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Services and Crisis Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management (CA/OCS/ACS) rightfully enjoys an excellent reputation within the Department of State (Department) for providing the American traveling public with a high level of service and timely, accurate information. Consular operations overseas were nearly unanimous in their acclaim for the support and guidance they receive from ACS. However, the need for improvements in information systems and the long-delayed publication of revisions to the *Foreign Affairs Manual* were common complaints.

CA/OCS/ACS's workload reflects the troubled state of the world. Recently, ACS has operated in a nearly constant state of emergency response due to international crises threatening the safety of U.S. citizens. This, coupled with resource constraints, has meant that the office leadership is absorbed by high profile case-work and has little time to devote to management issues. Office space, automation, and staff development are deficient and require more attention from CA/OCS/ACS management. Greater devolution of authority and some restructuring of responsibilities are needed to correct the situation. Workload distribution is uneven, with some staff overworked and others underemployed. This has an adverse effect on employee morale and operational inefficiency. Managers lack a workload tracking mechanism to enable them to make informed decisions about workload distribution and employee performance. Additional staffing and improvements to information systems, which are in the works, will help. CA/OCS has established a new Office of Systems Coordination to address this and related issues. Improved infrastructure, more training, and additional management attention should soon improve staff morale.

CA/OCS/ACS is diligent in monitoring threat assessments worldwide to ensure that the Department meets its responsibility under the "No Double Standard Policy" to keep the American public as well informed of conditions abroad that pose a potential threat to American citizens as it is itself informed. Several instances have occurred in which other U.S. government agencies have failed to coordinate with the Department and taken actions independently to protect their personnel, without timely notice to private American citizens. A directive that applies to all U.S. government entities operating overseas is needed to enforce the Department's No Double Standard Policy.

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ACS's responsibilities include assisting American citizens abroad who are in financial or medical distress, through the use of funds transfers or loans. Consular sections must often aid American citizens whose destitution is chronic, who have no fixed address due to homelessness, who lack relatives, or who do not understand the repayment obligation a loan entails. Posts therefore do not always adequately enforce management controls, which require information that will help the Department to collect on the loan. Approximately 80 percent of the repatriation loans extended by the Department to destitute travelers are not repaid. In order to increase the likelihood of repatriation loan repayment, ACS should reiterate to posts the need for obtaining certain information before approving repatriation loans.

The inspection took place in Washington, DC, from May 21 to July 13, 2001. It was conducted by Richele Keller (team leader), Douglas Ellice (deputy team leader), Thomas Frank Foulger, Renee Francis, Janice McCain, and John Meenan, assisted by Robin Waldo and Jane Lee.

OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management¹ (CA/OCS/ACS), in the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA), is charged with a fundamental national interest: protecting American citizens abroad. When trouble strikes outside our borders, Americans abroad turn first to the nearest American embassy consular section, which is supported in the Department of State (the Department) by CA/OCS/ACS. For an American traveler involved in foreign turmoil, anxiety runs high. In crisis situations, consular personnel both on the scene and in CA are accountable for delivering a professional standard of service to American citizens while handling occasional unrealistic demands with grace. In non-crisis times, ACS is responsible for writing and disseminating information to facilitate the travel and ensure the safety of Americans outside the United States. It also provides consular services directly to American clients, and supports consular sections around the world.

CA/OCS/ACS has a heavy and ever-expanding responsibility. Americans made 61 million trips abroad in 2000. Demand for U.S. government assistance by Americans traveling and living overseas has expanded proportionally. In 2000, consuls in the field and ACS desk officers in Washington assisted in approximately 12,000 welfare and whereabouts inquiries, 6,000 deaths, 2,500 arrests, and 1,200 cases of destitute Americans. The numbers do little to convey the emotionally charged urgency of these crises.

The Department has a responsibility to provide prompt and accurate public notice to American citizens about country conditions and the potential risks of visiting certain areas. The office updates Consular Information Sheets (CIS) for each of 207 countries as conditions warrant. ACS also coordinates public announcements—and, on a more urgent basis, travel warnings—as needed to alert the public to potential threats and other noteworthy conditions.

¹ The initials ACS, standing for “American citizens services,” are widely used in consular work. In Washington, the Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management is frequently referred to as simply ACS. For improved readability in this report, we may refer to the inspected entity as CA/OCS/ACS or simply ACS, depending on the immediate context.

