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**United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Office of Inspector General**

# Report of Inspection

## Embassy Damascus, Syria

**Report Number ISP-I-10-34A, March 2010**

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*Office of Inspector General*

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel  
Deputy Inspector General

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY JUDGMENTS .....	1
CONTEXT .....	3
EXECUTIVE DIRECTION .....	7
POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.....	11
Political and Economic Affairs .....	11
Public Diplomacy .....	17
Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. ....	21
Consular Affairs.....	26
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.....	31
Real Property .....	32
General Services Office.....	36
Procurement.....	37
Motor Vehicle Operations.....	37
Property Management.....	38
Facilities Management.....	39
Financial Management.....	40
International Cooperative Administrative Support Services.....	41
Grants Management .....	42
Human Resources Management.....	43
Information Management.....	45
Information Systems Security.....	46
QUALITY OF LIFE.....	47
<b>(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)</b> .....	47
Medical Unit.....	48
Community Liaison Office .....	49
American Embassy Employees Association.....	50
MANAGEMENT CONTROLS .....	51
Financial Management.....	51
Procurement.....	54
.....	54

RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	55
INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	59
PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS . . . . .	65
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	67



Harold Geisel visited Damascus and joined the inspection team during selected reviews, including consideration of issues relating to the embassy compound facilities; consultations with embassy officials; and a roundtable discussion with current American Fulbright fellows and Syrian Fulbright alumni.



jectionist policies toward Israel, armed interference in Lebanon, support for terrorist organizations in the Middle East, and efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. The new engagement policy, adopted shortly after President Obama took office, has resulted in at least six high-level, bilateral exchanges and an announcement by the President that he intends to name a new ambassador to Syria – a post that has been vacant since the previous ambassador was recalled by Washington in February 2005.

At the operational level, the early stages of the engagement policy have somewhat improved the Embassy's access to Syrian officials, but most government officials continue to avoid contact with embassy staff. Economic officers have no access to officials in key ministries such as the finance, energy, or industry ministries, and the situation is similar for officers elsewhere in the Embassy. Most Embassy business, routine and otherwise, is conducted through diplomatic note or during visits by senior Washington officials and congressional delegations, when access is granted.

The American Cultural Center (ACC), which also was ordered closed at the same time, remains closed to the public, and its identifying signage has been removed. The American Language Center (ALC) likewise was closed in the fall of 2008, but has since reopened.

Syria is a repressive state, ruled by a hereditary authoritarian leader. Political opponents of President Bashar al-Asad's government are regularly arrested and jailed. Human rights advocates are routinely persecuted. Web sites such as Facebook and YouTube are blocked. Opposition outlets are subject to government censorship, as are the media. The government's feared intelligence apparatus maintains a heavy presence throughout society. Despite modest reforms in recent years which allowed the operation of independent universities, newspapers, and broadcast stations, the independent watchdog organization, Freedom House, places Syria near the bottom of its worldwide democracy index.

The United States maintains extensive economic sanctions against Syria, as a consequence of Syria's policies in the region. Syria has been on the Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism since 1979. The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003<sup>1</sup> essentially limits U.S. exports to food, medicine, and a small number of items eligible for Department of Commerce waivers.

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<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. 108-175

Syrian foreign policy remains largely at odds with the United States, not least due to its continuing support for the terrorist organizations Hizballah and Hamas. Syria has withdrawn its troops from neighboring Lebanon. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees' 2009 World Refugee Survey, Syria continues to house approximately one million refugees who fled Iraq during periods of violence several years ago, as well as some 558,000 Palestinian refugees. U.S. military commanders have said publicly that the Syrian Government has made some progress in reducing the number of third-country foreign fighters crossing from Syria into Iraq, but relations between Damascus and Baghdad remain strained.

While promised movement toward political reform (such as legalizing political parties) has not materialized, the al-Asad government has taken several steps toward opening the economy. These include establishing a stock market and reducing domestic subsidies for food and fuel. However, Syria has not effectively addressed key structural problems in the economy, including widespread corruption and declining oil exports. In its 2009 Global Corruption Report, the global civil society organization Transparency International ranked Syria 147 out of 180 countries regarding government corruption.



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

The Embassy's ability to interact with both the host government and the Syrian public correlates directly with the highs and lows of U.S.-Syrian bilateral relations. The February 2005 inspection took place shortly after the recall by Washington of the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri in Beirut, when the UN cited evidence implicating both Syrian and Lebanese officials in the assassination.<sup>2</sup> In September 2006, the chancery was attacked by car bombers. Although there were no injuries or material damage inside the compound, the attack caused the deaths of several Syrian police guards and a Chinese diplomat, who was observing the incident from the Chinese chancery across the street. As noted above, the DCS was closed following an alleged incident involving foreign forces. In June 2009, the new U.S. administration announced that it was preparing to return an ambassador to Damascus. Virtually overnight, embassy access to Syrian officials eased, and U.S. officials in Washington found it easier to get Syrian visas. Senior U.S. officials made high level visits to Damascus for the first time in several years, which also sent a positive signal.

Since the departure of the ambassador, embassy policy and operational continuity have suffered from high turnover at the executive levels and the absence of a full-time deputy chief of mission (DCM). Since February 2005, the Embassy has had five chargés d'affaires (four in the past two years) It also has had seven acting DCMs (five in the last two years), who have had to serve double duty as section chiefs. The OIG team believes it would have been advisable for the Department of State to provide an extra slot for a full-time DCM as soon as the ambassador was withdrawn, in view of the probability that Embassy Damascus would be led for an extended period by a chargé d'affaires.

The current chargé arrived at post on July 30, 2009. He properly decided to forego selecting an acting DCM from within the mission staff, and instead took on the double burden of providing both substantive direction and operational oversight himself. An accomplished public diplomacy officer and Arabic language speaker with extensive experience in the region, he assumed command smoothly and leads his largely youthful team with energy and transparency. The mission staff has responded positively to his inclusive approach. In addition to restricted country team meetings, he holds a well attended, freewheeling, "all hands" session for the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> Report on the International Investigation Commission Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005).

staff once a week. He takes pains to keep personnel informed of current developments, activities, and concerns, and encourages them to respond in kind. He meets weekly with the political and public diplomacy locally employed (LE) staff — some of whom have been put in difficult situations, due to their affiliation with the Embassy — and periodically meets with LE staff from other sections.

Entry-level officers are receiving adequate training and mentoring. The chargé meets with them individually and as a group, and he is working with them on a comprehensive mentoring program. Nearly all of the entry-level officers participate in representation events and contribute to managing visits by high level congressional and other delegations. Most of them have gained experience taking notes during diplomatic exchanges and preparing memoranda of conversations. Both the consul general and the political/economic chief have made special efforts to train entry-level officers assigned to their sections. Of note, only one of the six entry-level officers at post speaks professional level Arabic.

The chargé maintains an active dialogue with Washington, with a focus on three areas:

Syria's interests and potential role (positive or negative) in regional peace efforts; Syria's support for terrorist organizations and its close ties with Iran; and, the pressing need to obtain Syrian approval for a site upon which to build a new embassy compound. The chargé has stressed to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) and other Washington consumers that these issues cannot be dealt with in isolation, and are in fact interlinked.

The chargé has drawn on his diplomatic and public affairs skills, and excellent ability in the Arabic language to give a number of stand-up media interviews and public speeches in Damascus, and elsewhere in Syria. His ability to command news coverage is valuable for presenting U.S. policy, thereby countering a near blackout of public diplomacy that the Syrian Government has imposed on the Embassy. The chargé and other embassy officers treat each meeting or telephone conversation with Syrian Government officials as a valuable opportunity that may not be repeated. They supplement these encounters by coordinating discreetly with their counterparts from friendly embassies, media contacts, and other interlocutors.

As the situation stands, senior officials from Washington (for example, deputy assistant secretary level and higher officials, special envoys, and National Security Council staff members) are better placed to reach out to higher level Syrian offi-

cial than is anyone at the Embassy. The chargé does not have access to the Syrian foreign minister or his counterparts elsewhere in the host government, and his access at the deputy level is not always assured. However, this situation can be expected to improve with the return of an ambassador to Damascus.

## **Rightsizing**

Embassy Damascus will have to carefully consider all resource and infrastructure implications when deciding whether to approve NSDD-38 requests. Future staffing increases must be closely coordinated with improvements in the bilateral relationship, including the move to a new embassy compound

Under the current configuration of the chancery and annexes, it is unlikely that new staffing requests will be approved. The contention of the Department's Office of Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation, that staffing will grow by about 20 people by 2015 is based on the assumption there will be a new embassy compound that can accommodate staffing increases.



# POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

## POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

### Political and Economic Overview

The political/economic section, colocated with the front office, receives high marks in Washington for effective reporting and outreach under difficult circumstances. The section's reporting is widely respected by all agencies, and it plays a crucial role in deliberations on current and future policy toward Syria. The section is well managed, and morale and output are high. Acting on President Obama's call for greater diplomatic engagement between the United States and Syria, but mindful of existing laws and designations that limit engagement, the section has ably supported high level visits from Washington and, in conjunction with the public affairs section (PAS), has sought fresh opportunities for dialogue with the Government of Syria and the public. These efforts have not been fully reciprocated by the Syrian government, which continues to limit Embassy access to all but a handful of Government officials. The stated reason for this restrictive policy is the continuing absence of a U.S. ambassador in Damascus.

