in the aggregate responses. Prospect theory also holds that “individuals tend to be risk-averse in the domains of gains and risk seeking in the domain of losses.”²⁸ Thus, individuals will do more to avoid loss than they would to achieve the equivalent gain. This may help explain why FS employees responded differently to similar questions on risk to personal safety, albeit framed differently. (See Figure 3). Also, possibly, personal and professional variables can play a role in decisions about risk. For instance, a history of trauma or crime victim status may impact an individual’s propensity for taking more or less risk. As well, a FS employee unable to accomplish and complete their work due to risk mitigation policies may be more inclined to take risks than his or her colleagues whose work did not suffer.

Figure 3: Aggregate Survey Responses to Questions 17, 18, 19 and 28



²⁸ Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk." *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (1979): 263-91.

Gender Differences

Overall, FS employees demonstrated that they accept the risks inherent in diplomatic engagement overseas. Some were more accepting of risks than others. The variations in mean scores between demographic and career groups exposed interesting differences—ones that can have significant career and management impacts. Firstly, women were significantly less likely than men to accept risk or opt to take more risk to their personal safety. This was consistent on all risk tolerance questions, apart from the question on whether the Department should take more risks in diplomatic engagements which showed a smaller, non-statistically significant variance in means. For the other three questions on personal risk tolerance, women were consistently and significantly less accepting of risk than men.

Table 8: Variations in Mean Scores for Survey Responses by Gender

	Break Down By	
	Female	Male
Avg. Q17 - I am okay with taking risk to my personal safety in the course of my work responsibilities. 1	3.6	4.2
Avg. Q18 - I do not want to take personal risk to my physical safety in the course of my work responsibilities. 1	3.0	2.2
Avg. Q19 - I think the Department should take more risk overseas in conducting day-to-day work activities. 1	3.3	3.5
Avg. Q28 - I want to take more physical risk in order to accomplish my work responsibilities. 1	2.8	3.3

Source based on author’s calculations

This poses an interesting challenge for the State Department. If women are less likely to take risks or opt to take more risks to their personal safety, they might seek out assignments in more secure, less dangerous environments. Also, if women are less likely to take risks, yet do serve in high or critical threat environments, they may choose to avoid higher risk activities, which also may be career-enhancing activities. Both can lead to disparities in the assignment and promotion process. Many mid-level and senior level FS employees spent a considerable part of their careers while the State Department maintained the ever-present missions in active war zones, such as Baghdad or Kabul. While promotions in the FS are not tightly linked to service in a critical or high threat post, the State Department issued guidance for years advocating for FS employees service in these dangerous assignments, and instructing promotion panels to take that service into consideration when deciding promotions.²⁹ Often FS employees were rewarded with linked assignments to the diplomatic post of their choosing. Service in high and critical threat assignments allows FS employees to bid on future assignments more senior than their current grade (rank). FS employees also enjoy the compelling monetary benefits of serving in a high or critical threat post. These are all nuanced

²⁹ This guidance is no longer given to promotion panels, however service in high and critical threat environments is still valued and encouraged.

benefits that can lead to long term impacts on one's career and financial success. If women shy away from these assignments due to lower risk tolerance levels, then they will experience continued disparities in career advancement.

Time-in-Service Differences

Additionally, those FS employees with more time in service, or having served in five or more overseas assignments, were more willing in the aggregate to take risks, accept more risk, and believe the Department should take more risks in diplomatic engagement. This countered a prevailing "corridor" belief in the State Department that senior leaders and those with more time in service become more risk averse. Based on the survey results, FS employees who have served longer and at more posts are okay with and want to take risks during their work responsibilities. However, this is not to say that they always do, as there are other constraints on their abilities to take risks which will be discussed later.

The change in risk tolerance levels may be influenced by an FS employee's length of service. The more time spent overseas in unpredictable or different threat environments, the more one understands the risks involved and the more they have "survived" those risks. Therefore, they may be more inclined to continue taking risks. Their decisions on risk tolerance become a "subjective assessment of probability," using heuristics which may or may not be representative of the actual probability of risky, negative outcomes (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979).³⁰ For an entry-level officer, their personal risk tolerance may be lower because they have no representative sample of prior risks taken with a positive or negative outcome. Availability of information can also impact their assessment of risk (Kahneman and Tversky, 1974). A new FS employee may only have heard of the Benghazi attack, or another salient, dangerous event in which the State Department took a risk and experienced a negative rather than a positive outcome. They assess risk through representativeness and availability of information, which can distort their perception of the probability of a negative outcome. If a newer FS employee has never served overseas and has a misrepresentative idea of the probability of risk, he/she may be initially uncomfortable with the idea of exposing him or herself to harm or injury during the natural course of work.

Career Type Differences

FS employees' career type also appeared as a marker for predicting risk tolerance, with significant statistical differences between FS career types on their survey responses on risk tolerance attitudes. Specifically, DS agents, political and economic officers were much more likely to be okay with taking risks to their personal safety in the course of their work responsibilities. In fact, political, public diplomacy and economic officers indicated that they were significantly more likely to *want* to take more risk in order to accomplish their work. Political and economic officers also strongly favored the Department taking more risk in diplomatic

³⁰ Tversky, Amos and Kahneman, Daniel. "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases." *Science*, Vol 185, Issue 4157, pp 1124-1131, September 1974.

engagement overseas. Consistently, the other career types were less likely to display strong risk tolerance attitudes, even though in general, FS employees still accept and tolerate risk.

The variance in risk tolerance attitudes among FS career types may be indicative of the type of work required to achieve success in their positions. Consular, management, office administration, and other FS specialties may not require a similar amount of diplomatic engagement outside of the embassy. This allows these FS employees to adopt less risk tolerant attitudes compared to their colleagues in other career types that require outside interaction with host country officials or other individuals and groups. Political, economic and public diplomacy officers must engage in liaison, program management and develop relationships and contacts outside the embassy. While Zoom has become popular during the global pandemic, diplomats consistently speak to the importance of in-person dialogue. Therefore, even understanding the risks involved, these FS career types still express a high degree of risk tolerance, and a desire to accept even more risk in order to achieve goals.