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In early July 2000, 25 public announcements and 28 travel warnings were in effect for specific cities, countries, or regions. These public releases are at times the subject of difficult negotiation between concerned Department offices and other agencies. Adherence to the “No Double Standard Policy”, which ensures that the public has the same credible information available to U.S. government employees, is at times compromised by the uncoordinated actions of other departments (see Recommendation 1).

When disaster strikes American citizens overseas, a Department crisis management task force must be staffed around the clock, with CA/OCS/ACS providing core expertise. An on-call task force roster is maintained, as is a fly-away team list for emergency duty overseas. A full-time crisis management officer is responsible for training and crisis preparation.

CA/OCS duty officers provide round the clock coverage, rotate weekly and are arguably among the busiest in the Department. Additionally, staff also rotates on a weekday late shift until 10:00 p.m. Reportedly, workload for the late shift is sporadic. CA might wish to monitor the workload of that late-shift duty period to determine whether it is needed.

As part of its routine work, the office renders civil and criminal judicial assistance to the Department of Justice, state and local jurisdictions, private citizens, and foreign governments. Examples include international extraditions, testimonies, and depositions. It also responds to a heavy volume of congressional inquiries on behalf of constituents. This and other routine but important work can become backlogged as urgent business intervenes, which occurs often (see Recommendation 5).

The Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management is the largest of three parts of the directorate for Overseas Citizens Services (CA/OCS). CA/OCS also includes the Office of Children’s Issues (CA/OCS/CI) and the Office of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison (CA/OCS/PRI). CI was recently relocated to a State annex building (SA-1), and plans are to move PRI there soon. This physical separation of CA/OCS units that coordinate on common issues impairs the cooperative nature of their related work. Ideally, the three offices that comprise CA’s directorate of Overseas Citizens Services should be collocated at Main State, and this issue merits revisiting (see Recommendation 13).

To perform its many roles, the office employs 46 employees, 12 Foreign Service and 34 Civil Service (which includes a few Cooperative Education Program workers). This does not include the Managing Director and her staff in CA/OCS. Five new permanent positions are approved and are to be filled by the end of the year. The office director oversees 5 regional divisions headed by chiefs who in turn supervise 6 to 10 desk officers and staff.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

The compelling nature of the work of CA/OCS results in a high degree of media and congressional attention. Consequently, the senior management of CA, and often of the Department, requires frequent and detailed updates on events related to cases involving the death, kidnapping, or arrest of an American citizen abroad. To be responsive to this need, the managing director of CA/OCS, the director of CA/OCS/ACS, and the division chiefs for each geographic region follow such cases closely. In doing so, they provide valuable guidance to less experienced desk officers. The office leadership conveys daily the bureau's commitment to providing the highest level of service to Americans abroad and support to the overseas posts that extend those services.

CA/OCS/ACS leadership is integrally involved in the continuous monitoring of security threat assessments worldwide. It consults with overseas posts daily, making dozens of decisions to keep information available to the American traveling public regarding health and safety conditions around the world as current and accurate as possible. In this endeavor, ACS works closely with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, the Office of Counterterrorism, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, each of the regional bureaus, and the public affairs staff of CA and the Department. The liaison is extraordinarily close, professional, and effective—though it would be enhanced if all ACS desk officers had access to the classified e-mail system (see Recommendation 14).

Coordination and cooperation occasionally breaks down in dealing with other U.S. government agencies, notably with the Department of Defense and, in at least one instance, with the United States Customs Service. CA cannot deal authoritatively with other Federal agencies and requires the support of the Secretary of State and the National Security Council to enforce its rigorous defense of the No Double Standard Policy (see Recommendation 1).

The intense and unending demands of the two principal missions of CA/OCS/ACS—to provide services to American citizens and to provide current information on travel conditions—leave the OCS and ACS directors little time to devote to long-range planning or day-to-day management issues. The lack of attention given to management issues, including staff development and performance, workload track-

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ing and workforce planning, office infrastructure, and information technology, is reflected in poor morale, uneven performance, and operational inefficiency throughout ACS.

