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

Report of Inspection

Inspection of the Regional Consular Officer and Consular Management Assistance Team Programs

Report Number ISP-I-11-18, January 2011

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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 Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General 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 economy 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 instance 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, 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 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
REGIONAL CONSULAR OFFICER PROGRAM	5
Program Supervision	5
Program Support	6
Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures	6
Program Web Sites	7
CONSULAR MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM PROGRAM	9
Program Management	9
Team Visits	9
Reports, Recommendations, and Follow-up	10
LESSONS LEARNED	11
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	13
LIST OF INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS	15
ABBREVIATIONS	17

CONTEXT

The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) established the RCO and CMAT programs as managerial tools to assist posts overseas. Both programs are coordinated by the senior management adviser in CA/EX.

CA expanded the RCO program in 2001 to employ full-time RCOs instead of assigning collateral assistance duties for smaller missions in the area to senior consular officers in selected large posts. CA considers all RCOs to be employees of CA/EX whether posted abroad or in the Department. At present, there are seven RCOs responsible for mentoring and advising 90 posts in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, South and Central Asia, Central and South America, and East Asia and the Pacific. The supervisory RCO is based in Cairo, the others in Frankfurt, Johannesburg, Bangkok, and Washington, DC. The frequency of RCO visits varies based on post size, experience of post consular managers, and RCO analysis of post performance. CA allocates Machine-Readable Visa (MRV) funds for each RCO to travel to covered posts.

CMATs were launched in early 2003 to assist posts in managing procedural changes enacted after 9/11. Teams are headed by a senior consular officer and vary in composition. They serve as CA management consultants to ensure implementation of critical security-related requirements, strict management controls, effective utilization of resources, and adherence to standard operating procedures. To date, CMATs have visited more than 140 posts overseas and will visit 24 more in 2010. CA schedules visits based on requests from posts, critical security threats, and perceived need. CA budgeted \$250,000 in FY 2010 for CMATs, including \$35,000 in travel costs.

The OIG team found that both programs successfully provide in-depth functional expertise and management advisory support to individual consular sections and by extension to mission management. Surveys of beneficiaries of both programs report, in general, a high degree of satisfaction with RCO and CMAT visits and outcomes. This report contains recommendations regarding the location of the supervisory RCO, RCO program management, reporting guidance and follow-up in both programs, and RCO program information sources.

REGIONAL CONSULAR OFFICER PROGRAM

The successful RCO program provides comprehensive support for small, isolated consular sections, and management and oversight guidance to larger posts as well. RCOs are, in effect, part information resource, part mentor, and part management consultant. They offer hands-on guidance to ensure adherence to laws, regulations, procedures, policies, and internal controls. They establish relationships with deputy chiefs of mission or principal officers to ensure appropriate supervision from front offices. They provide written assessments within 30 days that are distributed to the posts, CA, and the regional bureaus, with analysis of staffing and workload levels, internal controls, and management systems. Where appropriate, they provide and arrange training.

PROGRAM SUPERVISION

While the overall RCO program is strong and has positive effects, program coordination is problematic. While all RCOs are members of a virtual team, none have on-site supervision. The supervisory RCO has a full portfolio of posts and supervises and evaluates performance of the other six RCOs. They communicate by telephone or Internet, and face-to-face encounters are infrequent. The supervisory RCO provides general guidelines but leaves program implementation to the individual RCOs. With regard to reports, the supervisory RCO offers collegial advice and provides feedback.

The MRV funding allotment to hosting posts covers administrative costs, equipment purchases, and travel. Each RCO must pay close personal attention to proper accounting of travel expenses, as well as time and attendance issues, such as annual leave, compensatory time, and time-in-travel status. RCOs prepare their travel schedules well in advance, given the often complicated air travel connections and distances. Each RCO has an open travel authorization. Travel plans and specific arrangements including trip changes and cancellations are left to the RCO. Prior approval by the supervisory RCO or the CA/EX coordinator is not required, though in practice both the supervisory RCO and CA/EX do review the RCOs' travel plans. At host missions, travel vouchers are approved by the consular section chiefs who have no fiduciary responsibility for actual expenditures, and are processed to conclusion by

the home post financial management office. There is no centralized review of RCO travel expenditures by the supervisory RCO or in CA/EX. In sum, the proper use of travel funds depends on the personal integrity of the RCO. While there are no known problems, this lack of program oversight is a potential vulnerability.