Table 9: Variations in Mean Scores by Survey Responses by FS Career Type

	Break Down By							
	Consular	Diplomatic Security	Economic	Mgmt & HR	Office Administration	Political	Public Diplomacy	USAID & Other
Avg. Q17 - I am okay with taking risk to my personal safety in the course of my work responsibilities. 1	3.4	4.1	4.0	3.7	2.8	4.0	3.5	3.6
Avg. Q18 - I do not want to take personal risk to my physical safety in the course of my work responsibilities. 1	3.2	2.3	2.8	3.1	3.6	2.3	2.8	3.0
Avg. Q19 - I think the Department should take more risk overseas in conducting day-to-day work activities. 1	2.9	3.1	3.8	3.1	2.5	3.9	3.6	3.5

Source based on author's calculations

DS agents are a slight outlier in this regard. While more likely to be okay with the risk to their personal safety, they are not as likely to *want* to accept more risk as compared to political, economic and public diplomacy officers. DS agents were only slightly more likely to believe the Department should take more risk in order to accomplish goals (and also more likely to believe that the Department can accomplish goals with current risk mitigation policies in place). This may be due to DS's risk management responsibility. In order for the Department to take more risks, DS agents understand that their job will be harder, particularly if resources and budgets do not change. DS agents are trained on how to operate in extremely risky environments, and based on staffing requirements, are more likely by the end of their career to have served in high and critical threat assignments. Correspondingly, they receive information and intelligence on threat information in their environment and globally on a daily, if not hourly basis. The availability of this information may skew their assessment on the perception of the probability of a negative outcome when taking a risk. Yet, at the same time, DS agents knowingly signed up for a career that carries increased risk by nature of the profession. This set of factors can create a risk tolerance dichotomy: accepting of risk, but not wanting to take on any more.

Finding #6: Risk Mitigation and Completing Work Responsibilities

The survey and structured interview results showed weak consensus and division on the belief that FS employees are able to achieve day-to-day work responsibilities with current risk mitigation policies. In order to determine if the State Department is taking the appropriate amount of risk in order to accomplish strategic goals, it is important to understand how much work FS employees can complete under current risk mitigation policies. While a slim majority believed overall that they can accomplish work responsibilities with the current security restrictions and risk mitigation policies in place, there was a strong and consistent minority expressing their inability to get their jobs done. The responses to three out of the four survey questions on completing work with current risk mitigation policies revealed that almost one-third of FS employees do not believe they can accomplish their day-to-day work responsibilities.

Completing or Accomplishing Work

FS employees were asked two very similar questions which led to different responses regarding accomplishing work requirements. It is unknown which questions respondents saw first, as the survey order was randomized for each respondent. The survey prompted FS employees to respond to the following statement in Question 13: "I can accomplish my work responsibilities with the current security restrictions in place." 62% of FS employees agreed or strongly agreed, and 32% strongly disagreed or disagreed. For Question 24, FS employees reacted to the following statement: "I completed all of my work responsibilities with security restrictions in place." In this case, 76% of FS employees agreed or strongly agreed and only 16% disagreed or strong disagreed. The only difference in the questions was the use of the words "accomplish" or "completed." This difference led to a 14% change in disagreement to agreement on the ability to do their day-to-day work. When asked about completing work responsibilities, FS employees should have a stronger sense of what they have finished or not finished in their assignments. The word "accomplish" may have signified a future and unknown prospect to respondents, allowing for more doubt and thus leading to greater disagreement.

Figure 4: Aggregate Responses to Survey Questions: 13, 14, 24, 25



Only those FS employees who served in the State Department for more than 10 years received questions on risk mitigation policies before and after the 2012 terrorist attack on the State Department's diplomatic post in Benghazi. 45% of FS employees agreed or strongly agreed with following statement: "Security restrictions have impacted my ability to complete my work responsibilities more after the Benghazi attack." Political, economic and USAID officers were more likely to agree with that statement. Corresponding to the above findings, in general and regardless of having served in the Department prior to the Benghazi attacks, political and economic officers feel more constrained and believe they cannot accomplish or complete their work requirements given current risk mitigation policies.

In the structured interviews, senior leaders responded to the following statement: "I waived (or asked to waive), on a frequent basis, security restrictions in order to complete specific mission work requirements." The majority disagreed (Mean 1.96/5). However, almost each respondent added they objected to the term "frequent." Most admitted they did waive risk mitigation policies from time to time in order to accomplish specific work responsibilities. This generally pertained to a travel restriction due to a perceived or known threat or an access control policy (i.e. traveling to an area restricted to diplomatic personnel or hosting a large event on an embassy compound). Most senior leaders indicated that if it was extremely important to accomplish a specific work requirement, then they would find ways around risk mitigation policies, either by simply accepting greater risk, or, more frequently, by adding other risk mitigation measures to offset the increased risk.

Risk Mitigation as a Work Constraint

The survey also revealed that about 31% of the FS feels constrained when working due to security and risk mitigation policies, and 12% expressed neutrality on this issue. FS employees serving in high and critical threat posts were statistically and significantly more likely to feel constrained by risk mitigation policies. Additionally, political, public diplomacy and USAID officers significantly felt more constrained in their ability to accomplish their work than other FS employees. This was consistent across all questions on work completion. There were no large variances in responses by age, gender or race. This finding corresponds to responses in the structured interviews in which senior leaders expressed feeling more constrained by security restrictions, the higher the threat level at a diplomatic post, despite appreciating risk mitigation policies. For instance, senior leaders were asked if security restrictions impacted their ability to form professional relationships. 15% of interviewees agreed, and 33% felt that security policies prevented them from forming non-official relationships (See Figure 5).

Missing Work Events

Next, the survey asked FS employees to respond to the following statement: "I missed important work events due to security restrictions." Among FS employees, 34% agreed or strongly agreed, and only 54% disagreed. There were no variances in responses for gender or race. However, the threat level at a post, the number of overseas post previously served, and

certain career types were linked to those FS employees who were more likely to agree that risk mitigation policies impeded their work. FS employees over the age 50 and those who had served at five or more posts were more likely to believe that security policies at their diplomatic post limited their ability to attend certain official events. Economic, political, public diplomacy and USAID officers were also more likely to agree that security and risk mitigation policies affected their ability to attend work events.

Table 10: Variations in Mean Scores by Survey Responses by Threat Level at Post

	Break Down By			
	Low	Medium	High	Critical
Avg. Q25 - I have missed important work events due to security restrictions. 1	2.4	2.4	2.6	3.4

Source: Based on Author's Calculations

Table 11: Variations in Mean Scores by Survey Responses by the Number of Posts at which a FS Employee Served

	Break Down By		
	1-2	3-4	5-6 & Over 6
Avg. Q25 - I have missed important work events due to security restrictions. 1	2.1	2.5	3.0

Source: Based on Author's Calculations

Table 12: Variations in Mean Scores by Survey Responses by FS Career Type

	Break Down By							
	Consular	Diplomatic Security	Economic	Mgmt & HR	Office Administration	Political	Public Diplomacy	USAID & Other
Avg. Q25 - I have missed important work events due to security restrictions. 1	2.4	2.0	2.9	2.5	1.8	3.3	2.8	3.5