The CA/OCS managing director and ACS director informed the Office of Inspector General (OIG) at the outset of the inspection of several individual poor performers and employees who suffer from burnout after many years of operating in the crisis-driven environment of ACS. OIG found those assessments to be correct but found in addition that poor morale and complaints about weak management were pervasive throughout ACS. One of the key complaints was that although managers can identify nonperformance they have done little to discipline underperformers or raise the level of performance.

Because ACS has no workload tracking mechanism, it is unable to do meaningful workforce planning. Without any method to track workload, desk officers can fall behind in their casework without management's becoming aware of the problem in any reasonable length of time. ACS has requested and recently received approval for additional staffing, but little planning has been done to rationalize portfolio distribution with the addition of new staff. The typical pattern in the office is that strong performers gradually accrue ever-increasing work portfolios, while weak performers are given the least demanding roles. For the sake of accountability and morale, as well as effective resource management, the office requires a mechanism for measuring and tracking its work (see recommendations 5 and 6).

Despite the broad and complex nature of American citizen services, which requires skills in crisis management, judicial decision making, financial management, security threat assessment, public outreach, interviewing, writing, information systems development and application, and more, CA/OCS has no training program. New hires are generally given the consular basic course at the Foreign Service Institute and rudimentary training on proprietary consular information systems. There is no formal orientation program and no continuing training to refresh or upgrade the skills of long-time employees. Although CA/OCS management and virtually all employees of ACS are aware of this shortcoming, there is no tasking to address it (see Recommendation 9).

Regional division chiefs are the immediate supervisors of most of the ACS staff. The division chiefs, and the CA/OCS/ACS director, who is a former division chief, are excellent consular service providers, conversant with governing regulations and savvy about the hazards and safeguards of foreign travel. Although the management styles and effectiveness of the five chiefs vary, all are excessively drawn into day-to-day case handling. Only one was found to have strong delegation skills and

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adequate communication with the division staff. In most cases, the intrusion of the division chiefs into the work of the desk officers diminishes both the efficiency and the morale of their staffs. Information gathered by division chiefs at senior staff meetings is not shared effectively with working-level staff. In particular, the support staff is given little training, oversight, direction, or sense of purpose. Most feel underutilized. Senior managers, and some outside the bureau, complain about the poor quality of drafting by some desk officers, yet division chiefs take little responsibility for controlling the quality of the work of their staffs. This weakness in middle management places an impossible burden on the ACS director, who by default functions in many respects as a first-line supervisor for the entire office. This causes bottlenecks in the movement of paper and decision making.

The director and managing director need to make clear that the division chiefs, as immediate supervisors, are not responsible for directly providing consular services, but for raising and maintaining the quality of work of their subordinates. Individual desk officers also need to be given a sense of both accountability and ownership of their respective portfolios. When CA/OCS/ACS briefs senior Department officials on individual cases or country situations, desk officers should participate to a greater degree and division chiefs to a lesser degree.

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CORE FUNCTIONS

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM

CA/OCS/ACS is a major contributor to the bureau's public information program. It coordinates the drafting and issuance of Consular Information Sheets, public announcements, and travel warnings. American citizens have ready access by telephone and, increasingly, the Internet, to obtain details on country conditions and consular services. ACS provides valuable support and guidance to consular staff around the world. It is the hub of expertise and staff for responding to crisis conditions that pose a threat to Americans abroad.

Telephone resources for the general public include ACS staff and automated services for fax and recorded information. The CA web site (www.travel.state.gov) is a rich source of information. In addition to particulars on passports and visas, travelers can review Consular Information Sheets and travel warnings, as well as get information on a wide variety of services for Americans abroad, including marriage, registering births, authentication of documents, and help in emergencies. The site has links to useful Internet resources such as the web sites of U.S. missions, the United States Customs Service, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, and, for businesses, State's Overseas Security Advisory Council. Each of these has additional informative links to assist the traveling public. The popular Consular Information Sheets provide useful facts on entry requirements, security issues, crime, health conditions, traffic and road safety, and other important topics.

Public announcements alert Americans overseas about risks to their security and are usually issued for a specific short-term period. Travel warnings recommend that Americans avoid travel to a certain country or area and can remain in effect for extended periods. Both are widely disseminated to the news media, the travel industry, international organizations, U.S. passport agencies, U.S. diplomatic posts, other U.S. government entities, and to international businesses via the OSAC.