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### Staffing and Training

The section, combined in 2006, is comprised of a section chief, two economic officers, and two political officers, one of whom devotes half his time to supporting the chargé. They are supported by three experienced LE staff members and a family member office management specialist. A fourth LE staff member, employed by the Foreign Agricultural Service, also contributes to the section's work. A com-

bined political/economic section is appropriate in Syria, where the government plays a large role in the economy, and much of the Embassy's economic workload consists of explaining and enforcing U.S. trade sanctions.

The section chief is a mid-level political officer serving his third year in Damascus. He has a solid understanding of Syrian political dynamics, and is known and respected by Washington counterparts. The deputy section chief is an economic officer, also with Middle Eastern experience. The remainder of the reporting team includes a mid-level political officer with Middle Eastern experience, a second-tour political officer who focuses on human rights issues, and a first-tour economic officer with prior military and private sector experience. An officer from the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration is scheduled to arrive in summer 2010 to handle refugee affairs.

Of the five officers in the section, two political officers speak Arabic at a professional level. Neither economic officer speaks Arabic. The political officer who speaks Arabic has used his language ability to provide firsthand accounts of how Iraqi refugees view their situation, interview Syrian entrepreneurs, and contribute political insights from Arab embassies where staff members do not speak English.

## **Reporting and Outreach**

Embassy Damascus has compiled a solid record of achievement in reporting on regional and domestic political developments, economic sanctions, and human rights over the last year. Washington consumers regularly express appreciation for the Embassy's timely and thorough reporting.

The high point in 2009 reporting came when the Embassy filed a dozen papers for the new administration. These papers, and follow-on reports, offered detailed recommendations on how to move the bilateral relationship forward, and the obstacles to expect along the way. Officials throughout Washington have said that the continuing series of reports plays an integral role in high level policy discussions.

Reporting on economic sanctions, and the Government of Syria's attempts to circumvent them, was superb. The United States also was able to thwart several Syrian attempts to evade sanctions, thanks to timely Embassy warnings. The Department recognized the embassy's work by awarding the Herbert Salzman Award for International Economic Performance to one of the Embassy's economic officers.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) has cited the Embassy's human rights reporting as exemplary.

In one month reviewed by inspectors, 25 percent of the section's outgoing cables addressed human rights issues. In addition to reporting, the political officer who covers human rights regularly attends trials of dissidents, communicating by his presence the U.S. interest in their welfare. He also has helped involve the Embassy in a network of likeminded embassies, so that human rights information can be easily and widely shared.

The Embassy has established an initial dialogue with the Government of Syria on human rights issues. A breakthrough came in mid-2009, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor met with embassy officials to discuss ways to reduce trafficking in persons.

Washington consumers had offered three suggestions regarding reporting. First, several requested more on-the-street reporting of how Syrians view their government and its political and economic policies. Second, they recommended more reporting from outside Damascus, something the Embassy already plans to do. Third, they said some embassy analytical reports are too long, and would benefit from more focused editing. The inspection team discussed all three suggestions with the chief of the political section.

The political/economic section has worked effectively with the PAS to maximize outreach. Three examples stand out. First, when the PAS invited a Georgetown University professor to Damascus to discuss Syria's new stock market this year, the economic officers used the occasion to make new Syrian Government contacts in economic ministries. Second, the economic section used an H1N1 initiative cosponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Syrian Ministry of Health to establish new contacts in the Syrian health sector. The PAS contributed to the H1N1 program by inviting a U.S. speaker to Damascus, and by sending a Syrian health official on an international visitors program to the United States. Finally, a PAS visit by a U.S. expert on trafficking in persons led to the first official talks between the United States and Syria on this issue in recent memory. Coordination between the two sections on such initiatives has been exemplary.

Until recently, individual sections did not have representation plans, a weakness that reduced opportunities for outreach. However, the Embassy now has an overall plan that includes all key sections. The plan for the political/economic section provides representation funds for each officer and all LE staff.

## Refugees

Estimates vary widely regarding the number of refugees residing in Syria, but all sources agree that worldwide, Syria's refugee population is second only to Pakistan's. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' 2009 World Refugee Survey, Syria hosts approximately 1.2 million Iraqis; 558,000 Palestinians; and 6,000 other refugees. The Palestinian refugees are the most visible, since most of these refugees still occupy the areas set aside for them as camps beginning in 1948, when they came to Syria with few resources and little hope of returning to their homes. However, Palestinians have become fairly well integrated into the community, both socially and culturally. They carry Syrian-issued travel documents, and are permitted to work, study, buy property, and start businesses. Iraqi refugees, who have fewer rights than Palestinians, are more numerous but less conspicuous, since many brought enough resources sufficient to allow them to rent or buy property. When questioned by embassy officers and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), most Iraqis consider their sojourn in Syria to be temporary.

Most day-to-day refugee issues, including oversight of NGOs implementing U.S. funded projects in Syria, currently are handled regionally out of Embassy Amman (for programs involving Iraqi refugees) and out of Consulate General Jerusalem (for programs involving Palestinians). However, in 2010, the position of regional refugee coordinator for assistance for Iraqis will be moved to Embassy Damascus. This position, supported by one LE staff member, will report to the political section chief and will assume both the deputy consul general's and the political officer's refugee related tasks in addition to retaining regional responsibilities. Embassy Damascus will accommodate this officer in the chancery and the LE staff member in other unclassified space.

Embassy Damascus has played a central and essential role in the successful establishment and continuing operation of NGOs in Syria, such as the International Organization for Migration, which is the processing entity for refugees bound for the United States. The deputy consular section chief spends approximately 25 percent of his time serving as control officer for Department of Homeland Security refugee admissions teams that visit Damascus four times per year. One political officer's portfolio includes reporting on refugee affairs and serving as a liaison between the embassy and NGOs throughout Syria. This officer provides first-hand reports on refugees' problems and concerns, often using their own words, as well as updates on the frustrations faced by NGOs as they deal with what they see as the insular and micromanaging (but ultimately generous) Syrian response to its refugee population. This officer also recently coordinated the chargé's visit and speech at the formal dedication of a newly refurbished school for Palestinian children – a project which

the regional coordinator for Palestinian refugee affairs in Jerusalem had overseen; the U.S. Government had financed (through the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration); and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had executed and organized.

## **Democracy Programs**

Both the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) fund programs that address Syria. All are managed from Washington, not from the Embassy. Some programs are regional with Syrian participation, some focus on Syrian exiles, and others operate within Syria.

Coordination with embassy officers has been uneven, particularly with regard to MEPI programs. Earlier this year, the embassy's leaders noted that they were not being adequately consulted about MEPI programs, and they initiated a conference call with Washington based MEPI officials to discuss a range of issues. Coordination has improved since then, and the Embassy and MEPI have engaged in a lively debate over options for the program in Syria. The inspection team left an informal recommendation that the Embassy designate a single officer to oversee both Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and MEPI programs, and that this responsibility be included in the relevant work requirements for that officer's position.

## **Agriculture**

The Foreign Agricultural Service maintains one LE staff member in Damascus, who is supervised by an economic officer. The service withdrew its attaché in 1984, and now covers the country from Cairo. The staff member has worked with the Embassy for more than 30 years. He participates in weekly economic meetings, and officers readily draw on his knowledge of economic and political issues. As with other offices, access to government officials is limited. The section, for example, used to become directly involved when disputes snarled shipments of U.S. grain through Syrian ports; now, however, they are required to send a diplomatic note spelling out concerns, which is a slower and more cumbersome process.

## **Contact Management**

The Embassy does not have an effective means to manage its contacts. As do other sections, the political/economic section maintains its own contacts data base. An experienced LE staff member is working to create a user-friendly, embassy wide contacts base, but she will require strong support in getting various sections to

change their existing practices and adopt the new system. The inspection team left an informal recommendation that the chargé name an American officer to oversee the program, and that this officer's work requirements be revised to include this responsibility.

## Communication with Washington

Two issues regarding communication between Washington and Embassy Damascus merit attention. First, the Embassy relies, excessively, on emails and official-informal cables to convey information to Washington. Recent informal traffic reviewed by the inspection team, for example, included information on the seriousness of the drought in eastern Syria, readouts from meetings with ranking Syrian officials, and field observations from international NGOs. While this problem is not unique to Embassy Damascus, the repercussions are especially significant, due to the lack of reliable journalistic and other open-source reporting from Syria. Several Washington analysts specifically requested that the Embassy more widely share their field-generated information. The inspection team made an informal recommendation that the Embassy review how it disseminates information, and consider making greater use of front-channel messages, distributing emails more widely, or employing some combination of the two.

Second, while the Department generally provides the Embassy with adequate guidance in most areas, there is a lack of clarity on a number of issues related to engagement. Earlier this year, for example, the Embassy included a Syrian health official on an international visitors program to the United States, only to have her turned away by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, because of Syria's designation as a terrorist state. An LE staff member on training in Washington also was turned away from classes at the Department of Energy, for the same reason. These unfortunate incidents could have been prevented, if the Department had provided greater clarity on the rules of engagement.

The most immediate issue requiring greater clarity concerns economic sanctions. There is no front-channel guidance on the issue. The inspection team reviewed email and informal traffic regarding sanctions and waiver policy, and found several areas in which the guidance appeared to be contradictory. There also was inadequate guidance regarding how embassy officers should advise potential U.S. exporters of sanctions and possible waivers.