Source: Based on Author's Calculations

The structured interview responses support these survey findings. About 18% of senior leaders had to decline to attend official events due to security and risk mitigation policies. Also, 12% of interviewees had to cancel work engagements due to security restrictions. These responses indicate a lower rate than the survey responses for missing work events due to security and risk mitigation policies. This can be ascribed to several factors. First, in the interviews, the question about canceling or declining to attend events contained the word “frequently.” The majority of respondents indicated that they did have to cancel and decline to attend events, but not frequently. Also, many interviewees spoke about self-selecting out of work events they knew would be problematic to attend due to security restrictions. Thirdly, senior leaders have more flexibility to change and reallocate additional security resources to their protection to attend normal or special work events. Ambassadors retain specialized security protections, and to some extent, so do DCMs. RSOs receive extensive training on operating in dangerous environments. They also manage security and risk mitigation policies at a diplomatic post so may be more inclined to follow these policies strictly to serve as an

example. Therefore, while the interviewees demonstrated lower rates than FS employees of cancelling or declining to attend work events, the responses still support the survey results. A significant minority of FS employees cancel, decline or miss important work events due to security and risk mitigation policies.

Figure 5: Aggregate Responses to Interview Section 2: Questions 4, 5, 12, 13



Note: Likert Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither Agree/Disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree
Source based on author's calculations from structured interviews

Finding #7: Risk Mitigation and Achieving Strategic Goals

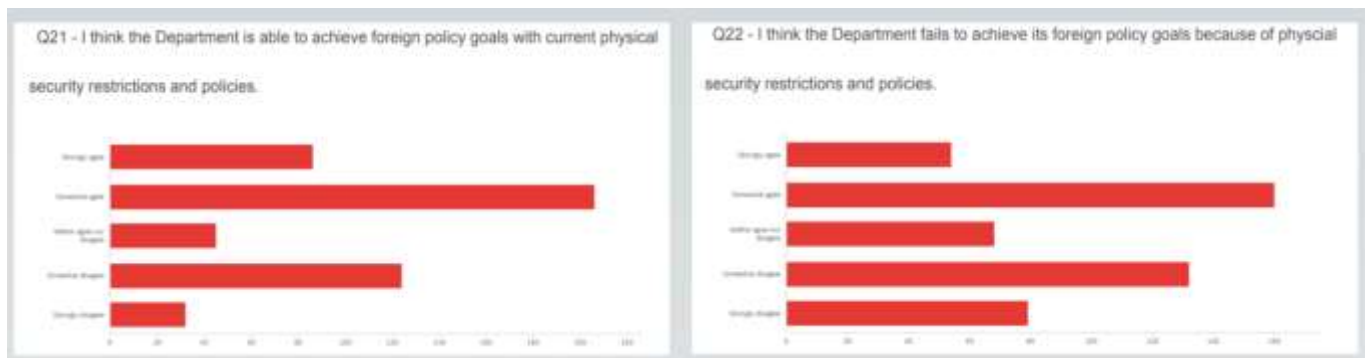
One of the most important findings of this study is that between one-third to just under one-half of FS employees do not believe the State Department can accomplish its strategic goals with current risk mitigation policies. The same finding is supported by senior leaders, who are almost evenly divided on whether the Department needs to assume more risk to physical security in order to accomplish strategic goals. In spite of this divide, senior leaders in general agreed that they consistently needed to approve higher risk diplomatic engagement in order to achieve strategic goals. Therefore, there appears to be a clear understanding by senior leaders that accomplishing strategic goals in certain instances requires taking more risk.

In the survey, FS employees were asked to respond to the following two statements: 1) "I think the Department is able to achieve foreign policy goals with current physical security restrictions and policies;" and, 2) "I think the Department fails to achieve its foreign policy goals because of physical security restrictions and policies." Responding to the first, about 59% of FS employees agreed, however 31% disagreed, showing that almost one-third of FS employees doubt the Department can accomplish its goals with risk mitigation policies in place. Interestingly, in response to the second statement, 43% agreed and 42% disagreed, indicating a

17-percentage point change in the belief that risk mitigation negatively impacts the State Department’s ability to achieve its goals (See Figure 6). Again, as mentioned previously, framing may play a crucial role in the variation in responses. When asked in the affirmative, FS employees were more inclined to agree. The statement was framed with a positive outcome (achieving foreign policy goals) and respondents may be more inclined to provide an answer which implies less risk (maintain status quo). When the statement was framed as a loss—the negative outcome of failing—FS employees were more likely to agree with the sentiment.

Additionally, there was a moderately strong correlation between those FS employees who want to take additional risks in their work and those that believe the State Department fails to achieve its foreign policy goals ($r=0.559$).³¹ Similarly, there was a moderate negative correlation between those FS employees who believe the Department should take more risk and those that believed the Department can achieve its goals with current risk mitigation policies ($r= -0.52$).³² There was also a moderately strong correlation between those FS employees who want to take more risk at work and those FS employees who believe the State Department should take more risk overall ($r=0.675$).³³

Figure 6: Aggregate Responses to Survey Questions 21 and 22



There were clear variations by career type among the one-third to 43% of FS employees who believed that the State Department fails to accomplish its foreign policy goals given current risk mitigation policies. Economic, political and public diplomacy officers and those FS employees who had served at five or more posts were more likely than others to believe this. This corresponds to this same career types’ belief that they cannot accomplish their day-to-day work responsibilities. This group was more likely to show a higher tolerance for risk. There were no significant variations based on age, gender, race, threat level at post, or time-in-service.

³¹ Source: Author’s calculations from survey data

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Table 13: Variations in Mean Scores for Survey Questions: 21 and 22

	Break Down By							
	Consular	Diplomatic Security	Economic	Mgmt & HR	Office Administration	Political	Public Diplomacy	USAID & Other
Avg. Q21 - I think the Department is able to achieve foreign policy goals with current physical security restrictions and p..	3.4	4.0	3.0	3.6	3.9	2.8	3.0	3.3
Avg. Q22 - I think the Department fails to achieve its foreign policy goals because of physical security restrictions and po..	2.9	2.1	3.3	2.9	2.4	3.6	3.3	3.3

Source based on author's calculations

In the structured interview, a clear divide emerged on whether the State Department needs to take more risks in diplomatic engagement in order to accomplish its strategic goals. However, interviewees in general expressed that in order to accomplish strategic goals, the State Department would have to expose itself to more risk to physical security—mainly the physical safety of diplomats such as their presence in dangerous environments. Several interviewees mentioned that in an effort to more heavily mitigate risks to physical safety and still remain in dangerous environments such as an active war zone, the State Department increasingly relied on the U.S. military. As one interviewee remarked, it was as though the State Department is using more and more resources and trying to mitigate threats down to zero. Therefore, instead of increasing reliance on the military for diplomatic engagement in high threat environments (which would create further constraints on the State Department), senior leaders consistently believed that better risk analysis and calculation with more targeted risk mitigation was warranted. However, there was a small minority of interviewees who felt that the State Department already took enough risks to physical safety and could accomplish its goals. This group believed that many in the FS did not sign up to serve in war zones or conflict areas. This mirrors findings from the survey which showed heterogeneous attitudes on risk tolerance and whether strategic goals can be accomplished under the current risk mitigation paradigm.