Although CA has no statutory or regulatory authority for issuing such announcements and warnings, the rationale for doing so can be inferred from CA's basic responsibility to protect American citizens overseas. The American public and Congress, in fact, have come to expect timely notice of potential threats to the safety and welfare of American citizens abroad when the U.S. government has relevant information.

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To fulfill this responsibility, CA/OCS/ACS convenes weekly with representatives of other Department offices responsible for threat assessment and protection of American citizens abroad, and on an as-needed basis with other responsible departments and agencies, usually collectively. U.S. diplomatic missions often initiate recommendations for announcements or warnings, but CA, in coordination with other bureaus and with national security counterparts, also generates some of its own.

NO DOUBLE STANDARD POLICY

A “No Double Standard Policy” guides the issuance of threat information to the public. This policy began with the 1990 Aviation Security Improvement Act (P.L. 101-604), which requires dissemination of aviation threat information to all Americans who might be affected. The Department subsequently applied that transparent notification policy to all threats to Americans abroad, requiring dissemination of relevant information to everyone potentially affected.

When a threat against U.S. government personnel, missions, or interests is determined by the Department (in concert with the intelligence community) to be credible and specific, that information must be provided without undue delay to private and official Americans when it applies to both. A public notice is not issued when the threat is determined to be directed solely against U.S. government personnel, missions, or interests.

When the public is potentially endangered, the CA/OCS/ACS staff occasionally must engage in difficult negotiations to craft acceptable language that remains meaningful for American citizens. That negotiation process, particularly for travel warnings, can be problematic as political considerations, protection of intelligence sources, and assessment of threat credibility must be taken into account. Despite these sometimes conflicting pressures, ACS has shown itself to be a capable advocate and broker to ensure that the American public has the timely information it needs to make well informed travel decisions.

The Department has primary responsibility for assessment and dissemination of threat information that could be useful to Americans overseas. However, other U.S. government agencies with a presence abroad have independent responsibility for the security of their own personnel (the Department of Defense, for example, through its local military commanders). Threat information, sometimes early in the assessment process, is shared with these other agencies through Emergency Action Committees at post and via Secure Video Teleconference System in Washington.

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These other U.S. government agencies sometimes provide information to their personnel before the Department makes a credible and specific determination of the threat. This premature release often compels the Department, in order to avoid the perception of a double standard, to publicize information that does not meet the threshold criteria for dissemination. The Department has attempted to coordinate dissemination of such threat information by other U.S. government agencies but does not have the authority to enforce compliance.

Specifically, U.S. military commanders make independent decisions about dissemination to their personnel of whatever threat information they consider appropriate to ensure force protection. When this occurs without prior notification, the Department must take after-the-fact measures to notify potentially affected private citizens and government officials.

The Department of Defense has agreed to notify principal officers at relevant U.S. missions abroad prior to such warnings to Department of Defense personnel or as soon thereafter as possible. Posts are then to advise the Department, which will make a decision on whether the information should be disseminated to the general public. All U.S. diplomatic missions were reminded of this procedure in a recent Department message. However, posts are still not always notified by military commands in a timely manner.

Out of immediate concern for their own personnel, other departments and agencies are at times not rigorous in their adherence to the policy. OIG learned of several instances in which other U.S. government entities evacuated their own employees or took other protective steps without appropriate coordination with the Department and, consequently, without interagency threat assessment and timely notice to affected American citizens. Those U.S. government entities were concerned with the wellbeing of their employees. Their uncoordinated actions have the potential to compromise safety of private citizens abroad. Playing catch-up, CA/OCS/ACS has apparently been able to redress the lapses, although not without delay in public notification.

This is a difficult problem to solve, and one that will require more interagency cooperation. It would be useful to remind other departments and agencies of the U.S. government No Double Standard Policy and the obligations it entails. It would also be appropriate for interagency guidance from the National Security Council, supported by a National Security directive or Executive Order, to clarify responsibilities as well as procedures. A Department telegram on the No Double Standard Policy was transmitted to all diplomatic and consular posts in mid-June 2001.