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should establish oversight over regional consular officer travel expenditures. (Action: CA)

PROGRAM SUPPORT

The primary locus of operational support for the RCO program is Frankfurt, Germany, home to three of the seven RCOs and the RCO administrative assistant. The administrative assistant prepares travel and other documentation for the three RCOs. While the primary locus of the RCO program is in Frankfurt, the supervisory RCO is posted to Cairo and does not have much direct contact with the RCOs whom she supervises. If relocated to Frankfurt, the supervisory RCO could more directly supervise two or three of the RCOs, exercise greater in-depth management controls, ease the administrative burden on the office in Cairo, and make better use of the RCO administrative assistant. While retaining an RCO in Cairo may be cost effective, good management practices dictate that the supervisory RCO is best located where most of his/her subordinates work.

Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, in coordination with the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, should establish the supervisory regional consular officer position in Frankfurt and consider exceptions to this location in extraordinary circumstances on a case-by-case basis. (Action: CA, in coordination with NEA and EUR)

GUIDELINES AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The *Newcomer's Guide for Incoming RCOs* is thorough and well organized, covering a description of the program, the RCO toolkit (Web sites and checklists), recommended consultations and training, and guidance on trip planning and reporting. In the latter regard, the guide incorporates most of the reporting guidance from a

November 2009 memorandum issued by the supervisory RCO. RCOs use an 18-page checklist as guidance for post reviews and a report template. There are no formal reporting standard operating procedures, per se, that describe the correct report structure, format, and content, as well as classification and distribution, for a consistent approach. The OIG team informally recommended that the RCO reporting guidance be codified and updated.

The guide for RCO-covered posts, entitled *Introduction to Your New RCO-Covered Post*, is less complete than the newcomer's guide. At only two pages, it provides a brief summary of the program and references to the RCO Forum, the RCO checklist, and the RCO email collective address. The guide lacks information about the RCO team members and contact information, the RCO toolkit, Web site references, and post visit and reporting protocols. The OIG team made an informal recommendation in this regard.

There is an inherent tension between the RCO's role as coach, mentor, and teacher, and the inspection-like aspects of surveying a post's consular operations and reporting deficiencies. At the end of each visit the RCO discusses the findings with the consular officer and the post front office under a "no-surprises" policy. Subsequently, the RCO submits to the post, a trip report with suggestions and recommendations. The report is not punitive and compliance is voluntary. Several RCOs reported that on occasion posts fail to respond or avoid contact, with little or no subsequent explanation from the consular officer or post management. In such cases, outstanding consular issues may linger and adversely affect consular operations. While it is important that any procedures should follow the RCO's own direct efforts at compliance, they could include intervention by the supervisory RCO or referral to CA, if warranted.

Recommendation 3: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should establish follow-up procedures for addressing Regional Consular Officer program recommendations when posts do not comply. (Action: CA)

PROGRAM WEB SITES

The RCO program hosts two Web sites that provide different levels of information and communication. The RCO SharePoint Web site is the electronic "home base" for current and archived RCO reports, a shared travel and leave calendar, consular section photos, and other related documentation. CA/EX owns the site

that is jointly maintained with the RCO office in Frankfurt. Access is restricted to the RCO and CA communities and to others on a need-to-know basis. The RCO Forum site provides Department-wide access to RCO program information. Hosted by the Department's Intelink intranet Web page, it contains links to Department and post-generated reference materials, and a useful discussion page on which any user can post a question or comment. However, much of the material on the Forum site is out-of-date, and responsibility for maintaining the site is divided between the RCOs on an ad hoc basis as time permits.

Recommendation 4: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should review all materials posted on the Regional Consular Officer Forum Web site for relevance, accuracy, and timeliness, in particular post-produced guidelines and standard operating procedures, and establish a process for regular review and updating. (Action: CA)

CONSULAR MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM PROGRAM

CMATs are an effective use of consular management and specialist experts for short-term assistance to selected posts. The majority of CMATs result from post requests, usually via their consular package submissions, while the rest are in response to critical security needs, or other specific issues and problem areas. CA tries to accommodate all requests but posts with strong consular managers may be given lower precedence. For budget reasons, teams usually visit more than one post in the same region on a trip. They complement the RCO program whose focus is on smaller consular operations, thus providing CA with the capacity to address substantive and management consular issues worldwide. OIG survey results of 10 recently-visited posts indicated that the CMATS are generally valued for their fresh perspectives and helpful suggestions for management improvement. They also serve to give CA senior management helpful feedback on their overseas operations.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The CA/EX senior management adviser manages the program and, in consultation with the CA directorates, proposes CMAT visits to the CA front office. He also solicits team member nominations from the CA directorates based on expertise and staff availability. Four senior consular managers (three retired Foreign Service officers and the CA/EX senior management adviser) lead the CMATs, with three other members, including one from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. The aforementioned survey noted several concerns about the composition of the CMATS, including team members with little or no overseas consular experience, and team members with outdated knowledge of consular rules and regulations.