Overall, a large amount (between 31-43%) of FS employees do not believe the State Department can accomplish important goals without assuming more risk, both at a personal and organizational level. This creates a genuine problem for the State Department and the U.S. government. Either the State Department tolerate more risk in order to achieve its goals, or it accepts that it will underperform in the conduct of diplomacy in order to more heavily mitigate risks to diplomats overseas. As discussed later, accepting less risk has profound implications both for the success of the State Department and for U.S national security.

Finding #8: State Department Leaders and Accountability

The internal State Department aftermath of the Benghazi attack is still a constant cautionary tale for senior FS employees in the field. During the 33 structured interviews, I never once asked questions or brought up subjects pertaining to Benghazi, the resulting termination of four Department senior officials, the ARB, its findings, Congress, the Congressional hearings, or their reports on the Benghazi attack. However, in 33 interviews, senior leaders mentioned “accountability” and “ARB” 26 times. Similarly, there were 26 interviews in which senior leaders spoke about the impact of Benghazi on the State Department and risk tolerance. Interviewees

mentioned the U.S. Congress in 15 interviews. Just over one-third of the interviewees spoke about the political consequences and the politicization of risk taking in the field. Many spoke of the lack of understanding by the U.S. public of the dangers of conducting necessary diplomatic engagement.

The interviews led to the conclusion that FS senior leaders feel a great deal of stress of being held personally accountable if any FS employee is harmed overseas, whether or not there was any feasible way to prevent this harm. There was no variation in this finding by gender, age, rank, length of time in service, position type (AMB, DCM or RSO) or service in high/critical threat posts. Unswervingly, senior leaders who are responsible for risk management in the field expressed the concern that they would be held responsible for something that they could never have predicted or prevented.

There is some benefit for accountability and career consequences for recklessness or disregard when involving personal safety of any person. However, the histories of the ARBs following the terrorist attacks in Beirut, East Africa and Benghazi demonstrate that despite finding no individual specifically accountable for failing to carry out their duties, those that did take risks, even calculated, could suffer personal consequences. In the case of Benghazi, those senior officials, and including Ambassador Stevens and the Ambassador in Libya, all made decisions to take calculated risks in order to achieve a specific goal. Despite none being found accountable for the tragic deaths of four U.S. government officials, three senior DS senior leaders and one senior Near Eastern Affairs Bureau official lost their jobs, careers and suffered reputational harm.

As mentioned above, many senior leaders felt that an increasingly politically divided culture led to the need for scapegoats in the State Department if any harm befell a diplomat or other government official in the field. The common use of the ARB with its own externalized process remains a somewhat frightening prospect to even the most seasoned senior leader. Interviewees also commonly mentioned that Congress needed to provide more than just lip service in understanding risk is inherent in diplomatic engagement, especially in high and critical threat environments. On the one hand, they felt that Congressional leaders demanded that the State Department be present in high-risk environments, yet at the same time had a zero-risk tolerance attitude. Leaders felt this was an unreasonable and unfeasible expectation. Lastly, senior leaders believed it is important that the U.S. public comprehend that diplomacy entails risk to its practitioners, somewhat similar to risks faced by the U.S. military. If the public understood and accepted that diplomats face risks to their personal safety in the field, then there would not be such a public, negative outcry in the event of harm to a diplomat. Without these changes, senior leaders would continue to be fearful of taking additional, calculated risks in diplomatic engagement.

Finding #9: Understanding Mission Goals

There is a large variance between posts and leaders on how mission strategic goals are communicated (or not) to FS employees at that post. This leads to problematic risk calculations at a diplomatic post. First, goals are vague and idealistic, and often are not tied to more section-specific measurable actions. These goals are codified in a diplomatic post's Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) which is completed every three years. Most senior leaders recognized that strategic goals are necessarily long-term and vague. However, most senior leaders at a post could not demonstrate consistent measurable, metric-based plans for achieving these goals. For instance, "improving democratic institutions in country X," is an example of a mission goal based on the State Department's strategic goal of protecting Americans abroad by strengthening democracy. In order to achieve this goal, a diplomatic post may include action items in their ICS such as "engaging with political group X" or "official dialogue with non-governmental organization Y."

Also, there is no uniform process for ensuring that all mission personnel have read, understood and tie these goals to diplomatic engagement, especially higher risk engagement. Most of those interviewed did not have a standard process in place to ensure dissemination, receipt and comprehension by mission staff of mission goals and action plans. Many senior leaders spoke of knowing that section heads in a diplomatic post understood the ICS goals, and assumed these section heads shared the ICS with their staff. Others remarked that most likely, only certain sections, specifically the Political and Economic sections understood the ICS, and others had no idea of its contents. Several commented that locally-engaged staff may or may not have been aware of a diplomatic posts' ICS goals. From an organizational management standpoint, this appears to be a communications failure. All organizations should ensure that all of their personnel understand both strategic and mission-level goals so that employees know what their daily work supports.

