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

Report of Inspection

Limited-Scope Inspection of Embassy Libreville, Gabon

Report Number ISP-I-08-31, May 2008

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PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

PURPOSE

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and being accurately and effectively represented; and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors

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, Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, the Arms Control and Disarmament Amendments Act of 1987, and the Department of State and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, FY 1996. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its oversight responsibility with respect to the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors to identify and prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

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 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 "Bill Todd", written in a cursive style.

William E. Todd
Acting Inspector General

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CONTEXT

Gabon is a tropical country, approximately the size of Colorado, with just 1.3 million people. Its interior is impenetrable forests, and its agricultural potential is limited by poor tropical soils. It lacks paved roads throughout the country, and its nascent national park system exists largely on paper because of the absence of passable roads.

Officially, Gabon is one of sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous nations, thanks to its decades of oil wealth. Oil accounts for four-fifths of the country's exports and represents about half of its Gross Domestic Product. But this is a wasting asset, with production in gradual decline and proven reserves down to two billion barrels. In the meantime, skewed income distribution leaves most Gabonese in poverty and in need of essential social services. Conversely, 41 cabinet ministers' salaries and benefits reportedly exceed \$200,000 per year, and many own upscale properties in Paris or elsewhere.

Gabon is a stable, single-party-dominated regime, at least for now. President El-Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba is the longest serving ruler in Africa. He has not designated a successor and has signaled his intent to seek reelection in 2011. Looking ahead, Bongo will almost assuredly continue to solidify his party's grip by having ethnic Teke officers from his native region dominate the senior ranks, by sharing state resources with key local players, and otherwise grooming his son, who is currently Minister of Defense, to take over as President.

Gabon maintains its strongest external ties with France, its predominant trading partner and former colonial power. France is the ultimate guarantor of the Bongo regime, and has some 850 troops in Gabon, one of four permanent locations for French troops in Africa.

The Bongo government has long sought to project Gabon onto a larger playing field as an influential participant in Central African politics by hosting, for example, the Economic Community of Central African States. Bongo also attaches great value to cultivating friendly relations with the United States and met with Presidents Nixon, Carter, and Reagan. He met with President George W. Bush in 2004. Over the years, Bongo facilitated, along lines consistent with U.S. Government interests, conflict resolution in Chad, Angola, the Central African Republic, Congo, and Sudan. Overall, the relationship between the United States and Gabon is good and should

become closer with the increasing U.S. Government focus on regional stability in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea. In this context, the Gabon Government stands ready to receive a U.S. Department of Defense's Africa Command (AFRICOM) element should a decision be made to locate it in Gabon.

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

The Ambassador to Gabon is also accredited to Sao Tome and Principe, a tiny country that includes two small islands, with its 130,000 people engaged in cocoa production and a largely subsistence economy otherwise. A revolutionary Portuguese Government pushed Sao Tome and Principe into independence in 1975, and the country spent a decade as a virtual protectorate of the Eastern bloc of the Soviet Union before reorienting itself. Relations with the United States are strong; respect and trust in the United States are such that the Ambassador decisively influences events in this Portuguese-speaking nation through personal engagement alone, in part because Sao Tome and Principe's former foreign minister served as his country's first ambassador to the United States, where he resided for a long time.

U.S. interaction and interest in Sao Tome and Principe remains modest with the potential to grow exponentially if prospecting American firms confirm significant oil reserves. At present, the U.S. presence is limited to a Broadcasting Board of Governors' Voice of America transmitting station, Sao Tome and Principe's second largest employer, and to encourage economic growth via an \$8.73 million Millennium Challenge Corporation grant. Two contract employees and other temporary duty officers manage this U.S. Department of Treasury program. The Peace Corps is no longer present in Sao Tome and Principe.