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Damascus, should initiate an interagency review of all sanctions-related issues and provide the embassy with explicit, formal guidance on how to address them, including specific clarification regarding the rules of engagement. (Action: NEA, in coordination with Embassy Damascus)

## **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

### **Public Diplomacy Overview**

Embassy Damascus' public diplomacy program has been restricted by the Syrian Government's actions. For instance, in 2006, the Damascus field offices of the NGO American Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST), which had been operating in part through Department grants, was closed. As noted previously, in November 2008, the Syrian Government closed the ACC, the ALC, and the DCS. The ALC subsequently has been permitted to reopen, but the ACC and its Information Resources Center (IRC) remain closed to the public.

The Embassy is also largely blocked from gaining access to public high schools and public universities. For example, the PAS is not permitted to have access to the American Corner in Damascus University. However, in response to educational reform, at least ten privately owned universities have sprung up around the country since 2001. The Embassy has been given limited opportunities to interact with these institutions, and must send diplomatic notes to the Ministry of Higher Education regarding the few programs that are permitted. The Government of Syria and the Ba'ath party are determined to control the education of Syrian youth, and this has made direct outreach to secondary students in public schools almost impossible.

Outreach beyond Damascus has been hampered by Syrian Government restrictions on the movements of embassy staff. Further, PAS access to the predominantly government-owned and government-influenced media is limited. However, media reform has led to growth in the number of privately owned print and broadcast media, which are generally easier to interact with than are government-run media outlets. Nevertheless, the information officer, who had been at Embassy Damascus for less than three months at the time of the inspection, had yet to see the managing editor of any government-owned newspaper. The public affairs officer (PAO), who







## **MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC.**

Syria does not host stations or affiliates for Radio Sawa or Alhurra TV, both of which are entities of the Broadcasting Board of Governors grantee, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. However, the International Broadcasting Bureau has ringed Syria with FM transmitters to facilitate reception of Radio Sawa signals in Syria. In addition, Syrian television viewers with satellite reception capability can freely access Alhurra TV from one of several telecommunications satellites that cover the Syrian audience. The Government of Syria takes a hands-off approach concerning its citizens' reception of regional and international satellite television broadcasts, and there are over 435,000 satellite subscribers for direct-to-home satellite television service; satellite dishes are ubiquitous on Syrian homes and apartment buildings. Surveys on Syria's viewing and listening habits are not available, so it is difficult to determine the preferred sources of information for most Syrians. The OIG team makes no judgment as to the efficacy of Radio Sawa or Alhurra TV programming, either as a source for news and information or in dispelling anti-American views carried by other media in the region and available to the Syrian audience.

### **Open Door to Major Cultural Events**

The Government of Syria has closed the ACC to the public, and the ACC's name plaque has been removed. The public can no longer access the facility or use the IRC, and the weekly movie night and other cultural events can no longer be pre-

sented from the ACC. In the face of these obstacles, the Embassy has experimented with ways to move forward for instance, by presenting events around Damascus under the aegis of the Embassy, rather than the ACC. The Embassy has presented successful public cultural events such as a concert by the Chris Byars Jazz Quartet, which performed in Damascus at a major auditorium; this event generated favorable media coverage. The Ministry of Culture also has indicated interest in expanding cultural contacts which do not involve the ACC facility, until such time as the Government of Syria allows the ACC to fully reopen. One of the best ways to pursue both the FY 2011 Mission Strategic Plan (MSP) goal of promoting people-to-people contact and the Department's goal of reaching out to Muslim populations is to aggressively expand the programming of visiting artists, under the sponsorship of the chief of mission. Even when the ACC can operate more openly, such efforts should continue.

**Recommendation 3:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, should develop and implement a strategy for more frequent and expanded programming of visiting artists that takes advantage of the open doors available to reach out to the Syrian people. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with R, ECA, and NEA)

## American Corners

The PAS has an American Corner and an American Bookshelf in Damascus, and American Corners in the cities of Dara'a and Swaida, near the border with Jordan. This leaves three-quarters of Syria (in the area north of Damascus) without any active American presence or programming platform. The Embassy has entered a dialogue with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) over the possibility of placing one or more American Corners in educational facilities that serve Palestinian refugees, but this does not address the need for coverage in the northern part of the country. Aleppo, located in the north near the border with Turkey, is Syria's second largest city with a metropolitan area population of up to 4 million, or one-fifth of Syria's total population. Although the Embassy owns property in Aleppo, it has not been used since a mob fire bombed it in 1967. In its current state, the property is not suitable to house an American Corner.

The FY 2011 MSP goal of promoting people-to-people contacts calls for expanding outreach programs beyond Damascus, so as to engage with and attract Syrians to other venues throughout Syria. In addition, in his October 2009 trip report,

the regional information resources officer cited a need for additional American corners in partnership with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and perhaps English language centers in other cities such as Aleppo. Aleppo has private universities, as well as English language centers, which potentially could serve as partner institutions for an American Corner.

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, should seek out a partner institution in Aleppo to host an American Corner, establish and operate an American Corner in that city, and provide funding to sustain the program and maintain its viability. (Embassy Damascus, in coordination with R)

During the inspection, a member of the OIG team accompanied the chargé d'affaires to the Dara'a American Corner for his first visit there, including a book donation to the American Corner. The Dara'a American Corner is located in Infinity, a privately owned, English language institute.

## **English Language Program**

There are many Syrian-run English teaching institutes in Syria. The Embassy effectively engages with these institutes through English language fellows, the regional English language officer, and the IRC. A centerpiece of the Embassy's English language program is the ALC, which has been in Syria since 1986. At one time, the ALC was managed directly by the PAS. Subsequently, the Embassy entered into a cooperative agreement with AMIDEAST to manage the center, but the PAS was compelled to take a more active role in ALC oversight after AMIDEAST's Syrian field office was forcibly closed in 2006. As noted previously, in November 2008, the Government of Syria closed the ALC. In March 2009, the embassy sent the Syrian Government a diplomatic note advising Syria that the ALC would have to be closed permanently, if it were not permitted to reopen. The Government of Syria allowed the ALC to resume operations shortly thereafter.

Located adjacent to the chancery in the former Danish embassy building, the ALC offers classes four terms a year, with more than 2,000 students per term, plus a summer intensive session. The number of students exceeds the FY 2010 MSP target (under performance indicator number one) of reaching 7,000 Syrians through the ALC's English language direct training program; the high level of attendance also achieves the FY 2011 MSP goal number five, of promoting people-to-people contact. The ALC turns away 600 students per term due to its limited space, notwith-

standing the fact that it has leased additional space in a nearby building to accommodate the program's growth. Despite its popularity, the ALC's accounts are currently in deficit, due to lost revenue caused by its five-month closure by the Syrian Government.

The Embassy currently leases the ALC's two properties, but the ALC pays the \$88,000 annual cost of the leases through its recycled funds. The ALC is the Embassy's biggest outreach program for Syrian youth. Through the PAS' collaboration with the center, ALC students learn about ACC provided educational advising and testing services, as well as information about other Embassy outreach programs and cultural events.

The ALC is in dire need of additional classroom space. The embassy-owned Hafez building, which abuts the ALC, currently is unoccupied, and could be used to expand classroom space for the ALC. However, the building cannot be occupied by U.S. direct-hires because the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) has not given it a security waiver (see Hafez Building in the Resource Section of this report). In the meantime, the Hafez building remains an underutilized property, but the Embassy will not sell it, for security reasons. Putting ALC classrooms in the underutilized Hafez building would support MSP goals. Maintaining the current situation prevents the ALC from achieving its potential; it also prevents the ALC from eliminating the deficit it faces through no fault of its own. The ALC is an overseas security advisory council member. It already screens students and staff with a walk-through metal detector attended by a security guard. The ALC could easily use space in the Hafez building without having access to the rest of the embassy compound.

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, should submit a proposal for the American Language Center to expand classroom space into a portion of the Hafez building, subject to agreed upon safeguards. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with DS and ECA)

## Educational Advising and Testing

The educational advising and testing office, a unit in the ACC, is serviced by two LE staff members, who are not U.S.-educated and therefore have limited ability to advise prospective students about studying in the United States. The Embassy is pursuing different courses of action to remedy the situation. The office averages 650 contacts per month. Students under 18 years of age may access its services; the

Embassy does not consider this as falling under the Ministry of Culture's ban on children at the ACC, because these clients are not coming to the ACC for cultural events. During the official closure of the ACC, most testing — including the test of English as a foreign language and the undergraduate and graduate level college entrance exams — is conducted at the DCS, whose facilities are still operational, although the school itself remains closed.

## **Exchange Program**

The Embassy has a robust exchange program. The Fulbright program in Syria predates Syria's inclusion on the Department's terrorist list in 1979. Even under challenging circumstances, the Embassy has sent more international visitors to the United States in the last two years than in several years before sanctions. The Embassy does not generate press coverage of returning students, for fear they could be harassed. The candidates themselves also have expressed concerns about receiving publicity.

Beginning in 2007, Fulbright fellows coming to Syria from the United States were denied affiliation with Syrian universities, which meant they could not obtain resident visas. Instead, they entered Syria on visitor visas, which had to be renewed repeatedly and were not valid for multiple entries. On October 29, 2009, accompanied by the PAO, the chargé d'affaires and the cultural affairs officer called on Syria's Deputy Minister of Higher Education for the first time in two years. The Deputy Minister said Fulbright fellows once again could be affiliated with Syrian universities, and that American students now would be permitted to audit courses at Damascus University, which will permit them to obtain resident visas. The Embassy is awaiting receipt of a formal written confirmation of this welcome change.