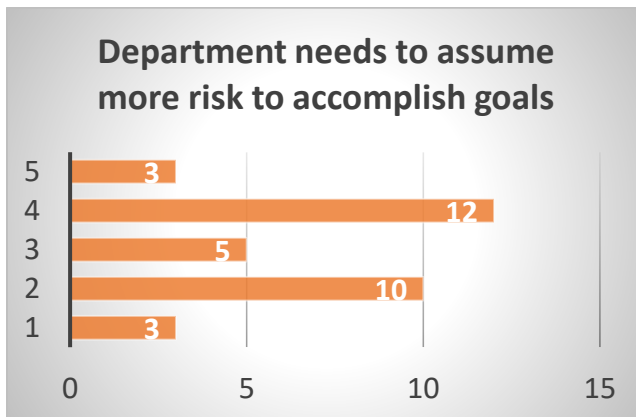
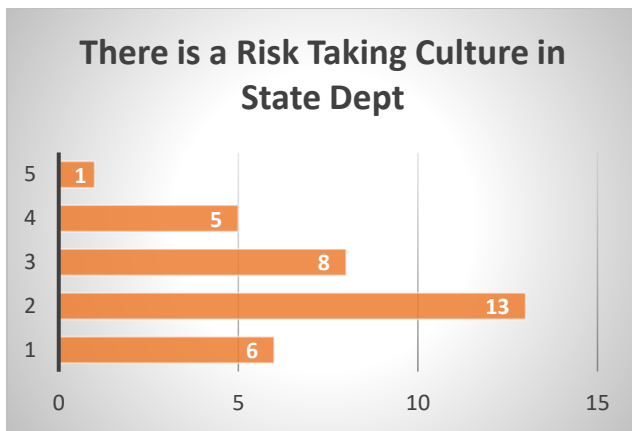
From a risk standpoint, the lack of communication and understanding of mission goals reveals a disconnect in the understanding and calculation of taking a risk. If a FS employee wishes to conduct diplomatic activity that carries a risk, then it must be purposeful. In order to show purpose, an organization should understand or demonstrate that the activity could possibly lead to a desired result. When strategic and measurable goals are unknown to many in an organization, balancing risk or taking appropriate risk calculations becomes murkier. Additionally, when an organization has one group that wants to take risks, but excludes others from understanding the opportunities of taking that risk, distrust and tension may increase. Fundamental communication failures breed distrust and acrimony. As well, with vague goals, almost any type of high-risk activity could be proposed to support achieving a mission goal. This makes risk calculation even more ineffective. If everything is worth taking a risk, then an organization would overwhelm its ability to mitigate risk. Operations in risky environments demand a stratification of necessary activities in order to achieve goals. The expression from one of the interviewees, "is the bang worth the buck" highlights this sentiment. Is the higher-risk activity in order to accomplish a goal worth it? If staff don't understand underlying goals, then

they will extremely difficult to prioritize and/or organize activity or calculate the risk of possible negative or positive outcomes.

Finding #10: The Harm of Risk Aversion

Interviewees were only unanimous on a few points, including the following one: if the State Department continues to take less risk, it will be less able to wield U.S. influence overseas, and ultimately, U.S national security would suffer. In addition, about 60% of the interviewees believed that the State Department is too risk averse (with 25% neutral), and 45% believe that the State Department needs to tolerate more risk in order to accomplish its strategic goals (with 15% neutral).

Figures 7 and 8: Interview Responses to Section 4: Questions 16 and 18



Note: Likert Scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither Agree/Disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree
Source based on author's calculations from structured interviews

Many of those interviewed admitted that they were inclined to either take or authorize others to take more risk in diplomatic engagement, yet they felt constrained by the possibility of unfairly being held personally accountable. One third of the interviewees felt they would face a politicized response in DC if they took additional risks that led to a negative outcome. Tellingly, one-half of interviewees believed that the lack of U.S. public understanding of the risks of

diplomatic engagement impacted their ability to take more risks. As well, interviewees mentioned that inconsistent funding and lack of risk mitigation resources constituted a major obstacle to taking more risk in diplomatic engagement. The lack of consistent resources provided through Congressional appropriations led to a serious staffing shortage in all FS career fields globally. During the 33 interviews, senior leaders referred 56 separate times to the need for consistent resources, or more resources, in order to properly manage, mitigate and take risks. Clearly, the lack of understanding by the U.S. public and the lack of resources to manage risk present major obstacles to risk taking in the field. Therefore, many senior leaders tended to maintain the status quo on risk tolerance, even though they disagree with this posture. Despite this, each interviewee was clear in their belief that continuing to take less risk would impair the ability of the State Department to achieve its goals and protect the U.S.

Most senior leaders strongly believed in the power of in-person, face-to-face diplomatic engagement. Indeed, the interviews occurred during the height of the second wave of coronavirus pandemic in the U.S. when the majority of diplomatic missions overseas remained at limited, heavily remote operations. Interviewees felt that much like the remote work during the pandemic, taking less risk in the field by limiting diplomatic engagement would lead to negative consequences in the short and long term. Interviewees strongly believed in the need to maintain working relationships with allies and friends, as well as to see, hear and converse with those opposed to the U.S. or its policies. If State Department diplomatic engagement ceased or declined due to risk aversion, interviewees stated that other actors (both state and non-state) would step in to fill the void. This would (and some interviewees said it already had) lead to a diminishing ability of the U.S. to project its power overseas and influence allies, competitors, and adversaries.

Section V: Main Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Based on the results of my survey, supported by the structured interviews and considering the historical context of previous attacks on diplomatic facilities, I conclude the State Department has slowly moved toward a paradigm of risk conservatism and risk aversion, despite paradoxically taking on and maintaining diplomatic engagement in highly dangerous environments. While the State Department is protecting Foreign Service employees and mitigating risk well, it is not balancing risk appropriately to achieve its foreign policy goals, mostly in high and critical threat environments.

This study also demonstrated that within the State Department, approaches to and beliefs about risk, risk management, security, risk calculation and risk tolerance are not homogeneous. There are areas of consensus and areas of division. First, FS employees value risk mitigation security measures, especially those that offer increased protection, rather than those that limit movement and travel. There is a general consensus that the State Department manages risk well, even though it needs to improve its flexibility in risk mitigation, especially when a threat environment becomes less dangerous. Overall, the FS is accepting of risk, and a majority believe the Department needs to take more risk in the day-to-day conduct of diplomacy.

Lastly, there is a lack of consensus among FS employees on whether they can accomplish daily work and if the Department can achieve its strategic goals with current risk mitigation policies in place. In the simplest terms, the State Department must either tolerate more risk to accomplish its goals, regardless of risk mitigation options, or it must accept that in mitigating more risk it will not achieve those goals. This presents an existential debate for the State Department, and highlights the imperative need to figure out how it can improve processes to manage and confront risks to physical security and safety and still achieve its foreign policy goals.

Next, within the FS, there exist variances in beliefs on risk by demographic or career factors. Consistently, men displayed more tolerance than women for taking risks in the course of their work responsibilities. DS agents, political, public diplomacy and USAID officers, and those FS employees having served at five or more diplomatic posts were more likely to accept or want to take more risk to accomplish their work. Additionally, political, public diplomacy and economic officers, as well as those having served at five or more posts believed that current risk mitigation policies impeded the State Department from accomplishing its work and achieving goals. Race and age among FS employees rarely played a role in attitudes on risk.

Senior leaders who manage risk at the diplomatic post level often feel a great deal of stress about suffering personal and career fallout if any employee under their responsibility should come to harm, whether it was feasible or not to prevent this harm. In general, senior leaders do not receive guidance on how to calculate risks or establish a risk tolerance level at post that is linked not only to the threat environment, but also to a calculated decision to achieve specific strategic goals. Due to this, many senior leaders feel that the Department has a risk averse culture, and that the current legal and policy framework make it extremely difficult for them to take additional risks, even to achieve strategic goals. Senior leaders overwhelmingly state that by continuing to reduce its risk tolerance overseas, the State Department will lose its ability to influence allies and non-allies, and U.S. national security will suffer.