OIG's limited-scope inspection did not allow for a visit to Sao Tome and Principe. Secondhand observations suggest Embassy Libreville manages the relationship reasonably well, despite its officers' lack of fluent Portuguese. It might be more logical to shift oversight of American interests in Sao Tome and Principe to a nearby Portuguese-speaking post such as Embassy Luanda, which has two weekly nonstop flights to Sao Tome and Principe. Although the OIG team discussed this possibility with bureau officials, full consideration of such a change was beyond the scope of this inspection. Absent finding oil, the OIG team finds no rationale for establishing an embassy or for creating an American Presence Post in Sao Tome and Principe.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

Embassy Libreville is a mission in transition. It is historically difficult to staff, especially with officers of the appropriate rank and experience. The mission also suffered from staffing gaps. Although Embassy Libreville was fully staffed during the OIG inspection, some of its officers, including the Ambassador and deputy chief of mission (DCM), arrived within the past six months after lengthy gaps following their predecessors' departures. In short, to a certain degree, OIG arrived to find an embassy where almost everyone is in a learning phase.

The Ambassador and DCM favor the open-door approach and sometimes visit offices to talk with the staff. The Ambassador, with a sharp sense of the Washington policy environment, sets a thoughtful, measured tone for the post; and the DCM acts as the chief operating officer who manages the bulk of the paper flow and addresses a host of thorny staffing and administrative problems. Interagency relations are smooth, with the Defense attaché and the front office working exceptionally collegially. Most section chiefs commended the front office for its ability to render a quick decision and, in general, to get things done. Some employees felt micro-managed or subject to conflicting instructions from the executive office. The OIG team views this as a reflection of their relative inexperience and concomitant need for guidance. Some sections could benefit from getting a sharper sense of priorities when they get multiple front-office taskings.

The Ambassador and the DCM were not involved in the preparation of the current Mission Strategic Plan (MSP), but view it as an excellent template. It is consistent with the Department of State and Agency for International Development Strategic Plan and the Bureau of African Affairs Strategic plan. Members of the country team developed briefings for the incoming Ambassador that drew specifically on the MSP. Strategic plan priorities are clearly reflected in the Embassy's efforts to obtain a security assistance office and otherwise serve as a better platform for expanded military-to-military cooperation in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea. The OIG team notes the Department offered no comment on the MSP, which usually means agreement.

ENTRY-LEVEL OFFICERS

The Ambassador and DCM have conscientiously mentored their mission's entry-level officer complement, now three officers, but until recently four. All were invited to socials at the residences and included in embassy meetings. A few were invited to join the front office in calls on host country ranking officials such as the Minister of Interior. OIG commends the DCM, in particular, for devoting many hours to training the entry-level political officer in reporting, writing, and analysis.

SECURITY

The Ambassador and DCM are appropriately attentive to security. Meetings with the regional security officer (RSO) are frequent, collegial, and two-way in nature. The flow of information appears ideal. Employees uniformly credited mission management for its attention to security. Pursuant to its limited-scope inspection format, the OIG inspection team did not include a security professional and thus cannot comment on either technical security matters or render a definitive judgment about security. The OIG team quickly reviewed the Emergency Action Plan and determined there is no reference to using a boat purchased by previous mission management for emergency evacuations and there are no plans to include it in the update, now underway. The current Emergency Action Plan dates from 2004.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

There is one bulletin board in the administrative annex that displays the name and telephone number of the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counselor resident at Embassy Yaounde and the telephone number for the Office of Civil rights in Washington, DC. There are other instructions on how to file a charge of employment discrimination. This information should also be displayed within the chancery and at the general services annex. Last December, the Embassy got a volunteer to fill the EEO counselor role. Training will be provided once funding is identified, and that counselor's name, location, and telephone number will be prominently displayed at each location mentioned above. The EEO information could be translated into French, and the Embassy should designate an LE staff EEO liaison.

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POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Embassy Libreville has overcome prolonged staffing gaps in furthering its key democracy, political-military, economic, and trade objectives, with a sage Ambassador fresh from a relevant Washington tour and a talented, energetic DCM at the tiller. The Department's officers shouldering the daily load are a first-tour political officer and economic/commercial officer, one assisted by an EFM and the other by an LE American citizen. The economic and commercial officer also covers public diplomacy and consular affairs for stretches of up to two months.