The FY 2009 budget for Fulbright programs was \$1.1 million for a total of 26 U.S. and Syrian scholars and students. Five candidates dropped out, because they did not receive Syrian permission to participate. There were also two Syrian Humphrey Fellows in FY 2009, one Syrian Fulbright foreign language teaching assistant, and seven U.S. students who received critical language enhancement awards. The Embassy Damascus exchange program also included 30 International Visitor Leadership Program participants in FY 2009, who were supported with a budget of \$297,180.

## **Youth Outreach**

Guidance put out by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs limits the Embassy's ability to interact directly with secondary school age Syrian youth. In 2006, the Government of Syria closed AMID-

EAST, a major NGO which had received grants from the Embassy to run exchange programs that reached Syrian youth. The Embassy does no outreach to public schools. Permission to present programs in public schools must be requested by diplomatic note to the Ministry of Education, and to date such requests either have been denied or received no response. Persons under 18 years of age cannot attend embassy cultural functions, based on directives from the Ministry of Culture to all foreign cultural centers. Before the closure of the ACC, when the weekly movie night presented animated features, Syrian families with young children were turned away at the doors by armed security officers from the Ministry of Interior.

Before the closure of the DCS in November 2008, the Government of Syria determined that no new Syrian students (who had comprised the largest portion of the student body), could be enrolled at the DCS. In July 2009, the Syrian Government reiterated its position that the DCS would not be permitted to reopen.

Without outreach to Syria's youth, it is difficult to counter anti-American propaganda and other false views of Americans and U.S. policy. It is likely that negative attitudes will continue to take root, and make it even harder for the Embassy to reach Syria's future leaders.

The American Mideast Leadership Network, which has a successful record of youth exchange programs in Syria, has submitted to the Embassy a proposal for a United States-Syria grassroots diplomacy youth program. No decision has been made by the Department to fund the costly proposal. In the meantime, the Embassy has not reached out to groups like Rotary International, which also have broad experience in youth exchange programs as an alternative or for expanded options.

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, should develop and fund youth-directed initiatives and exchanges. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with ECA and NEA)

## CONSULAR AFFAIRS

The consular section is cramped and uninviting, but there is cooperation and mutual support among its six officers, ten LE staff members, and one eligible family member. The section is implementing customer service practices promoted by the

Bureau of Consular Affairs, under the guidance of a perceptive and knowledgeable new chief. Written standard operating procedures (SOP) would enhance efficiency and morale.

## **Consular Facilities**

Renovation of the consular section, is underway as part of the larger public access project. This renovation provides no additional space, but improves the section's layout slightly.

## **Consular Management**

One of the FY 2011 MSP goals is "efficient consular operations." The section is streamlining procedures and services in pursuit of this goal. It was not able to implement the initiatives mentioned in the 2005 inspection report due to various infrastructure problems, such as inadequate local Internet quality, but now is reviving them. These initiatives include improving the systems for visa and passport appointments; receipt and pass-back of documents by courier; credit card acceptance; and off-site fee payment. The objective is for most customers to come to the Embassy only once. At present, successful visa applicants make at least four visits. Small businesses have sprung up nearby to help visa applicants fill out forms and make online appointments. Consular management monitors these businesses, to ascertain that they are not compromising or violating regulations – for instance, by suggesting answers to questions or providing false supporting documents.

Transparency is the new consular chief's consistent theme. The section hopes to fill an LE staff position with an employee who will update Internet pages and broaden public access to consular information. During the inspection, the section introduced its first web chat, answering questions from the public. The Bureau of Consular Affairs strongly recommends having written SOPs to increase transparency and efficiency. At present, for example, LE staff who are unit supervisors do not consistently inform their teams of cases in process, and as a result, junior staff members cannot answer customer queries. An SOP requiring shared electronic files would alleviate this problem. No one completes the weekly update of the nonimmigrant visa work flow data, which is published on [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). The fraud unit's standards for accepting and investigating cases are not followed consistently. Officers clear visa computer system messages periodically, but a visas SOP would remind them to do this daily.

**Recommendation 7:** Embassy Damascus should write or update and implement standard operating procedures for all consular functions. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

A consular team visits Aleppo three times a year, to accept passport and report of birth applications, perform notariats, and register Americans as being resident. The team works in space provided by a private university and returns finished documents to the university for distribution to their owners.

The section's deputy serves as control officer for the Department of Homeland Security's refugee processing teams, which visit four times a year and stay in Syria for approximately eight weeks per visit. The officer spends approximately one quarter of his time making arrangements for the teams' arrival by making hotel reservations, arranging for transportation, resolving problems, and dealing with emergencies. In 2010, the new refugee affairs officer in the political section will assume this responsibility.

The section has excellent relations with the rest of the mission. The section chief meets weekly with the chargé, who is informed and supportive. The information management section responds to computer problems swiftly and effectively. The consular cashier submits funds daily, the class B cashier provides receipts correctly, and the accountable consular officer maintains records as required.

## **American Citizen Services**

Consular MSP objectives include items which are taken for granted in most other countries: prompt notification of American citizen arrests; timely access to prisoners; and, welfare/whereabouts visits to children whose custody is disputed. In Syria, these fit comfortably into the broader MSP theme of improving relations and cooperation with the host government.

The resident American population in Syria, at about 9,000, is small but assisting these citizens can be labor- and time-intensive. Although Syria is a signatory to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the Embassy learns of arrests only when friends or family members call, not from the government. Moreover, upon learning of these arrests, the consular section must submit multiple requests before gaining consular access to prisoners.

American citizen services cases involving women can be complex and perilous. Honor killings are not uncommon, and since penalties for this crime are minimal, there is no effective deterrent to the murder of young women by male relatives for

perceived insults to their families' reputations. Several recent cases involved young Syrian-American women who would have been victims of honor killing had they been found by family members yet, despite the very real risks they faced, these women could not legally leave Syria. In such circumstances, the Embassy, at times, has gone beyond the usual limits of consular support to help the endangered women return to the United States. The Government of Syria has opened shelters for abused women, but only Syrian citizens can use them. The Embassy is prepared to shelter endangered American women on the mission grounds, if necessary.

Women face other challenges, as well. Syrian men can place exit holds on their wives, or can refuse to renew their foreign wives' residency permits, effectively imprisoning the women in Syria. In the case of divorce, Syrian law awards custody to mothers until daughters reach age 15 and sons reach age 13. Fathers must pay the Syrian equivalent of child support, but enforcing payment can require long, costly court battles. Since children under 18 cannot leave Syria without their fathers' permission, this can imprison and impoverish the divorced women and their minor children. Syria's tradition of restricting women's rights is so strong that sometimes Jordanian men will leave their American wives and daughters in Syria, believing that Syrian immigration officers will be less likely than Jordanian officers to help the women return to the United States.

Children's issues are also taxing. Syria is not a signatory to The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, so custodial parents of children who have been taken to Syria by the noncustodial parent have no legal means to compel their children's return. In such cases, the Embassy can only meet with the children and pass on gifts from the noncustodial parent if permitted by Syrian family members. The Embassy is also allowed to forward photographs of the children and reports about their welfare, if there are sympathetic relatives to whom to provide this information. The Embassy has 12 ongoing, long-term cases of this type involving 28 children.

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## Visas

The majority of the FY 2011 MSP consular goals pertains to visas and is addressed by the broad improvements that the consular chief is implementing. In addition, because most Syrians are subject to security advisory opinions, the responses to which can take weeks to arrive, the section could improve efficiency and public good will by making security advisory opinion results available on its Web site. The OIG team reviewing Embassy Amman has commended its system for publishing its security advisory opinion results online as a best practice; the Damascus OIG team informally recommended that Embassy Damascus adopt this or a similar system<sup>3</sup>.

The section has implemented the new worldwide visa referral policy, but referred cases are not always entered correctly. For example, class B nonimmigrant visa referrals are often recorded as class A, because the system default of an A classification was never changed to B, at any point in the process – i.e., during data entry, interview, or adjudication. As another example, whenever an officer other than the interviewer performs final approval following a security advisory opinion response, the system might show that an entry-level officer has adjudicated an A referral, which is contrary to 9 FAM Appendix K, 202 regulations. To correct this, the section should return all referral cases to the interviewing officer for final adjudication. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to correct these processing errors.

## Fraud Prevention

The fraud unit is staffed by a highly competent investigator, supervised by the deputy section chief. Prior to the arrival of the current section chief, the unit had accepted suspect cases, even though the cases did not have clear fraud indicators. The unit now is closing or processing to conclusion those cases which do not involve actual fraud, requiring adherence to the existing SOPs, and teaching officers to write petition revocation memos. The section chief and deputy meet quarterly with their counterparts from other embassies in Damascus.

## Visas Viper

The mission holds monthly visas viper committee meetings. These meetings are chaired by the chargé, who is working without an acting DCM. The committee reports as required and submits names as appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> OIG Inspection of Embassy Assan, Jordan, Report Number ISP-I-10-35A

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The management section is functioning appropriately, now that it has a full complement of experienced American staff. Until several months ago, the management officer was acting DCM, the former general service officer (GSO) was acting management officer, and there were no other management section officers. The supervisory GSO, facilities manager, information management officer, community liaison officer, and Foreign Service health practitioner are all newcomers to Embassy Damascus.