Recommendation 1: The Department should seek a National Security directive to clarify responsibilities and procedures for the implementation of the No Double Standard Policy. (Action: CA, in coordination with S/CT)

DIRECT SERVICES TO AMERICAN CITIZENS

When American citizens abroad require consular assistance, they usually obtain that help from the embassy or consulate nearest to them. But when Americans inside the United States have a consular problem, they obtain their consular services from OCS/ACS.

The services ACS provides mirror those provided abroad by embassies. The most difficult, of course, are death cases. The sad duty of informing a family that a loved one has died while traveling sometimes falls on the shoulders of an ACS desk officer. Desk officers also provide liaison with funeral directors in the United States when remains are being returned from abroad, and help families transfer funds abroad to the foreign mortician preparing the remains for shipment.

Missing persons cases involving an American citizen abroad are also handled by ACS. Most of these are eventually resolved with the reappearance of the traveler. But even those that are resolved involve many days of high anxiety and stress for the family. Their anxiety and stress are sometimes focused on the ACS desk officer.

Tragically, a few cases every year are not resolved. During the weeks and months that searches are being conducted—or not—it falls to the citizen services specialist in CA/OCS/ACS to help the family deal with the embassy, and through it with the authorities in the foreign country. It is difficult to describe the level of frustration experienced by the families, convinced as they naturally are that if only someone would try harder their loved one would be found.

Desk officers frequently must explain to a family in the United States the limits to what consular colleagues abroad can accomplish. Travelers sometimes phone the Department to ask that someone from our embassy in a country they visited find lost property or dispute hotel bills. The Department has often been asked to aid in returning unsatisfactory merchandise bought on a vacation. Whenever a consular officer overseas fails to satisfy a request from a traveler, the traveler's family may contact CA/OCS/ACS to insist that the consul be ordered to "do something." The desk officer is obliged to explain the regulatory and practical limitations of consular assistance.

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American citizens services specialists frequently use e-mail to field requests from the public. This permits them to copy the appropriate embassy on their reply, and many cases were best handled by putting the citizen in direct e-mail contact with a consular employee abroad.

OIG did not attempt a comprehensive evaluation of the satisfaction level of American citizens who have dealt with CA/OCS/ACS. Such a survey would have required time and funding that was not available to OIG at this time. OIG did survey posts abroad, an important constituency of ACS (see the next section). Review of ACS files and employee interviews, however, turned up several incidents of unsolicited praise from the public for assistance rendered in the past, and very few criticisms. Desk officers report that the most frequent complaint they hear from telephone callers is that the caller was transferred from one office to another several times before finally being connected with the correct person. The desk officers in regional bureaus also reported that many of the calls they receive should be transferred to CA/OCS/ACS. It was the consensus of officers in all the bureaus that this was unavoidable, given the size of the Department and callers understandable inability to be specific when asking for someone's help.

SUPPORT TO OVERSEAS POSTS

The consensus from posts is that CA/OCS/ACS is indispensable in helping them provide high quality consular service and plays a vital role in helping posts meet the needs of the American citizens living or traveling overseas. According to the vast majority of the posts surveyed, ACS is responsive to their needs and provides good coordination and feedback. Timeliness on urgent matters is commendable. E-mail has become the primary means of communication between CA/OCS/ACS and posts. Several posts provided OIG with examples of exemplary assistance from CA/OCS/ACS after political upheavals or natural disasters.

Although customer satisfaction is generally high, several complaints did arise in posts' feedback. In one instance, a post indicated that it waited two months for a response to a namecheck hit on a passport application for a minor. (The post acknowledged that ACS must rely on the Passport Office to obtain the records.) In another instance, a post experienced a 1-year wait for responses regarding citizenship cases requiring Department review.

One complaint was heard repeatedly during our survey from posts around the world: Volume 7 of the *Foreign Affairs Manual* (FAM) is outdated. This compels embassies to maintain elaborate systems to duplicate and store certain telegrams that

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are the only current reference material about certain issues. Posts often seek guidance from CA/OCS/ACS on a matter only to be referred to an old telegram they failed to file or for some other reason cannot now find. For example, the current guidance regarding repatriation loans is contained in a 1999 telegram sent to all diplomatic and consular posts. When embassies have questions about the program, the Office refers posts to this telegram, rather than to the out-of-date FAM section.