A highly skilled Defense attaché covers much of Embassy Libreville's political-military affairs in close coordination with the Ambassador and DCM. Law enforcement issues lie within the RSO's portfolio, but the DCM effectively and actively backstops. This constitutes a somewhat untraditional division of duties, but it works well in the Libreville context in playing to the strengths and weaknesses of individual officers and staff.

POLITICAL-MILITARY

Embassy Libreville effectively promotes national interests in regional stability and security, a key strategic plan goal, through several mechanisms. Among these are training Gabonese forces under the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance and the International Military Education and Training programs. Gabon is an oasis of relative calm in the center of a region in turmoil and is routinely used for evacuating Americans from neighboring countries. The OIG team witnessed the embassy staff's quick response to help evacuate Americans resident in Chad, as rebels entered the capital city of N'Djamena.

An overburdened Defense attaché office is also heavily involved in issues related to the security of the strategic Gulf of Guinea region, origin of a growing share of U.S. oil imports. Besides innumerable military temporary duty visits to the mission, Gabonese and Sao Tome ports saw 11 ship visits in 2007. Nine more are scheduled for January to April 2008. Additionally, the Defense attaché is heavily involved in building up the Sao Tome and Principe Coast Guard.

Gabon is clearly willing to host AFRICOM, the new U.S. military command in Africa, as complement and counterbalance to its close relationship with France. The Department of Defense has yet to make a final choice regarding the site of AFRICOM, but Gabon is on the short list and planning for this eventuality also commands considerable embassy time. The OIG team finds the embassy proposal for establishing a Security Assistance Office to be justified, given these many military activities.

TRADE PROMOTION

With a per capita income four times the regional average, Gabon imports more from the United States than most Sub-Saharan countries, including \$133 million in goods in 2007. This figure could be higher except for the French domination of banks, oil companies, and other enterprises, a circumstance deriving from President Bongo's close ties to French business leaders. This association is under scrutiny by French magistrates because of alleged payoffs from a major French petroleum company to Bongo, one of the world's richest heads of state.

The Bongo government desires to keep the United States regionally engaged as an implied leverage that the OIG team believes could be used to enhance U.S. exports. The Embassy put forward a draft Bilateral Investment Treaty only to have Gabon propose its non-application to mineral resources including hydrocarbons, thus rendering the treaty all but meaningless. Despite the Ambassador's engagement with the Foreign Minister, the draft treaty continues to lumber through the Gabonese bureaucracy. At some point, the Embassy could raise American concerns to the presidential level. The OIG team views this as an instance where the United States has more leverage with Bongo than it actually uses.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATION

Embassy Libreville has only modest law enforcement coordination with Gabonese and Sao Tome and Principe authorities, although the relationship has been enhanced over the past year via training of 25 Gabonese at U.S.-funded international law enforcement academies. Narcotics trafficking is insignificant, and the regional Drug Enforcement Administration office has not visited recently. A \$200,000 program designed to improve the ability of the Gabonese police to combat trafficking in persons is just getting underway.

The 1999 murder of a Peace Corps volunteer played a role in the departure of the Peace Corps from Gabon in 2005. The OIG team believes the Gabonese Government could do more to resolve this case, which was recently raised by the Ambassador with the Minister of Interior. It would send a powerful signal if this unsolved murder case is raised directly with President Bongo. The bottom line is President Bongo wants to do more with the United States, and this case may be standing in the way.

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Anchored by the DCM, who contributes heavily to mission reporting, Embassy Libreville is producing an adequate amount of quality analyses for Washington. Washington consumers expressed general satisfaction with post reporting as clear, appropriate in length, and well-sourced. They commended Libreville reporting as balanced and appropriately reflecting that Gabon's importance to the United States derives from its regional role, its oil, as well as Bongo's sheer longevity that allows him to maintain influence in Africa. Washington consumers commended Libreville for some of the best reporting on African visits, including an excellent wrap-up of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's recent trip to Gabon.