Some of the findings in this study produced concerning conclusions. Neither the State Department nor any component of the U.S. government wants its primary diplomatic organization to lose influence and thus face adverse consequences for national security. Correspondingly, I cannot forget the fact that I am also a practitioner of diplomacy and want to offer solutions in addition to empirical information. My research was borne out of the endless professional and personal conversations, policy discussions, debates, and arguments (mine and others) on taking or not taking risks to personal safety in the field. Understanding how the FS approaches risk is important. As a practical matter, it is also necessary to present policy recommendations based on my findings that I believe will improve the ability of the State Department to effectively and efficiently take and manage risks *and* achieve its mission.

Policy Recommendation 1: Secretary of State Provides Risk Calculation Guidance

Most importantly, the State Department needs to provide enterprise-level risk tolerance and calculation guidance. Recently, the Undersecretary for Management introduced a new section in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) that states that the Secretary of State is responsible for setting the risk tolerance of the State Department. It also allocates responsibility to

Ambassadors for setting risk tolerance levels at a diplomatic post. This is a great first step. The Secretary of State should follow up on this FAM guidance by clearly communicating to diplomatic posts that risk calculations should incorporate both the possibilities of negative and positive outcomes. The Secretary of State should also specifically communicate to the State Department those strategic and even mission goals that are critically important. Thus, risk calculations in the field would incorporate the prioritization of achieving these goals (gains) as well as the threats to engagement (losses).

Policy Recommendation 2: Empower Risk Tolerance Decisions at Diplomatic Posts

Following on the above recommendation, senior leaders in the field should seek greater understanding from State Department headquarters, and internally at post, on what are the risk tolerance levels for diplomatic engagement linked to achieving strategic goals. The State Department should empower senior leaders at post to take calculated risks when the importance of achieving a goal is high (higher risk tolerance). This may require additional consultations with regional bureaus and DS bureau on the importance of strategic goals and the possibility of increased risk mitigation if necessary.

In order to accomplish this, senior leaders must clearly communicate both State Department strategic goals and linked mission goals. Senior leaders must ensure that every mission employee has read and understood mission goals. Senior leaders could host a town hall or direct section heads to discuss these goals in detail at a routine staff meeting.

Policy Recommendation 3: Embed risk calculations in all policy development

The State Department must embed risk assessments, risk mitigation planning, and risk tolerance levels into the policy formation process. This allows the State Department to reduce the production of infeasible options. It also importantly forces the State Department to have the conversation linking risk tolerance during policy development to both threats as well as the achievement of a goal. FS employees in the field will then understand that despite the high risks of implementing a policy, the Department is willing to take the risk, with or without increasing risk mitigation measures. FS employees could more confidently link local risk management decisions to this calculation. Conversely, the process may also expose an unwillingness by the State Department to assume a greater degree of risk in order to achieve a goal—or that it requires heavier risk mitigation moving forward. Thus, by removing the silo between risk management and policy formation, the State Department can eliminate a major inefficiency and source of confusion regarding risk and security in the conduct of diplomacy.

Policy Recommendation 4: Improve Flexibility and Adaptability of Risk Mitigation

By allowing a more transparent risk calculation framework that incorporates risk tolerance tied to both threats and achieving goals, the State Department can focus on improving flexibility in the application of risk mitigation measures. This will require changes to process as

well as the risk culture of seeking safety in the status quo. For diplomatic engagement that requires travel and movement, the State Department should allocate sufficient resources to provide more timely risk assessments. As well, senior leaders must move away from risk calculations that prioritize outdated threats or dangerous events that happened well into the past or are statistical outliers. Lastly, the flexibility in risk calculations should incorporate risk tolerance decisions, which can also change over time depending on new or shifting strategic and mission goals.

Policy Recommendation 5: Advocate for Increased Funding/Staffing and Improve Training

The State Department must secure consistent and greater funding for risk management, security training and overall staffing. Senior leaders were clear: they needed additional resources to keep up with the legal mandated risk management requirements. If Congress is not willing to roll back certain risk mitigation standards, then it must fund the State Department appropriately to meet those standards. Most importantly, most diplomatic posts are understaffed and constantly handling coverage of positions. In addition, the State Department generally has about 10% of its personnel in training. Thus, the State Department should expand the Foreign Service by at least 10% so that FS employees can receive proper training without creating staffing gaps and shortages.

With increased funding and staffing, the State Department should create more risk management and risk calculation training for FS employees. This will help non-security professionals understand better how to weigh risks appropriately in the field. Last, the State Department should begin orienting all new FS employees together, and not in separate classes as it currently does. The division of generalists and specialists in basic orientation and in later training creates organizational silos and cultures that can persist well into a FS employee's career. These silos and cultures also evoke and evolve differing risk tolerances and attitudes on risk. By removing some of the barriers to understanding others' professional responsibilities and approaches through joint orientation and other training, the State Department may improve the current cultural divide on risk taking.

Policy Recommendation 6: Create a New Undersecretary for Diplomatic Security and Law Enforcement

The conclusions from this research indicate that the State Department must take major organizational steps to address deficiencies in risk management in order to achieve its strategic goals. Specifically, it must improve how it calculates risk, establishes risk tolerance/appetite, and implements risk mitigation policies. In order to do this effectively, the State Department must empower its security and risk management professionals to the appropriate degree in order to create systemic changes. Therefore, the State Department should create a new Undersecretary for Diplomatic Security and Law Enforcement, incorporating primarily the DS Bureau. This Undersecretary would be responsible for all risk management decisions and

operations in the State Department—albeit with the guidance and approval from the Secretary of State. This organizational structural change resolves two major problems.

First, by creating this undersecretary, the State Department will remove some of the onerous, limiting and confusing bureaucratic barriers that exist when making decisions about risk in diplomatic engagement. Currently, the DS Bureau belongs to the Under Secretary for Management, which manages an extremely large and diverse array of bureaus. The Under Secretary for Management is not a security or risk management professional or position. Rather this portfolio belongs to the Assistant Secretary of DS who does not have direct access to the Secretary of State. This creates access and seniority obstacles for the State Department's primary authority on security and risk management. The current structure disadvantages the DS Assistant Secretary who must negotiate risk management issues with other State Department policy officers who outrank him or her. Security and risk management authority must exist on the same plane as other undersecretaries to ensure equitable representation in risk discussions, and ensure appropriate access to the Secretary of State and other agency principals. By creating this undersecretary, it places security and risk management responsibility and operationality at the appropriate level. This change would house risk management, security and law enforcement responsibility and authority within the professional entity staffed, resourced, and trained to carry out these important functions.