There is no way to know which of the day's telegrams will be the sole source of guidance on a key issue for the future. So posts defend themselves by duplicating and filing multiple copies of *all* telegrams describing ACS issues, in case one of them is still policy years later. Similarly, each desk officer in CA/OCS/ACS must keep his or her own files of cables, so that when a post seeks guidance from ACS, the desk officer will know which telegram to tell the inquirer to review. CA has not updated the FAM, despite a 1997 OIG recommendation to do so (OIG Audit Report, 7-CI-007).

Recommendation 2: CA should revise Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual to provide thorough and reliable current guidance to consular officers. (Action: CA)

Another complaint by both posts abroad and staffers in CA/OCS/ACS was the hard-to-use ACS software applications (see Recommendations 15 and 16).

A few posts complained that the Washington clearance process usually takes longer than desirable for its Consular Information Sheet (see Recommendation 5).

LOSS OF NATIONALITY CASES

The U.S. government sometimes finds that a person who held U.S. nationality has renounced or otherwise relinquished his or her citizenship. When this occurs, the Department executes a Certificate of Loss of Nationality (CLN). It is standard practice to create a "lookout file"² in the passport records system to prevent the former citizen from acquiring a new U.S. passport, or descendants from being incorrectly accorded citizenship.

² Lookout files highlight the need for a closer review of an individual who applies for consular services. A lookout file, which can be created for many reasons, results in the individual's name being entered into the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS).

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It commonly happens that, years later, the former citizen or a family member seeks to have the CLN vacated and U.S. citizenship restored. The process of examining an old loss of nationality case, possibly to vacate the CLN, is called an administrative review. These cases can be brought to the Department's attention in the form of a direct request for service by someone in the United States. Alternatively, they can come to the Department from a post overseas, where the application for an administrative review is submitted.

Several desk officers complained to OIG that administrative review cases sometimes are processed in CA/OCS/ACS, and other times in the Office of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison (CA/OCS/PRI). Overseas posts almost always send their cases to ACS. Applicants in the United States, or their attorneys, might contact PRI. There is apparently no Bureau policy that specifies in which office administrative review cases should be handled, leading to potential overlap and inefficiency. The Department should create consistent guidelines for processing cases, regardless of where the requests originate.

The first step in performing an administrative review is to obtain the loss of nationality file from the Passport Office, where it was filed. This is frequently a difficult and time-consuming process, as old passport files are archived in a distant location. It is not uncommon for an initial retrieval effort to fail, then succeed on a later attempt when more specific information is available. Persistence on the part of the requestor and the retrieval specialists occasionally pays off. On the other hand, sometimes a file cannot be retrieved even with all the necessary (and correct) information. This may result from errors in the archiving process. In this event, repeated requests prove to be a waste of time.

If a CLN file cannot be retrieved from the archives, there can be no basis on which to decide whether the current claim (that the original finding of loss of nationality was in error) is meritorious. If it is determined that a loss of nationality file is not retrievable, the Department routinely vacates the CLN and restores the person's citizenship by default. The outcome of an administrative review can, therefore, hang on how quickly the search for the file is abandoned by whomever was handling the case.

OIG made several informal suggestions related to crisis management training and software.

Recommendation 3: The Office Director for OCS/ACS, in coordination with the Office Director for PPT/PAS, should establish standard written procedures for performing administrative reviews of loss of nationality cases. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS, in coordination with CA/PPT/PAS)

LIAISON WITH THE PASSPORT OFFICE

In addition to administrative reviews, consular officers abroad and CA/OCS/ACS desk officers in Washington often require information from old passport records to perform a service. This may be to resolve a questionable claim to American citizenship by someone who has been arrested, to issue an emergency travel document, or to find next-of-kin information for someone who has died.

A new computer system went on-line in 1999 that stores and retrieves scanned images of passport records. Records prepared since then are swiftly retrievable. However, over 95 percent of passport records predate the new computer system. For almost 25 years preceding the new computer system, passport applications were microfilmed and then filed. Pre-1975 records exist only as paper files in boxes on shelves. There is no high-speed method for retrieving files from either the microfilmed records or the archived paper files. Passport files, like all U.S. government records, are maintained by the originating agency for only a few years and are then retired to a Federal Records Center far away. Since another federal agency manages the Federal Record Centers, what seems to the consul abroad like a simple request becomes a time-consuming interagency transaction. It involves searching an enormous warehouse in another state, documenting the removal of the file from the archive, and transferring custody down a chain to the original requestor. Returning a file is almost as complicated as retrieving it.