While there were requests for additional reporting, the OIG team finds them unrealistic save for the suggestion for more reporting on Sao Tome and Principe. For example, requests for more messages on rural Gabon are unrealistic, given the absence of hard-surfaced roads and the plethora of required reports discussed below. The entry-level political officer could usefully update the cables on succession modalities to Bongo, consulting with the Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research to determine what precisely would be useful. An overall wrap-up on the growing relationship between the Peoples Republic of China and Gabon would also be valued to build on the Embassy's well-received message on the recent signing of a \$3 billion Chinese iron mine project.

Burden of Required Reporting

Since the abolition of the special embassy program, small missions devote disproportionate amounts of time to all-embassy assignments, which pose much less of a burden for major embassies. Above all, small posts stagger under the load of innumerable annual reports, including at least 11 mandated by Congress, on subjects

ranging from human rights to religious freedom, trafficking in persons, and investment disputes, among others. Each is based on a separate statute with different definitions, reporting schedules, and standards, some in conflict. Many reports carry the possibility of sanctions, thus, dialogue with host governments can be prickly and beyond the skill of the first- or second-tour officers at small embassies.

Above all, the OIG team favors a simplification of the current welter of deadlines, guidelines, and timelines, especially for reports not mandated by Congress. Ideally, small missions would do an annual omnibus report covering these topics. Embassies could then draw on individual sections needed for reports due later in the year that do not rely heavily on timely information.

At a minimum, the Department might amalgamate mandated reports into logical subgroups. An omnibus economic report could address the investment disputes, intellectual property, and national trade estimate reports. A homeland security report could cover the counterterrorism, money laundering, and narcotics reports. A human rights and democracy report could embrace the human rights, religious freedom, trafficking-in-persons, advancing freedom and democracy, and labor reports.

Finally, the OIG team notes that certain reports of a complex nature, such as that required for the U.S. Agency for International Development and for the Office of the Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance, could be structured so that small embassies and those missions with little likelihood of receiving significant assistance, do an Internal Revenue Service 1040-A style “short form.”

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Gabon is a strongly francophone country with just over one million people and a highly static political situation, which make it a challenging location for public diplomacy (PD) activities. This is especially true when comparing Gabon with other small West African countries with significantly larger populations that have transitioned, or are transitioning, from the concept of President for Life, to elected presidents with finitely fixed terms. While President Bongo has made episodic appeals for a greater cultural presence here, this is more in keeping with his desire to lessen the perception of total French domination than anything else. Others in his powerful family have stronger ties to the United States and are more committed to expanding cultural ties.

Gabon is one of the few francophone posts in Africa without a dedicated PD officer, and due to Department priorities elsewhere, this staffing level is unlikely to change in the short term. A mid-level economic and commercial officer holds the

PD portfolio and also serves as the backup consular officer. He devotes one-third of his time to PD activities, assisted by one LE staff member. Neither has adequate office space to display materials or to conduct meetings. Moreover, the chancery's sole conference room is also small and unsuitable for most PD events. The Embassy and Department may wish to revisit the current PD limitations based on existing staff, space constraints, and bureau priorities once the Embassy moves to the new embassy compound (NEC).

In the meantime, Washington expressed satisfaction over the limited scope of PD activities currently conducted in Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe. These include periodic holiday commemorations, regular media releases, selection of international visitors, placement of the first-ever English language fellow in Gabon, donations of books and other educational materials to schools in Gabon's interior, and hands-on support for numerous ship visits to both countries under the African Partnership Station initiative.

In January 2008, the PD section developed a proposal for an American Corner in Port Gentil, Gabon's second largest city, and is expected to complete a similar proposal for Sao Tome and Principe in March 2008. If additional resources become available, the PD section has a notional master plan, which would significantly increase the number of International Visitors programs, digital videoconferences, speaker programs, cultural events, scholarships, alumni programs, and educational advising.

The OIG team did not visit Sao Tome and Principe but believes this country, while small in population, would be fertile ground for PD. The country's leader is highly pro-United States and painfully aware of the island nation's cultural isolation.