Second, by creating a dedicated security and risk management undersecretary, the State Department ensures (rather than hopes) that the policy development process incorporates risk management and calculations at both headquarters and post levels. Creating an undersecretary to manage risk in the State Department will also send a clear, unequivocal message to FS employees about the importance of collaborating with security professionals when calculating risk and risk tolerance for every policy and its implementation.

Additionally, and slightly outside the scope of this research, the State Department should consider realigning other bureaus with law enforcement and security portfolios within this new undersecretary, such as the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations (OBO). This will further reduce organizational redundancies and inefficiencies.

Appendix I: Survey Questions

State Department Risk Mitigation

February 19, 2021 11:07 AM MST

Q1 - Thank you for your interest in this survey, a research study conducted by researchers at Duke University. This survey is intended for all Foreign Service employees who have or are serving overseas at a diplomatic post. You will be asked a number of questions about you and your opinions towards the U.S. Department of State's risk mitigation policies and overall risk tolerance. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and your responses are entirely confidential. At no point will researchers disclose your individual responses with any information that would identify you. The de-identified data from this study may be made available to other researchers. This survey should take roughly 7 minutes to complete. You may withdraw at any time and you may choose to skip a question. For any questions you may have about this survey, please contact Margalit Murray at Duke University (margalit.murray@duke.edu). Have you read the above information and do you consent to participate in this research study? (Y/N)

Q2 - Are you a Foreign Service employee? (Y/N)

Q3 - What is your Foreign Service specialty or cone?

Q4 - How many years have you served in the U.S. Department of State?

Q6 - How long have you served at your current post?

Q7 - At how many overseas posts have you served?

Q8 - What is the overall current risk/threat level in your current overseas post or most recent overseas post? (Low, Medium, High/Critical)

Q9 - Can you drive a personal vehicle at your post? (Y/N)

Q10 - Can you take public transportation at your post? (Y/N)

Q11 - Do you manage the security portfolio at your post (or your most recent overseas post)? (Y/N)

Q12 - Do you have family/dependents at post? (Y/N/Sometimes)

Q13 - I can accomplish my work responsibilities with the current physical security restrictions in place. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree=SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q14 - I feel constrained by the current physical security restrictions as they relate to my work responsibilities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q15 - I feel safe when conducting work outside the diplomatic facility. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q16 - I feel safe when conducting work inside the diplomatic facility. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q17 - I am okay with taking risk to my personal safety in the course of my work responsibilities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q18 - I do not want to take personal risk to my physical safety in the course of my work responsibilities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q19 - I think the Department should take more risk overseas in conducting day-to-day work activities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q20 - I think the Department mitigates risks well in order to protect my physical security. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q21 - I think the Department is able to achieve foreign policy goals with current physical security restrictions and policies. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q22 - I think the Department fails to achieve its foreign policy goals because of physical security restrictions and policies. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q23 - I believe I should have no security restrictions on my ability to achieve my work responsibilities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q24 - I completed all my work responsibilities with security restrictions in place. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q25 - I have missed important work events due to security restrictions. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q26 - I think most of my colleagues believe that security restrictions to mitigate risk is a good thing. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q27 - I value security programs and restrictions that seek to protect me from physical harm. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q28 - I want to take more physical risk in order to accomplish my work responsibilities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29 - The Department has a variety of physical security restrictions that it views as important to the wellbeing of its employees and mission. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the importance of each of those listed here:

Q29.1 Bodyguards (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.2 Travel restrictions within country (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.3 Travel restrictions in a post's city (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.4 Guards around embassy/consulate (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.5 Curfews (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.6 Armored vehicles (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.7 Access policies for non-cleared visitors (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.8 Embassy Fences/Walls (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q29.9 Other (SA, A, N, D, SD)

(The following five questions were only visible to FS employees who previously answered that their time in service was greater than 10 years)

Q31 - I take my physical security more seriously than I did before the Benghazi attacks. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q32 - Security restrictions have impacted my ability to complete my work responsibilities more after the Benghazi attack. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q33 - The Benghazi attack changed the security restrictions at my diplomatic post. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q34 - Since the Benghazi attacks, I feel less safe at my diplomatic post. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Q35 - Since the Benghazi attacks, I feel more safe at my diplomatic post. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

For all survey takers:

Q36 - Finally, we have a few questions about you and your background. As a reminder, your responses to these questions are confidential. What year were you born?

Q37 - Which best describes you? Female/Male/Other

Q38 - Which best describes you? Mark all that apply.

White

Black or African American

Hispanic

Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American/Alaska Native

Other

Appendix II: Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

My name is Margalit Murray, and I am a Visiting Fellow at Duke University, representing the U.S. Department of State where I am employed as a Supervisory Special Agent in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. I am participating in the Counterterrorism and Public Policy Fellowship at Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy. I am conducting the following interview as part of my research for my thesis project which focuses on the State Department's balance of risk mitigation and risk-taking policies and how these policies affect the conduct of diplomacy.

I would like to record the interview mainly so that I can review the responses at a later time, not missing out on any information. It is not necessary that I record the interview, and can take notes instead. Can I record the interview through Zoom? (Yes/No)

This interview will include background questions about your position and your post (or previous posts and assignments). The second and third sections will include questions which will require ranked responses (strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neither agree nor disagree (N), agree (A), strongly agree (SA)) followed by a qualitative response in which you can provide more information, thoughts or opinions. You may choose to skip a question or stop the interview at any time. Your answers will be anonymous, as will the post at which you did or currently serve.

Do you have any questions at this time? If not, I will start recording and begin the interview.

Interviewer Note:

Age:

Race:

Sex:

Section 1:

1. What is your current position title?
1. If retired or previous COM/RSO, what was your last Department position?
2. How long have you served/or previously served in the Department?
3. At how many overseas posts have you served? Please name them?
4. What is the threat level at your current post (or last post if applicable)?
5. Did you ever have Department travel restrictions/travel advisories in country in which you served?
6. Do you/Did you have travel restrictions in your post's city/area of operation?
7. Do you/Did you have security-related curfews at post? (Or previously did). What were they?
8. Have you served at a post on a closed compound (residential included)?

9. Have you ever served at a post with a transportation/movement policy? Briefly describe.
10. What are/were the main threats to physical (personal) security at your post?
11. How safe do (did) you feel at home? In the office? Outside of the embassy?
12. Have you ever been the victim of crime, terrorism or any other security incident while posted overseas at an embassy/consulate?
 - a) Describe the incident

Section 2:

1. Mission personnel at your current or previous assignment were frequently the victims of crime, terrorism, or other security incidents. (SA, A, N, D, SD).
2. All mission personnel usually abided by physical security restrictions in place at post (e.g. curfews, travel restrictions). (SA, A, N, D, SD)
3. Mission personnel frequently complained about physical security restrictions at post? (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. If so, what were the main complaints, and were they personal or professional?
4. Security restrictions at post, not other factors, affected your ability to form professional relationships with host country officials? (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Describe?
5. Security restrictions at post, not other factors, affected your ability to interact with non-official host country nationals and residents? (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Describe how?
6. Security restrictions and risk mitigation strategies helped you to carry out your work requirements. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
7. You thought that the threat level for your post appropriately matched the security situation in your area of operations. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Explain your answer:
8. You thought/think that the security restrictions at your post were appropriately applied given the threat level at your post. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Explain your answer:
9. There are/were too many security restrictions at your post? (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. If so, what are they?