Consular officers abroad and citizen services specialists in CA/OCS/ACS are not the only requestors of files. The vast majority of requests come from the many passport agencies around the country. Since 1996, there have been over 32,000 requests for lookout files alone. The requests greatly outnumber the human resources available to perform the searches. To reduce the delay, requestors often flag their requests as “urgent” or “emergency” when they are not, creating an overworked and unstable system.

As previously indicated, posts abroad sometimes believe that the length of time necessary to retrieve passport information from old files reflects poorly on CA/OCS/ACS. This is not appropriate; requestors may not appreciate how much work is involved in retrieving old files from the Federal Records Center.

The Passport Office lacks sufficient space and equipment to manage a first-rate record filing system. OIG visited the Records Retrieval branch, and observed the lack of resources needed to perform their mission in an effective and timely manner. The work and storage areas are inadequate. The physical environment is

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cluttered with 200 file cabinets, some of which belong to other offices within CA. Work cubicles have become overwhelmed with paper because of the lack of space, and the record retrieval process is an arduous undertaking.

During OIG's on-site review of CA/OCS/ACS, several files successfully retrieved months earlier were still in ACS and had not been returned to the records center. In one case, an officer had intentionally retained them indefinitely in a bottom drawer "in case there were further developments in the case" on which the officer had been working.

Employees in CA/OCS/ACS (and consuls abroad) are provided access to a Passport Office computer system (PFM/OTIS) to view some passport data. Several ACS staffers complained to OIG that it takes too long to get a password for the PFM/OTIS system, and that the few data lines into the passport office computer system were always swamped by too many demands to log-in, resulting in endless "busy signals." OIG looked into this and found both complaints valid.

Assigning a password for the computer system requires action by two different Passport Office employees, which inevitably slows the process. The first employee, in the Records Branch, verifies the requestor's identity and need to access these sensitive files. The second employee, in the Passport Systems Branch, creates the password and updates the computer's files to recognize it. Each of these two employees has other duties. If either is busy, or away, a request might stagnate. There is also a fixed maximum number of active log-ins and the system is already at full capacity, meaning that some new requests need to wait until inactive accounts are purged.

The Systems staff at the Passport Office are aware of the problem users have logging on. The old mini-computer running the application can handle no more than 128 simultaneous connections. Even when everything is working as it should, this is not sufficient for a user base of over 3,000 employees. Unfortunately, the Passport Office computers have not always worked as they should. Since they were moved from building SA-17 to SA-1, unexplained connectivity problems have limited concurrent connections to fewer than 100. The large number of ACS employees seriously handicapped by inability to access passport data files makes this a major problem for desk officers. Efforts to troubleshoot this problem and repair it are ongoing.

OIG made several informal suggestions related to the availability of passport and citizenship information.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

CA/OCS/ACS directs emergency and protective services to American citizens residing or traveling abroad, coordinates the evacuation of American citizens threatened by disasters abroad, and manages the return and identification of bodies of U.S. citizen victims. ACS initiates and monitors efforts to locate nonofficial American citizens abroad about whom there is special concern and notifies interested parties of search effort results.

The Crisis Management section of CA/OCS/ACS is staffed by one Foreign Service officer, the crisis management coordinator, who is aided by the remaining CA/OCS staff members in the event of a full blown crisis. When a crisis erupts, the Department establishes a Task Force or a Working Group in dedicated office space near the Operations Center. Staffed around the clock, these units are a proven method for the Department temporarily to enhance communications with the embassy, the media, and the public. The Task Force generally receives many calls, some seeking information about loved ones, others providing information about the situation. To manage this information in a way that brings credit to the Department requires both precision and sensitivity. This is a monumental undertaking, and crisis workers need specialized training and skills.