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

The consular section is competently led by a Civil Service employee who had consular experience while based in Washington and on temporary duties at other missions. The economic-commercial-PD officer, who also performed consular duties during an extended staffing gap, is the back-up. One of the section's two LE staff is new to the section, and the other has worked there for less than two years. Both were scheduled for appropriate training at the Foreign Service Institute. An LE staff member from the PD section shares consular office space and also performs backup duties. Consequently, the section's work area is cramped and not designed for this staffing and required consular equipment.

Directional signage and consular information are appropriately placed. The consular waiting area is under a roof that is open on three sides, subjecting it to high humidity and rain. These weather-related problems have corroded the window-based microphones and other metal hardware and the fingerprint capturing equipment, and occasionally drench consular clients as well as their documents. The current layout also admits mosquitoes carrying malaria and other insects. These problems affect efficiency, staff health, and the image of the United States.

Recommendation 1: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, should request funding to replace defective microphone equipment and to screen the consular waiting area. (Action: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with CA)

The American citizens' services workload is light but also capably managed. The most recent Report of Potential Evacuees (F-77), written in 2004, estimates that fewer than 400 Americans reside or are visiting Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe at any given time. In September 2007, there were 303 registered Americans in Gabon. Shortly before the OIG inspection, the Ambassador and consular officer conducted a town hall meeting for Americans resident in Sao Tome and Principe. This was the first such meeting in many years.

Over several days during the inspection, the Embassy was asked to assist in the French-sponsored evacuation of American citizens and others from Chad to Gabon. Mission management praised the consular section's role in coordinating with French and Gabonese authorities to admit the evacuees and to arrange their onward travel. The Embassy was already updating both its Emergency Action Plan and its F-77 estimates for the first time since 2004, and OIG urged their completion as soon as possible. There were no arrests or death cases in FY 2007.

Visa processing is light and handled according to regulations. Just over 2,000 nonimmigrant visa (NIV) applications were submitted in each of the past three years. The refusal rate of roughly 30 percent includes a significant number of applicants from other African countries with no long-term ties to Gabon. Internet access is readily available in Gabon, and all NIV applicants download visa applications directly from the Internet. Similar use of the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Web-based NIV appointment system would also be viable for applicants in Libreville and reduce the section's workload. OIG left an informal recommendation in that regard. The section also considered the benefits of instituting offsite machine-readable visa fee collections. Immigrant, diversity, and refugee visa cases were an insignificant part of the

workload. The Embassy circulated an updated visa referral policy in January 2008, and historically referrals have not posed problems.

The Frankfurt-based regional consular officer visits annually to provide advice and comprehensive trip reports to the Embassy and Bureau of Consular Affairs offices in Washington. The Accra-based field office director from the Department of Homeland Security visited in January 2008 after a long staffing gap in that office, and consular management reported that communication with the Department of Homeland Security on refugee and asylum issues has improved markedly.

Although the inspection was limited in scope, it appeared that all appropriate consular management controls were being observed.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Agency	U.S. Direct-Hire and Eligible Family Member Staff	Locally Employed Staff	Funding FY 2007
State – program and consular	9	9	\$1,385,700
State – ICASS	7	52	3,267,932
State – Diplomatic Security	2	1	799,876
State – OBO (NEC)	3		1,099,000
Defense Attaché Office	2		200,400
Totals	23	62	\$6,752,908

Staffing for Embassy Libreville has not adequately ensured effective operations, and regional support from surrounding embassies is not sufficiently frequent. For example, human resources and facilities management assistance comes from Embassy Yaounde, less often than twice yearly; financial management from Embassy Cotonou, not for more than one year; medical and psychiatric support from Embassies Lagos and Accra, also less than twice yearly. Instead of scheduled visits from the Bureau of African Affairs' financial management rover staff, visits must be requested. For a mission with newly hired LE staff and officers in stretch assignments, regularly scheduled visits could be useful.

MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

The management officer and the entry-level general services officer, in stretch assignments, needed to learn a great deal quickly on the job. The management officer has specific responsibility not only for the entire section, but specifically for human resources and financial management.

The information technology section, with a total of four employees, operates effectively through its staff's diligence and dedication, which includes substantial overtime. Human resource management, conducted by local staff under the management officer's supervision, maintains close contact with the regional human resources officer located at Embassy Yaounde. The regional officer visits Libreville less frequently than the six month intervals promised. More frequent and longer visits would be beneficial.

Although regional support for financial management had been a problem for more than one year, those issues appear to be resolved. Longer visits would not only remedy problems but could be used to train LE staff. Support from the Bureau of African Affairs' Paris-based rovers is invaluable. By invitation, there were two rovers' visits within the last five months.

The chancery, a former bank building, and several small out-buildings occupy a small compound in the downtown area. Construction of a NEC is underway; completion, however, is not anticipated before 2010. Pending the Department of Defense's decision about where to locate AFRICOM, there are no plans to sell the U.S. Government-owned chancery compound. The general services annex houses the warehouse, procurement and shipping offices, the medical unit, maintenance workshops, the boat, and other office facilities. The current NEC does not include a warehouse; consequently, the mission expects to keep the general services annex. OIG questions the need to keep this complex of buildings, given that most offices will be relocated to the NEC. It is possible that only a warehouse is needed. It is, however, premature to recommend the outcome for this complex as well as to discuss other warehousing possibilities.

Human Resource Management

The OIG team's review of LE staff performance evaluation reports showed nearly half of all required reports were overdue. Two were not completed in more than two years, and four were more than one year overdue. Until the local human resource staff got training in usage of the Department's analysis tool, WebPass, insufficient attention was devoted to evaluations and the subsequent effect on within grade increases.

Given that staff recently had additional, specific human resource training, the mission anticipates that position descriptions will be reviewed and subjected to the Department's computer-assisted job evaluation. Particularly important is the need to review and rewrite position descriptions for EFMs where their responsibilities exceed

the current position descriptions and may not be reflected in their compensation. One reason for these deficiencies is turnover in the LE staff positions, three LE human resources staff in the last five years.

Another concern is accuracy in time and attendance reporting. Time and attendance reports are not always reviewed and approved. OIG left an informal recommendation in this regard.

Financial Management

As noted in various reports, financial management was problematic. Until recently, unspecified problems prevented visits from regional financial management staff, located at Embassy Cotonou. The financial management officer and the Paris-based financial management rovers recommended restructuring the office and changing the work requirements for LE staff. The OIG team agrees changes are needed and endorses those that were recommended.

At the same time, the OIG team reviewed problems with the many vouchers that arrive daily and the need to file them with photocopies of embassy-issued checks. The Embassy could limit the number of vouchers that arrive daily by having the vendors file with blanket purchase agreements, aggregate vouchers monthly, and use electronic funds transfer for payments. Discussions with the procurement section also produced agreement on this alternative.

General Services Operations

Distant from the Embassy, the general services annex houses elements that function better under close supervision. Embassy Libreville is reviewing and revising the current general services officer's responsibilities. While understandable, this should be done with great caution. Removing the general services officer for other duties when general services operations are not ideal, is disadvantageous. Current plans to separate maintenance and repair from the usual general services portfolio are a concern. Given the complaints to date, the OIG team is not convinced this change will result in positive improvement absent direct, continuous, and daily supervision. The Embassy understands that whatever restructuring takes place, eligible family members, without specific training and without contracting warrants, for example, should not oversee procurement, leasing, warehousing, inventory and other controls.

U.S. GOVERNMENT-OWNED BOAT

OIG's 2001 report on Embassy Libreville recommended disposing of a U.S. Government-owned boat at the Embassy, because nonofficial-use costs were not properly reimbursed and the boat was useless for emergency evacuations. Embassy Libreville complied with the recommendation and sold the boat in November 2001.

The current OIG inspection team learned the previous Ambassador directed the Embassy to purchase a new boat, costing \$75,000. The justification for purchasing this boat was based on fears that tribal violence would follow the death of Bongo, who does not have an announced successor but is in good health and absolutely unchallenged politically.