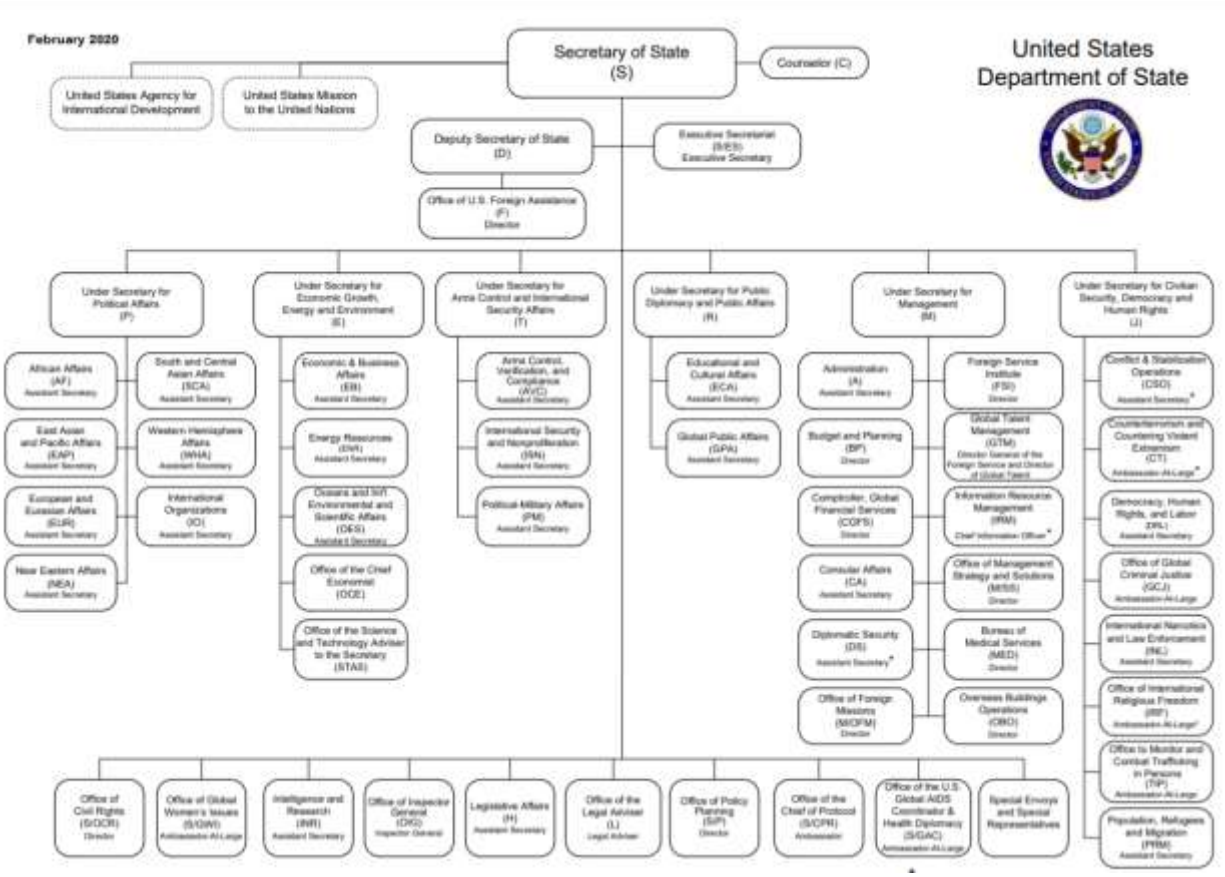
10. The security restrictions in place are beneficial to protecting your life and those of other mission personnel. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
11. You asked to waive security restrictions on a frequent basis in order to complete mission specific work requirements. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Provide more information?
12. You frequently had to cancel official engagements due to security restrictions enacted in lieu of an ongoing security situation in your area of operations. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Provide more information?
13. You frequently had to decline to participate in an official event or meeting due to security restrictions. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

Section 3:

1. Did you receive Department-level guidance on which strategic goals warranted affording greater physical security risk (meetings in high threat areas, meeting with violent groups, allowing larger groups onto the compound, etc)?
 - a. Please expand?
2. Can you describe how your post determined which higher risk official activities were necessary to accomplish Department and mission strategic goals.
3. Did your post's Integrated Country Strategy align with Department strategic goals at the corresponding time? (SA, A, N, D, SD).
4. Did mission personnel understand the ICS goals? (SA, A, N, D, SD).
5. You achieved all of the Integrated Country Strategy Goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD).
6. Discuss which goals of the ICS were not met?
7. Security restrictions and risk mitigation policies, not other factors, assisted you and your team in accomplishing ICS goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. If so, discuss how?
8. Mission personnel conduct, or attempt to conduct, high risk activities that do not correlate to mission work priorities. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Elaborate on your answer
9. Mission personnel appropriately weigh the risk of carrying out a work activity with mission strategic goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
10. Mission personnel take personal responsibility for their security, such as following security guidelines at post. (SA, A, N, D, SD)

- a. Elaborate on this answer?
11. Mission personnel sought out higher-risk activities for official purposes that were not linked to mission strategic goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD).
12. I approved higher-risk official activities to achieve mission strategic goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Expand?
13. I approved higher risk official activities for mission personnel that were not linked to mission strategic goals (SA, A, N, D, SD).
14. I often had to prohibit requests for higher-risk official activities that were not linked to mission strategic goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Expand?
15. The Department mitigates risk sufficiently to ensure the security of its mission personnel. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Expand?
16. There is a risk-taking, not risk avoidance culture in the State Department. (SA, A, N, D, SD, NA)
 - a. Expand?
17. The Department provides clear guidance to diplomatic posts as to which strategic goals warrant assuming greater physical security risk. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Expand?
18. The Department needs to assume more risk in order to accomplish strategic goals. (SA, A, N, D, SD)
 - a. Why or why not?
19. If so, what are the main obstacles for the Department if it were to assume more risk to physical security in the conduct of diplomacy?
20. What are the main outcomes for the Department if it were to assume less risk to physical security in the conduct of diplomacy?
21. Do you have anything else to add on this subject?

Appendix III: U.S. Department of State Organizational Chart 2021



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