TEAM VISITS

CMATs are required to look at 18 areas of consular management of particular importance to border security within the context of a broader list of topics for review. Together, they constitute a definitive guide for the CMATS and a reminder of important issues, policies, and processes that consular managers should consider in organizing consular operations and management.

CMAT visits are intended to be collegial and collaborative, with an emphasis on assistance rather than an OIG-style inspection and assessment. They normally last 3 to 5 days during which the team members meet with American and locally employed consular staff, senior post consular managers, and others as required. Team leaders debrief post consular managers and senior mission management on their findings and recommendations prior to the team's departure. The team does not prepare or leave a written report at post. Subsequent reports are sent by the CA Assistant Secretary to the chief of mission, deputy chief of mission and/or principal officer, and the chief of consular operations. Separately, CMATs prepare an information memorandum exclusively for the CA Assistant Secretary and the CA principal deputy assistant secretary to elaborate on the report and convey findings on sensitive issues. The CMAT leader debriefs the CA front office and senior managers of the CA directorates separately.

REPORTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FOLLOW-UP

The CMAT trip reporting cables request that posts reply within a specified period, a request considered to be sufficient incentive for posts to address CMAT findings and recommendations. However, there is no formal compliance mechanism, as recommendations are considered informal and implementation is left to the discretion of the post. Neither is there a formal follow-up mechanism. While the CMAT reporting cables are distributed to the appropriate CA directorates whose analysts examine them for items of interest, the results of these communications are not tracked. In addition, according to the OIG survey of posts visited by CMATs, less than half reported receiving feedback on outstanding issues that the teams promised to address after return to Washington.

During the inspection, the OIG team found agreement among several former and current CMAT participants that the lack of a follow-up mechanism is an inherent weakness in the program's procedures. One opined that a few repeat CMAT visits and one OIG special issue inspection might have been avoided had there been follow-up on the original recommendations. Another stated that without follow-up the CMAT may be perceived as a "paper tiger" and the impact of the CMAT compromised. In sum, the program is demonstrating to some visited posts and CA directorates a lack of sustained interest in seeing positive results from the CMAT visits.

Recommendation 5: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should establish a follow-up mechanism to track Consular Management Assistance Team recommendations, post responses, and feedback to visited posts. (Action: CA)

LESSONS LEARNED

RCO reports often contain programmatic and policy commentary of wider applicability. CA has tasked one of the RCOs to initiate a systematic collation of lessons learned from RCO visits and trip reports on how consular regulations, policy, and training broadly play out in the field. The resulting written product culled from RCO observations will complement the CMAT-derived posting on the CA intranet site entitled *CMAT Lessons Learned: What Makes a Great Consular Section*. This information has been incorporated into the Foreign Affairs Handbook (7 FAH-1 H-240). The OIG team commends CA for its efforts to document lessons learned from both programs.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should establish oversight over regional consular officer travel expenditures. (Action: CA)

Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, in coordination with the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, should establish the supervisory regional consular officer position in Frankfurt and consider exceptions to this location in extraordinary circumstances on a case-by-case basis. (Action: CA, in coordination with NEA and EUR)

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Recommendation 5: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should establish a follow-up mechanism to track Consular Management Assistance Team recommendations, post responses, and feedback to visited posts. (Action: CA)

LIST OF 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.

There is no formal reporting SOP for RCO reports.

Informal Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should codify and update regional consular officer reporting guidance into formal standard operating procedures.

While the RCO has complete information on the RCO program, the posts that are covered by the RCO program are only given a few resources.

Informal Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should prepare a more complete guide for posts covered by the Regional Consular Officer program.

ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
CA/EX	Executive Office, Bureau of Consular Affairs
CMAT	Consular Management Assistance Team
OIG	Office of Inspector General
MRV	Machine-Readable Visa
RCO	Regional Consular Officer

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