Although the mission called this vessel an emergency evacuation boat, the OIG team found no reference to emergency evacuation boats in any of the Foreign Affairs Manuals. Discussions with several regional security officers at Embassy Libreville and elsewhere confirm that emergency evacuation boats are not included in Emergency Action Plans because small craft holding few people are not adequate for evacuations. There is the possibility that they may be used for official needs and as a recreational asset. In any case, Embassy Libreville's Emergency Action Plan does not refer to an emergency evacuation boat and likely will not when the update is completed.

Before the mission decided to spend \$75,000 of program funds to purchase a boat that holds 8 to 12 people, it should have carefully analyzed: how frequently post was subject to a drawdown or evacuation; how many trips to a safe destination would be required to complete drawdown or evacuation and how long that would take; and the number of evacuees listed in the Report of Potential Evacuees (F-77) that includes not only mission personnel but also potential U.S. citizen, host country, and third country evacuees.

At this point, the boat is kept on a trailer at the general services annex. It is already deteriorating in the tropical climate. It was only used for the previous Ambassador's fishing trip and a trip to a resort on the other side of the estuary. The boat is a potential recreational resource and may eventually be inventoried and identified in that manner. The OIG team found that life jackets and other safety equipment are stored behind a locked door at the warehouse because the boat was becoming waterlogged. Plans to move the boat to a nonexistent ramp at the Ambassador's residence to launch it were not tested, and the boat was not tested in open water.

The OIG team remains uncertain about how and when the boat will be used. Further, the OIG team questions the use of appropriated funds when the boat policy (91 State 231436) states it is not Department policy to encourage the purchase of boats with appropriated funds. Even now, procurement of life jackets and other boat-related equipment consumes LE staff time and uses International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) funds for payment. The OIG team is disturbed by this seeming misuse of funds.

THE NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND

The cost for the new embassy is estimated at \$50 million. The contractor completed only six percent of the work when 40 percent of the work should have been accomplished at this point. According to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) officials, it is too early to terminate the contract for default, because the contractor is not performing. The OIG team has learned that OBO guidance is to wait until the entire contract time has fully elapsed before initiating a termination for default. Should this be the case, the date for completing the new chancery could be substantially later than 2009. This delay has important effects on the Embassy's and the Department's planning that should be noted now.

Further, original plans showed a warehouse would be built on the compound, and without this building, air-conditioned warehouse space is needed. It is not cost-effective to keep the current general services annex to fill this need.

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HEALTH UNIT

Located at the general services annex, the health unit’s staff, including an LE physician and an LE nurse-laboratory technician with several years of prior Peace Corps experience, is adequate. The office area is clean and adequately sized; medications and employee records are properly stored. Most common complaints and ailments are respiratory-related and can be treated locally. Three patients were medically evacuated to South Africa in 2007 for illnesses that were untreatable in Libreville. In addition to serving the official American community, the health unit also reviews and certifies LE staff medical claims for reimbursement under the Embassy’s self-insured medical plan. There were no unofficial patients.

Regional Support

Embassy Lagos’ regional medical officer provides medical support, and Embassy Accra’s regional psychiatrist provides psychiatric support. (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)
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Recommendation 4: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with Embassy Lagos and Embassy Accra, should schedule quarterly regional medical officer and regional psychiatrist visits to Embassy Libreville. (Action: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with Embassy Lagos and Embassy Accra)

Embassy Lagos' regional medical technician last visited Embassy Libreville in August 2007. The health unit nurse attended regional training in 2006 and expects to attend sometime during 2008.

Drainage and Water Problems

The OIG team also saw open drains within the general services annex that back-up with raw sewage during the heavy rains that often plague Libreville. The drain runs through an area of heavy foot traffic adjacent to the general services office, the lunch room, and the health unit. Some embassy staff describe a stench when the septic system overflows into the drain. Standing water also collects in nearby parking areas and in front of the health unit. When wet, these areas serve as breeders for malarial mosquitoes; when dry, the dust may be the cause of respiratory infections. Repairs are needed to remedy health-related problems.