Agency	U.S. Direct-Hire staff	Eligible family member staff	Locally-employed Staff	Total Staff	Total Funding FY 2009
Diplomacy and consular programs	28	3	27	57	\$1,699,147
ICASS	4	3	41	49	3,970,300
Public Diplomacy	3		10	13	573,571
Diplomatic Security	4		95	99	600,866
Marine security guard	6		3	9	154,591
Representation					36,100
OBO	1		27	28	2,281,522
Defense attaché office	3		1	4	198,320
<i>U.S. Department of Agriculture</i>			1	1	54,431
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>\$9,568,848</b>

Source: Embassy Damascus Financial Management Office

An eligible family member serves as the assistant GSO, and the small staff of LE employees in the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) sections provide good service. A number of residential properties are being replaced, as needed. The housing board accompanies the GSO and the sole housing staff member when properties are being considered and keeps minutes documenting the process. The section has succeeded in negotiating leases to a level below the \$50,000 waiver requirement.

## REAL PROPERTY

The Embassy and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) have been seeking a plot for a new embassy compound since 2001. The government of Syria's efforts to develop a diplomatic quarter in the city of Damascus have failed to materialize. The United States is awaiting Syrian approval for a site to resolve overcrowding and other problems at the present chancery and annex. According to OBO and DS, once a site is approved and acquired, it will likely take a few years for a new embassy to be completed and occupied.

The current chancery is a labyrinth of U.S. Government-owned and leased properties. The general services office occupies basement-level, rented space in a building where other tenants occupy the upper floors. The facilities section's workshops are poorly situated in a basement that is located down worn stairs without handrails or any means by which to haul equipment up and down. The warehouse is approximately ten miles from the embassy. The public diplomacy building, a leased property one block away from the chancery, houses public affairs, human resources, the health unit, the community liaison office, and LE staff members in the economic, political, and agricultural sections.

### Hafez building

Purchased in 1997 for approximately \$4 million, the Hafez building was acquired to create additional unclassified work space. Like other buildings on the compound, it is located adjacent to a busy street. Unfortunately, since DS has not granted the mission a Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 1999 waiver for the building, the Embassy does not allow staff to occupy it, although during the current post security upgrade project, several staff members have occupied the building intermittently.

According to 12 FAH-5 H-121.2, if particular physical security standards cannot be met, the regional security officer must obtain documentation confirming the post's inability to institute that particular security standard. In 2005, the last OIG report<sup>4</sup> noted the underutilization of the Hafez building and suggested that the Embassy ask DS to reevaluate it for use as offices, including a conditional waiver. However, the Embassy has taken no action in this regard, and the Hafez building remains underutilized, as it has for nearly 13 years.

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<sup>4</sup> OIG Report No. ISP-I-05-17A, Inspection of Embassy Damascus, Syria, July 2005

Key U.S. Government interests are served by the Department's support to overseas American schools. From 1964 to 2008, the Department provided the [redacted] with grants totaling \$1,613,480 and security funds totaling \$355,400. Between 2007 and 2008, the school worked to comply with the Syrian Ministry of Education's May 2, 2006 Legislative Decree 55, governing pre-college private teaching institutions. In September 2008, in further compliance with Syrian law, the [redacted] agreed to discontinue enrolling new Syrian single and dual passport holders. Nevertheless, on November 3, 2008, the Government of Syria closed the school. As a result, several embassy officers with school-age children curtailed their assignments at the post.

[redacted] Two more officers' families remain in the United States on separate maintenance allowance.

[redacted]. The closure of the [redacted] has had a negative effect on Embassy Damascus' capacity to recruit officers with school-age children, and this problem may become more acute over time.

The school remains in "temporary extended closure" status, but it is likely to close permanently. In July 2009, the Government of Syria reiterated that it will not permit the [redacted] to reopen. The Embassy is hopeful that another school, located elsewhere, will open in the near future.

In 1947, the Embassy acquired the Garden property site for a new chancery. The [redacted] has occupied this U.S. Government-owned property since 1964. Over the years, the school modified existing buildings and added new ones, as the campus grew to include ten buildings, 34 classrooms, a library, and offices.

In 1997, the Department's real property advisory board recommended selling the garden property and, in 1998, the OIG team identified the [redacted] site as high-value, excess property which should be sold. Both the 1997 and 1998 recommendations anticipated that the [redacted] would vacate the property, and either find a new site or lease an alternate property. In 1998, the school undertook a property search for this purpose, but without success.

In 2002, the Under Secretary for Management approved a decision to charge the [redacted] \$150,000 annual rent, with \$25,000 annual increases. However, based on a 2005 OIG report, the requirement for [redacted] to pay rent was eliminated; in lieu of rent, \$50,000 a year was put into a school escrow account, toward the purchase of a new site for the campus. Upon closure of the school, however, this practice was



this building. The caretaker, who also serves as the gardener, works five days a week. The annual cost for the caretaker's salary, utilities, and other maintenance expenses is about \$19,000.

One contractor estimated that cleaning and partially restoring the buildings might cost \$1 million to \$2 million.



*Fire Damage to Consulate Office Building in Aleppo.*

In August 1981, the Embassy agreed to sell the property for 5,500,000 Syrian pounds (\$105,000) and expected to complete the sale in January 1982, pending approval by both the U.S. and Syrian Governments. However, the U.S. Government did not approve the transaction and the sale was cancelled. The potential buyer's heirs have maintained a legal challenge claiming a right to purchase the property at the 1981 offered price.

In October 1997, the Embassy agreed to sell the property for \$3,555,685 to a different buyer, who paid the embassy \$10,000 in earnest money, plus a \$500,000 down payment. However, the sale was not completed, because the buyer changed the offer to only \$2 million based on declining real estate values. The Embassy refused to accept the revised offer, returned the \$510,000, and cancelled the deal.

In May 2002, the original intending buyer's heirs put liens on the property, asserting their right to purchase the property at the price their predecessor had offered in 1981. In early September 2002, the liens were removed but have subsequently been reinstated.

The cycle of court dates and no-shows by both parties continued through 2006. According to the embassy's Aleppo-based lawyer, the Embassy cannot sell the property with the heirs' liens on them. The Embassy has been approached by buyers who are willing to purchase the property even with the liens.

**Recommendation 10:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should ask the Office of the Legal Adviser to review the legal status of the Aleppo properties (X4000, X4005, and X4004) and their associated liens, and to determine how to remove the liens in order to allow the Embassy to sell, trade, transfer ownership, or make unencumbered repairs to the Aleppo properties. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with OBO and L)

There may be uses for the properties if they are restored to a usable condition. However, to permit the Department to make an informed decision, the Embassy needs to obtain reliable appraisals of the properties' current market value.

The OIG team's 2005 recommendation stated that the Embassy, in coordination with the Office of the Legal Adviser (L) and OBO, should choose a negotiation and sales strategy that realized the full value of the Aleppo property. The OIG closed the recommendation, based on the Embassy's assertion that the real estate market at that time did not support obtaining the properties' full value. However, without an appraisal, there is no way to know the full value of the properties.

**Recommendation 11:** Embassy Damascus should obtain two independent appraisals by qualified appraisers to determine the current value of the Aleppo properties (X4000, X4005, and X4004). (Action: Embassy Damascus)

Once the Embassy, L, and OBO review the appraisal and legal information, they will be in a position to make an informed decision.

## GENERAL SERVICES OFFICE

### Lease payments

The general services office building is owned by the many relatives of the original owner, who is now deceased. For many years, the Embassy has been unable to

pay its lease on the building (despite repeated attempts), because disputes among these property owners have not been resolved. The survivors want the Embassy to pay them their proportionate shares of the property, but the number of shares each survivor claims to own (out of 2,400 total shares) cannot be verified. The Embassy has placed \$65,000 in an escrow account so there will be adequate funds to pay the lease costs when the disputes among the property owners are finally resolved; in the meantime, the Embassy is reluctant to split the lease cost among them.

The Embassy has proposed settling the rent payment dispute, and has provided the Office of the Assistant Legal Adviser for Building and Acquisitions with a proposal on how it plans to do this. As recently as October 2009, in letters to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the original owner's successors, the Embassy put forward proposals to make proper and legal payments in the correct amounts to the correct owners, based on their shares in the property.

## **PROCUREMENT**

A three-person procurement section handles local cash purchases and overseas online purchases, and also solicits for and awards contracts and blanket purchase agreements. Syria remains a cash-based society. Hence, local purchases are made primarily with petty cash. When a unique item is needed for the facilities management section, a member of that staff may become involved in the purchase. The OIG team has made a recommendation in the management controls section of this report to remove subcashier responsibilities from the purchasing agent.

The procurement and housing staff prepares utility bill schedules each month, by listing properties, tenants, landlords, and monthly charges. The financial management office uses these to prepare vouchers for payment. The OIG team informally recommended that these financial tasks be reassigned from the procurement section to the financial management section.

## **MOTOR VEHICLE OPERATIONS**

An experienced dispatcher and assistant run the motor pool very well. Owing to disruptions caused by the post security upgrade construction project, some vehicles are currently parked at the <sup>(b) (2)</sup> where a mechanic provides limited repair services.

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that having the necessary supplies (including oil, filters, etc.) near the vehicles would be more efficient. The OIG team discussed these issues with the general services officer, who agreed to monitor the office location and provide supplies, wherever possible.

Driver overtime is kept to a minimum. Each of the drivers is scheduled for a 48-hour work week, and shifts ensure that coverage is adequate. There are presently nine pool drivers. There are two chief of mission drivers and three Marine security guard drivers. Housing, facilities, and purchasing staff members also drive; all of these individuals have completed the Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management's safe driving training process program. There are 25 vehicles and 33 diplomatic license plates.

The dispatcher pointed out that it is time-consuming to record mileage for start and finish odometer readings on each trip ticket, but necessary.

## **PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

The property management unit is a solid performer. Nonexpendable and expendable inventory overages and shortages were less than one percent in the last reporting cycle. The nonexpendable property clerk had command of the Nonexpendable Property Application (NEPA), and the expendable supply clerk had complete mastery over the WebPASS expendable supply application. The new storekeeper has brought energy, direction, and positive change to the warehouse. Although the unit did not prepare a physical inventory and reconciliation file (as is required by 14 FAM 416.2 e.), the NEPA contained comprehensive visual inventory coverage and missing property reports supporting inventory assertions, and receiving and inspection reports and property disposal authorizations were available for overages and shortages. The OIG team has made an informal recommendation that the unit retain in a binder, copies of the reports for each annual inventory, and keep the binders on file for three years. The unit demonstrated a firm grasp of the auction process for turning over property. Its work preparing for the next sale was impressive.

OBO and DS have construction materials stored in the warehouse without an inventory, as is required by 14 FAM 414.1-1 a.(2); the OIG team has made an informal recommendation that the Embassy create an inventory record for this property. Eight mission families have not returned their residential property inventories as required by 14 FAM 416.3 a. The OIG team informally recommended that the management officer become directly involved in obtaining these documents.

A substantial amount of facilities-related expendable supplies are being stored in a facilities maintenance room, without record of them in the WebPASS expendable supply application. Also, one of the facilities maintenance rooms contained excessive trash. The OIG team has made informal recommendations to address these issues.

## **FACILITIES MANAGEMENT**

The facilities management section, led by an experienced and professional facilities manager, is another small but capable section. It has a team of 23 staff members, including laborers and tradesmen. The section relies heavily on contractors to maintain properties, and it reports that landlords are not doing the work. Landlords are permitted up to 72 hours to perform repairs. When they do not act, the section's staff fills in; however, the Embassy does not consistently deduct the cost of these services from the landlords' leases.

The chief of mission's residence is undergoing a large-scale and severely needed renovation. During the project, the residence is still being used for community events and remains accessible for those purposes. However, maintaining the U.S. Government-owned buildings on the chancery compound is difficult. One reason is that the new restrictions on using OBO funds for short-term leased properties are limiting the Embassy's ability to make needed repairs to leased buildings on the chancery compound and residential properties. For instance, repair work at the leased public diplomacy building has essentially halted, and the landlord has done nothing. Given the OBO funding restrictions, even making needed upgrades to the health unit will be problematic.

Other reductions in funding for maintenance activities also have hindered maintenance efforts for U.S. Government-owned properties. The OIG team notes, however, that the hazards resulting from reduced maintenance in individual spaces could be remedied by cleaning out the accumulated trash, old files, boxes, and other unnecessary items.

An October 2009 Safety, Health, and Environmental Management synergy visit revealed manageable shortcomings that require funding to resolve.<sup>5</sup> For example, the trip report detailed the need for handrails, glass door markers, wiring and electri-

<sup>5</sup> Technical Field Support Branch Synergy Visit, Embassy Damascus, October 12 – 15, 2009. Office of Safety, Health and Environmental Management, Overseas Buildings Operations Office, Department of State.

cal upgrades, and the addition of a full-time LE staff position for post occupational safety and health. A visit from OBO's Fire Protection Division is scheduled for winter 2010.

The OIG team attended the Embassy's semiannual safety, health, and environmental management meeting. The chargé attended this meeting, along with the post occupational safety officer, the regional security officer, management officer, and human resource officer. The post occupational safety officer provided the attendees with a tabbed binder and led the discussion to resolve old, emerging, and new issues.

The facilities manager also mentioned that software upgrades are needed on the section's Windows-based facilities management tracking application. Since the application does not currently provide a sorting or filtering capability, the facilities staff cannot ascertain the NEPA number nor the number of times an item has been repaired.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The financial management office handles its workload well. Financial management services received acceptable scores on the ICASS customer satisfaction survey. A second-tour financial management officer and five LE staff work in the section. The unit provides service for Department and two other agency components. The Embassy's serviced accounts increased from nearly \$7 million in FY 2006 to \$10.6 million in 2009.

The staff is responsive to customers, and it effectively establishes, liquidates, and monitors obligations. The section successfully coped with the Embassy's need to make large purchases at the end of the year. The Embassy subsequently issued a management notice detailing how to avoid similar situations in the future.

Representation and official residence expense vouchers are processed promptly. In some instances, the section used purchase orders to pay credit card companies for individual, small purchases, resulting in relatively high administrative costs per transaction. The OIG team has recommended informally that the financial management office coordinate with the procurement unit to initiate bulk funding for credit card purchases.

Travel vouchers are routinely filed late by U.S. direct-hires. In one case, an employee had three delinquent vouchers, one of which dated back a full year. The OIG team informally recommended that the management office issue a management

notice reminding employees of the 4 FAM 465.1 requirement for employees to file vouchers upon completion of travel.

The office has introduced direct deposit electronic payments for most LE staff wages, despite extreme reluctance among LE staff members to establish accounts with local banks.

The office conducts unannounced cash verifications of the class B cashier funds monthly; however, it has failed to properly monitor the subcashiers. This matter is discussed in the management controls section of the report.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

The Embassy has held ICASS council meetings only sporadically, and it has not regularly kept ICASS meeting minutes. One of the council's most important responsibilities is to review and approve actions that have an impact on the ICASS budget.

Membership on the council is not consistent with guidance from the ICASS executive board (06 State 139716), which limits each agency to a single representative. The Embassy's political officer serves as the Department's representative, but the public affairs officer is also a voting member on the ICASS council, which is contrary to guidance.

**Recommendation 12:** Embassy Damascus should take immediate action to comply with Department guidance regarding the composition of International Cooperative Administrative Support Services council membership. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

The effectiveness of the ICASS system depends upon the degree to which customers understand ICASS principles. Embassy Damascus has a very good Web site, on which it has posted ICASS service standards so customers can review them. However, the mission management could take additional measures to promote better awareness and understanding of ICASS – for example, by posting ICASS meeting minutes on the Web site, as well as prominently displaying the ICASS service standards in the offices of all ICASS-related sections. The OIG team informally recommended that the Embassy address these matters in a manner that is consistent with the customer service standards and principles discussed in 6 FAH-5 H-013.5.

## GRANTS MANAGEMENT

The PAS authorizes and oversees grants which are intended to enhance educational and cultural ties between the United States and Syria. For FY 2009, it awarded 22 grants to private individuals and organizations, collectively amounting to \$144,242. The PAS is not only responsible for identifying grant objectives and recipients, but is also tasked with post-award monitoring of funds and outcomes. In this regard, the section must see that funds are disbursed properly and used for the intended purpose; that the desired outcomes are achieved; and that records are maintained appropriately for each grant.

The PAS is staffed adequately to manage the workload associated with current grants, but Embassy Damascus could implement several measures to improve grants monitoring. The first is to ensure that all PAS personnel with grants management responsibilities receive appropriate training. With the sudden departure of the previous PAO in summer 2009, the former information officer was appointed to that position. She did not have the opportunity to complete the Foreign Service Institute's course for PAOs, which would have better prepared her for the responsibilities of managing a public diplomacy grants program.

All three American officers in the PAS have completed the Foreign Service Institute's online training course, but they reported that the course was focused more on the legal framework than on the practical aspects of being a grants officer or a grants officer's representative. In response to their concerns, the Department has arranged for an experienced grants manager to visit Damascus to provide practical advice to the American officers and the entire PAS staff.

Two of the three officers hold warrants, under which they can award grants up to \$100,000 per grant; the third has completed the course but has not applied for the warrant. This individual should follow through to obtain the warrant, to provide the PAS with additional capability in awarding and monitoring grants. The OIG team has made an informal recommendation to that effect.

Another important element of grants management is to appropriately maintain grants files. In reviewing the FY 2009 grants, the OIG team noted some minor deficiencies, including a failure to use the required DS-4012 folders for the orderly maintenance of grants documentation. Also, some grants files did not include the mandatory report from the recipient regarding the outcome of the project or activity. The OIG team has made an informal recommendation that the grants files be maintained properly.



good. For those LE staff members who responded to the OIG questionnaire, the average rating of personal morale was 3.1 on a five-point scale. Many commented favorably on the efforts of the new chargé to establish and expand communications with the LE staff.

### Local Employment Compensation Plan

The LE staff compensation package includes a base salary and a broad range of monetized allowances, as well as other benefits, such as a salary advance provision, a lump sum retirement payment, and a medical payment plan. Under the latter arrangement, employees and family members may receive treatment at a clinic or hospital of their choice, then present the invoices to the Embassy for payment (subject to the rules, percentages, and maximum limits stated in the plan). Administering this plan is labor-intensive, because hundreds of invoices must be reviewed, validated, and paid. It also poses potential vulnerabilities to fraud. Embassy managers believe that alternatives such as private health insurance may be available, but LE staff favor the current arrangement and would likely oppose any change.

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While the OIG team is seriously concerned about the school issue, the responsibility for identifying solutions resides with the embassy and the Office of Overseas Schools. (The subject of the school is also covered in the resource management section of this report.)