Recommendation 5: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, should fix septic systems, rain water catchments, and cover drainage channels. (Action: Embassy Libreville, in coordination with OBO)

COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE

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(b) (2)(b) (2) The incumbent, appointed in January 2008, is aware of the many challenges and has energetically begun to develop strategies to foster happier working and living environments for the official community. The Embassy funded the CLO position to attend the Department's Family Liaison Office formal training in

March 2008. The CLO has ready access to the management officer, attends country team meetings, and meets twice weekly with the Ambassador and DCM to discuss community issues. The client population includes 17 employees, 12 spouses, and nine children.

The CLO coordinator will be an active participant on the Embassy's housing board, which has at times made highly contentious decisions. The CLO intends to identify appropriate sponsors and ensure that newcomers of all ages receive relevant information prior to arrival in hopes of creating realistic expectations for officers considering assignment at this hard-to-fill mission. During the inspection, OIG observed the welcoming atmosphere in the CLO. The CLO coordinator communicated with the Embassy's LE physician to arrange for medical examinations and training in good hygiene for personal household staff. Other traditional CLO activities include a rotating paperback library, movie loans from the U.S. Navy Motion Picture Service, group outdoor movie nights, no-host group dinners at local restaurants, and a monthly newsletter.

During the inspection, OIG heard from both LE and American staff that cultural awareness and sensitivity training would be beneficial for all embassy staff. Training would help the staff to identify and avoid common mistakes that inadvertently offend LE staff and result in negative public situations. The OIG team is aware that the Family Liaison Office strongly endorses CLO outreach among LE staff and notes that training would nurture relationships between American and Gabonese staff and their families, and strengthen the Embassy's support for EEO and Civil Rights principles. The Peace Corps ended its programs, including cultural awareness training, when it departed Gabon in 2005; however, several of its former trainers who are still in Libreville could serve as resources. OIG left an informal recommendation for the Embassy to pursue this course of action.

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be 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.

Although Internet access is widespread in Gabon, the Embassy has not yet adopted electronic visa application form procedures for nonimmigrant visas. Embassy Libreville currently schedules its nonimmigrant visa appointments by telephone.

Informal Recommendation 1: Embassy Libreville should, after appropriate advance public notice, require all visa applicants to make appointments using the Internet.

The Embassy is not meeting 3 Foreign Affairs Manual 3000 requirements for time and attendance reporting and supervisors are not monitoring time requirements to ensure staff is working 40 hours each week.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Libreville should meet time and attendance reporting requirements.

Many position descriptions, including local staff and eligible family members, were not reviewed and subjected to the Department's computer-assisted job evaluation.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Libreville should review position descriptions, use the computer-assisted job evaluation tool to reclassify them, as appropriate, and make salary adjustments accordingly.

American staff and family members occasionally violate Gabonese cultural norms because they do not understand the culture.

Informal Recommendation 4: Embassy Libreville should conduct periodic cultural sensitivity training for American staff and their family members.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Arrival date
Ambassador	Eunice Reddick	11/2007
Deputy Chief of Mission	Nathan Holt	08/2007
Management Officer	Charles Morrill	09/2007
Political Officer	Leslie Doumbia	05/2007
Economic-Commercial Officer	John Corrao	06/2007
Consular Officer	Grace Genuino	12/2007
Regional Security Officer	William Sandlin	07/2007
Defense Attaché	LTC Rene Dechaine	06/2007
Broadcasting Board of Governors Voice of America Transmitting Station	Kenneth Tripp	06/2007

ABBREVIATIONS

AFRICOM	Department of Defense Africa Command
BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CLO	community liaison office
DCM	deputy chief of mission
Department	U.S. Department of State
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EFM	eligible family member
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
LE	locally employed
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
NEC	new embassy compound
NIV	nonimmigrant visa
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PD	public diplomacy
RSO	regional security officer

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