## MEDICAL UNIT

A Foreign Service health practitioner, who arrived in the summer of 2009, directs the Embassy's medical unit, and is the first health practitioner ever assigned to Damascus. The LE assistant, also hired earlier in 2009, worked for many years at the DCS. Embassy Amman's regional medical officer and regional medical officer/psychiatrist provide additional support.

Damascus has a relatively benign medical environment, with respiratory problems and traffic accidents representing the greatest health risks. Modern medical facilities and Western-trained medical personnel are available for conditions requiring secondary treatment. Embassy London is the evacuation point for patients with complex medical problems requiring advanced or extended treatment.

The medical unit provides primary care to embassy staff members and their dependents, and emergency care for LE staff members who suffer illness or injury while on the job. The embassy community is well satisfied with the quality of medical care, as is evidenced by the average score on the OIG questionnaire of 3.76 for overall management of the medical unit. The 2009 ICASS customer survey indicates a similar degree of satisfaction with health services, with scores averaging well above both NEA and worldwide averages.

This level of satisfaction is remarkable, in view of the recent turnover in medical unit staff, as well as the abysmal facilities. The unit is located in cramped quarters in the basement of the public diplomacy building, across a busy street and one block from the chancery. The unit's space includes a single office (which both employees share), a small examination room, and an adjoining room that serves as medical storage space and a safe haven for building occupants. There is no separate patient waiting room, and storage is so limited that shelves are overflowing and cartons are stacked on the floor. When the health practitioner arrived, she found a meager inventory of supplies and equipment. She has submitted a lengthy list of items the unit must procure in order to provide basic primary care for the growing mission population.

**Recommendation 14:** Embassy Damascus should upgrade the physical capabilities of the medical unit, renovating the physical space and procuring the supplies and equipment the unit needs in order to provide comprehensive primary care for embassy staff and their dependents. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

The OIG team verified that contingency plans for possible pandemics are in place; the control and distribution of controlled substances are conducted in the prescribed manner; expiration dates are tracked; and logs are properly kept. The health unit conducts wellness programs for the embassy community and provides information on smoking cessation, weight management, first aid, and cardiac pulmonary resuscitation.

## **COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE**

The CLO coordinator is new to Damascus and has no previous embassy experience. She has not yet had training; however, she uses online resources and participates in an active CLO email exchange to seek advice and learn more about her role. The LE, part-time CLO assistant, also a recent hire, singlehandedly kept the office functioning and on track for eight months before the CLO coordinator arrived. She also conducted a survey, the results of which serve as a template for the activities the office now is planning.

**Recommendation 15:** Embassy Damascus should send the community liaison office coordinator to community liaison training as soon as is practicable. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

CLO activities are supported through donations of goods, volunteer services, and monetary contributions by the community and employees' association. The employees' association reimburses CLO staff members for items they purchase using their personal funds. CLO 101, a handbook for CLO coordinators, states: "The CLO coordinator should not be expected to personally advance funds for activities even with the understanding of subsequent reimbursement." However, the embassy's CLO staff members have been using personal funds.

**Recommendation 16:** Embassy Damascus should establish and implement procedures for community liaison office staff to obtain monetary advances before making community liaison office related purchases. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

The CLO staff manage and participate in activities on weekends and at other times which are beyond their scheduled work hours. Since they have not obtained advance approval for the overtime work, they have not been paid for overtime or received compensatory time. The OIG team has left an informal recommendation that the CLO staff request overtime in advance and receive proper compensation.

## AMERICAN EMBASSY EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

The American Embassy Employees Association (AEEA) has made great strides since the last OIG inspection, and it has transformed itself into a reasonable, customer supported entity. The association is chartered to provide a convenience store, video lending library, snack bar, and sale of postage stamps. In the ICASS survey, the Embassy staff rated food service quality as satisfactory.

AEEA is well past its former issues of inadequate accounting, missing records, financial irregularities, and a massive quantity of unrecorded accounts receivable. After its last OIG inspection, the Embassy retained the services of an international accounting firm to mend accounting and reporting deficiencies. The AEEA treasurer, who is also the Embassy's financial management officer, has taken an active role in monitoring the association's financial position. The association today is solvent. Association management controls comply with Department regulations for annual audits and semi-annual reports.

The 2005 inspection reported a \$65,000 outstanding bill for air transportation, which the association had disputed. The OIG team recommended that AEEA negotiate a settlement of the dispute. A requirement to pay the charges in full would have put AEEA out of business. After much deliberation, the air transporter informed the embassy in August 2009 that the bill was not on their books, and they would not seek collection.

## MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The chargé and the management officer are promoting the principles of good management controls. The former chargé memorandum regarding assurance of management controls, dated July 30, 2009, states that Embassy Damascus' systems of management controls, taken as a whole, comply with the Comptroller General of the United States' standards and the Department's objectives. This memo does not identify any deficiencies in inventory controls, and states that assets are being safeguarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, or misappropriation. The OIG team found the various representations concerning real and personal property management and inventory to be accurate.

The management officer is the post's designated management controls officer. A satisfactory management controls program was resumed during the last reporting cycle. The management office considered all embassy sections in its examination and identified a number of vulnerabilities. To its credit, the Embassy has addressed vulnerabilities and remedied them. Despite management's best efforts, however, the OIG team found a number of shortcomings in the Embassy's purchase cycle and allowance administration.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

### Cashier Controls

The Embassy makes extensive use of petty cash purchases, because local businesses and the local economy are cash-based. The OIG team considered the anomaly of this practice, and agreed that it is reasonable.

To maximize procurement effectiveness, the management office uses subcashiers in a few operating sections. Two subcashiers in the general services section handle advances (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) (2) These advances have not been subject to monthly reconciliations, as is required by 4 FAH-3 H397-.2-3 a.; in one case, reconciliation occurred only once in two years. In addition, at the time of the inspection, one subcashier advance that was subject to quarterly verification had not received coverage since 2002.

As a result, the Embassy has been at a risk, insofar as errors, defalcations, and misuse involving cash might have gone undetected. The Embassy managers' failure to act caused these possible risks. The OIG team notes, however, that the problem may also be partly due to the management office roles and the lack of management officers.

According to 4 FAH-3 H-397.2-3 f., the subcashier's U.S. citizen supervisor is responsible for ensuring that verifications of subcashier funds are performed in a timely manner. The financial management officer is responsible for assisting with any difficulties in obtaining verifications per 4 FAH-3 H-397.2-3 e..

**Recommendation 17:** Embassy Damascus should require that the subcashier supervisors conduct unannounced verification of subcashier funds on a monthly or quarterly basis and report the findings to the financial management officer. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 18:** Embassy Damascus should update work requirement statements for all subcashier supervisors to include routinely conducting the required subcashier fund verifications and reporting the findings to the financial management officer. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

## **Allowances: Post Differential Procedures**

A recent OIG inspection and an ongoing Department-wide survey both found that embassies are not consistently terminating post differential allowances when circumstances warrant. Post differential allowances must be terminated per 4 FAH-3 H-533.12-4 and reinstated by Global Financial Services Charleston. Procedures for alerting Charleston to process the needed adjustments vary among embassies. The financial management section performs the time keeping function at Embassy Damascus. The timekeeper generally understands post differential allowance rules (as defined under Department of State Standardized Regulations 500 series), and the financial management office and timekeeper attempt to terminate allowances when appropriate. However, the timekeeper, who relies on the travel section to learn about official staff travel, is not being kept adequately informed. The travel section needs to pay more attention to making the timekeeper and the financial management section aware of the instances when staff members travel and are not at the mission.

To determine compliance with the procedures, the OIG team tested 17 rest and recuperation travel vouchers indicating requirements for post differential termination. In four instances, the Embassy did not terminate post differential pay correctly. As a result, the Department overpaid the post differential allowance to four employees. The OIG team did not test for other types of travel requiring post differential termination, such as temporary duty, training, and personal travel. Moreover, financial management staff members indicated that they are not often informed of personal travel to the United States. As a result, the section fails to terminate post differential pay for this kind of travel more often than it does for official travel.

The OIG team found that these errors were attributable, in part, to the timekeeper's failure to comprehend the need to terminate the allowance. In addition, other shortcomings contributed to the situation — namely the:

- Absence of financial management office written policies and procedures governing timekeeping processes in allowance termination;
- Lack of awareness among officers regarding allowance termination requirements; and
- Officers' failure to inform the timekeeper of required changes as set forth in 4 FAH-3 H-533.10-3 c.

**Recommendation 19:** Embassy Damascus should issue a management instruction reminding employees of the circumstances under which their post differential allowance would be terminated when traveling to the United States, the procedural requirements for processing post differential pay termination, and employees' obligation to inform the embassy about any travel which would qualify for the required termination of their post differential pay. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 20:** Embassy Damascus should review all American direct-hire official and personal travel for fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010 to determine post differential eligibility, and seek reimbursement from any staff members who were overpaid. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

The OIG team informally recommended that the management office implement a control technique by which the travel office will more consistently communicate with the timekeeper and the financial management office regarding all official travel. The team also informally has recommended that the financial management section prepare and implement written policies and procedures for administering post differential allowances.

## PROCUREMENT

### Petty Cash Purchasing Procedures

As described earlier, the Embassy makes extensive use of petty cash transactions. Of particular concern is that the purchasing agent, who is responsible for selecting vendors and conducting local purchases, is the subcashier for a            equivalent advance. The purchasing agent prepares replenishment vouchers, often and routinely involving his own purchases. As a result, the same person is in a position to conduct financial transactions and conceal errors and irregularities. This practice violates the separation of duties outlined in 4 FAM 042, which states in part that “No individual should control all key aspects of a transaction or event.” This breakdown in process, coupled with the failure to properly monitor cashier advances (described above), has a damaging effect on the Embassy’s control environment.

**Recommendation 21:** Embassy Damascus should remove the purchasing agent’s subcashier designation and designate the responsibility to the general services office assistant or another member of the general services staff, as appropriate. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, in coordination with Embassy Damascus, should initiate an interagency review of all sanctions-related issues and provide the embassy with explicit, formal guidance on how to address them, including specific clarification regarding the rules of engagement. (Action: NEA, in coordination with Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 2:**

**Recommendation 3:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, should develop and implement a strategy for more frequent and expanded programming of visiting artists that takes advantage of the open doors available to reach out to the Syrian people. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with R, ECA, and NEA)

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, should seek out a partner institution in Aleppo to host an American Corner, establish and operate an American Corner in that city, and provide funding to sustain the program and maintain its viability. (Embassy Damascus, in coordination with R)

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, should submit a proposal for the American Language Center to expand classroom space into a portion of the Hafez building, subject to agreed upon safeguards. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with DS and ECA)

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Damascus, in coordination with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, should develop and fund youth-directed initiatives and exchanges. (Action: Embassy Damascus, in coordination with ECA and NEA)



**Recommendation 16:** Embassy Damascus should establish and implement procedures for community liaison office staff to obtain monetary advances before making community liaison office related purchases. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 17:** Embassy Damascus should require that the subcashier supervisors conduct unannounced verification of subcashier funds on a monthly or quarterly basis and report the findings to the financial management officer. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 18:** Embassy Damascus should update work requirement statements for all subcashier supervisors to include routinely conducting the required subcashier fund verifications and reporting the findings to the financial management officer. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

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**Recommendation 20:** Embassy Damascus should review all American direct-hire official and personal travel for fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010 to determine post differential eligibility, and seek reimbursement from any staff members who were overpaid. (Action: Embassy Damascus)

**Recommendation 21:** Embassy Damascus should remove the purchasing agent's subcashier designation and designate the responsibility to the general services office assistant or another member of the general services staff, as appropriate. (Action: Embassy Damascus)



## INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau and are not subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

### POLITICAL/ECONOMIC

#### Contact Data Base

The Embassy does not have a complete or consolidated contact base that can be used for representation and other purposes.

**Informal Recommendation 1:** Embassy Damascus should name an officer to work with the protocol assistant to establish an effective, embassy-wide contact base.

#### Use of Email

The Embassy relies too heavily on emails to convey information back to Washington and to other posts. Information of use to other agencies is not adequately distributed.

**Informal Recommendation 2:** Embassy Damascus should implement a new policy for disseminating information featuring greater use of front-channel cables and wider distribution of emails.

#### Management of Democracy Programs

The Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor have programs in Syria but there is no single point of contact within the Embassy to coordinate these programs.

**Informal Recommendation 3:** Embassy Damascus should designate an officer to be the principal point of contact for programs managed by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

## **CONSULAR**

### **Security Advisory Opinions**

Most Syrians are subject to security advisory opinions, the responses to which can take weeks to arrive. The consular section relies on telephone calls to inform applicants when their visas are ready, a process that is time-consuming and ineffective.

**Informal Recommendation 4:** Embassy Damascus should post visa application status updates for cases pending special administrative processing on the consular pages of the embassy public Web site.

### **Visa Referrals**

Visa referrals are not always processed correctly. Errors include incorrect notation of the type of referral and of the adjudicator.

**Informal Recommendation 5:** Embassy Damascus should enter and process visa referrals correctly.

## **MANAGEMENT**

### **Procurement**

Procurement and housing office staff prepare utility costs spreadsheets for the financial management section that the financial management section should prepare.

**Informal Recommendation 6:** Embassy Damascus should remove tasks associated with financial management requirements from the procurement and housing section and reassign them to the financial management section.

## Property Management

The property management unit did not prepare a physical inventory and reconciliation file as required by 14 FAM 416.2 e. to hold hard copies of reports supporting inventory assertions and reconciliations.

**Informal Recommendation 7:** Embassy Damascus should require that the property management unit maintain hard copies of inventory-related documentation in a binder for each annual inventory and keep the documentation for three years.

The Bureaus of Overseas Buildings Operations and Diplomatic Security have construction project material stored in the warehouse without the inventory required by 14 FAM 414.1-1 a. (2).

**Informal Recommendation 8:** Embassy Damascus should create an inventory record for Bureaus of Overseas Buildings Operations and Diplomatic Security construction project material stored in the warehouse.

Residential property inventories required by 14 FAM 416.3 a. had not been returned by eight families.

**Informal Recommendation 9:** Embassy Damascus should require that employees return their residential property inventories.

A substantial amount of facilities-related expendable supplies was stored in a facilities maintenance room without records in the WebPASS expendable supply application.

**Informal Recommendation 10:** Embassy Damascus should record expendable supplies stored in the facilities maintenance section in WEBPass and move the property to the expendable supply room.

## Financial Management

In many instances, purchase orders were used to pay credit card companies for individual, small purchases resulting in relatively high administrative costs per transaction.

**Informal Recommendation 11:** Embassy Damascus should require that the financial management office coordinate with the procurement unit and initiate bulk funding for credit card purchases.

Contrary to 4 FAM 465. 1, direct-hire employees routinely file travel vouchers late. In one case, an employee had three delinquent vouchers, the latest one dating back one year.

**Informal Recommendation 12:** Embassy Damascus should issue a management notice reminding employees of the requirement to file vouchers upon completion of travel.

## ICASS

Minutes of ICASS council meetings are not prepared after meetings and are not posted on the Embassy's Web site.

**Informal Recommendation 13:** Embassy Damascus should require the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services council secretary to write council meeting minutes and post the minutes on the embassy's internal Web site.

Embassy Damascus' ICASS sections have not posted the service standards prominently in ICASS sections.

**Informal Recommendation 14:** Embassy Damascus should require the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services sections to post service standards in their sections.

## Grants Management

The cultural affairs officer completed the initial grants management course at the Foreign Service Institute, but has not received a warrant that will enable her to authorize grants.

**Informal Recommendation 15:** Embassy Damascus should require the cultural affairs officer to apply for a grants warrant.

The PAS is not using the required DS-4012 folders for its grants and has not included mandatory reports from recipients regarding the outcome of the project or activity.

**Informal Recommendation 16:** Embassy Damascus should review grants files and require that they are maintained in accordance with applicable Department standards, and that required grant close-out actions are contained in the files.

## Allowances: Post Differential Procedures

The timekeeper, who relies on the travel section to learn about official staff travel, is not being kept adequately informed.

**Informal Recommendation 17:** Embassy Damascus should implement a control technique by which the travel office will more consistently communicate with the timekeeper and the financial management office regarding all official travel.

The absence of financial management office written policies and procedures governing timekeeping processes in allowance termination contribute to errors in terminating post differential pay.

**Informal Recommendation 18:** Embassy Damascus should require that the financial management section prepare and implement written policies and procedures for administering post differential allowances.

## Information Management

Eight of the Embassy's laptop computers are too old to encrypt.

**Informal Recommendation 19:** Embassy Damascus should remove its eight old laptops from the laptop computer inventory.

The Embassy's October 2009 information system security officer (ISSO) designation cable violates the Department's separation of duties principles (04 State 171664) by making the principle administrator for the classified systems responsible for security of the classified systems.

**Informal Recommendation 20:** Embassy Damascus should revise the information system security officer designation cable to reflect a separation of duties, such that no individual is assigned as information system security officer on a system for which they are the primary system administrator.

## Community Liaison Office

Community liaison office staff have not requested overtime or compensatory time, in advance, and have not been paid for overtime or received compensatory time.

**Informal Recommendation 21:** Embassy Damascus should require that community liaison office staff request overtime or compensatory time, in advance, and should ensure that they are properly compensated.



## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Arrival Date</b>
Chargé d'affaires	Charles Hunter	07/2009

### Chiefs of Sections:

Consular	Andre Goodfriend	08/2009
Management	George Novinger	08/2008
Financial Management	Vincent Wing	08/2008
Facilities Management	Phillip Steinhauser	09/2009
General Services	Michelle Ward	07/2009
Information Management	Tom Murray	08/2009
Public Affairs	Tracy Roberts-Pounds	08/2007
Political/Economic	Tim Pounds	08/2007
Regional Security	Assiya Ashraf-Miller	07/2009
Project Director Post Security Upgrade	Ronald Riggs	10/2008

### Other Agencies:

#### Department of Defense

Defense Attaché	Col. Robert Friedenburb U.S. Army	09/2009
Security Detachment	GySgt Troy Powers U.S. Marine Corps	10/2008



## ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	American cultural center
AEEA	American Embassy Employees Association
ALC	American language center
AMIDEAST	American Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc.
CLO	Community liaison office
DCM	Deputy chief of mission
DS	Bureau of Diplomatic Security
GSO	General services officer
HR	Human resources
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
ISSO	Information system security officer
IIP	Bureau of International Information Programs
IRC	Information Resources Center
LE	Locally employed
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
NEA	Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NEPA	Nonexpendable property application
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
PAO	Public affairs officer
PAS	Public affairs section
SOP	Standard operating procedure



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