Through the crisis management coordinator, CA/OCS/ACS maintains regular contact with major airlines (under the terms of a memorandum of understanding between the Department and the National Transportation Safety Board), as well as with the Department of Defense, foreign embassies, and the American Red Cross. The coordinator is also responsible for ensuring the preparedness of the Fly-Away and Emergency Response Teams and serves as the trainer and manager of all functions related to crisis management. Primary focus, at present, is on replacing the old software system (CRIS), in place since fall 1989, with a new software system called CRISIS.

CA/OCS/ACS employs a number of software systems. The old CRIS software was described by the crisis management coordinator as “antiquated and non-functional” in meeting the needs of ACS personnel. A consulting firm was hired in late 2000 to design new database software to assist task force members in responding to emergencies with a greater level of accuracy and timeliness. Phase I of the project was completed ahead of schedule in May. Phase II, which involves the distribution of CRISIS to posts overseas and includes evacuation management software, was originally scheduled for delivery in August, but currently has an unpublished delivery

date to allow for last-minute debugging. Training of overseas personnel, scheduled to begin in Fall 2001, will also be delayed until after delivery of the corrected software.

Several training/familiarization sessions held in June allowed ACS personnel to become acquainted with the CRISIS software and to suggest changes needed to make the system more user-friendly. Structured training will have to be scheduled in the future to include all staff who will be required to work with CRISIS in the performance of their duties. The staff who attended the familiarization sessions identified approximately 80 defects; work has begun on fixing them. Other ACS staff members still need to review the new software and additional suggestions will likely be made.

There is no established schedule of training for incoming employees or refresher courses for employees who may need to update their customer service or computer skills. It is essential that staff be fully functional in these areas, as there is an increasing reliance on high tech equipment and software to complete daily tasks. Until three years ago, CA/OCS used contractors for training purposes. The use of contractors ended in 1998, followed by a gap in training. In-house training was only recently reestablished with the arrival of the current crisis management coordinator.

OIG made several informal suggestions related to crisis management training and software.

Recommendation 4: The Office of American Citizens Services should develop a list of courses and a training schedule for those who will be asked to work on task forces so that volunteers acquire the skills necessary to participate effectively in crises. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

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DIPLOMATIC READINESS

CA/OCS/ACS has been effective in carrying out its mandate to assist American citizens in distress overseas. However, responding to day-to-day imperatives has largely crowded out longer-term resource planning. Areas that have suffered are staffing, workload management, staff training/development, and performance management. They are not independent, and some must be addressed simultaneously.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Many employees report low morale throughout ACS. OIG identified three main areas of concern that contribute to the current environment. They include (1) reluctance to delegate authority, (2) uneven workload distribution, and (3) lack of a training program for new employees. These conditions result from a combination of bureaucratic inertia and inattention to management.

Authority Delegation

As a crisis arises and an officer's case takes on a high profile, some directors adopt the case and take over its day-to-day management, often ignoring divisional management responsibilities and leaving the case officer out of the picture. The front office regularly calls the managing director or the director—instead of the desk officer handling the case—with questions. As a result, detailed information about casework routinely flows up the chain of command, but rarely in the opposite direction. Desk officers for their part complained that the moment a case draws attention it is removed from their control. This detracts from divisional management, and it frustrates experienced, capable officers. There were also several complaints about phone calls and e-mails between senior officers at embassies and in the Department that tend to cut the working-level officers out of the loop. This is a Department-wide challenge, but CA/OCS/ACS should avoid making the working-level officers feel disenfranchised in high profile cases.

Workload Management

Although ACS clearly accomplishes a large amount of work, it is difficult to quantify precisely. Like most offices in the Department, there is no system in place to measure the work that has been performed or the staff hours used. Managers in ACS have no way to know how much work employees have, or how long they are taking to complete it.

ACS's inability to measure its workload has some serious negative effects. For example, OIG review of CA front office tracking logs revealed that responses to congressional inquiries were routinely submitted later than the Secretary's five-day deadline, often by many weeks. OIG believes this is mainly because of a partially integrated tracking system that does not run consistently from the front office through intermediaries to the responsible officer. Insufficient training and supervision of ACS secretaries, as well as incomplete understanding of procedures by some staff, compound the problem.

Although ACS makes an effort to track congressional correspondence, most incoming work does not pass through a "gate-keeper" and is not tracked. One of the frequent complaints from embassies abroad was that much routine casework takes too long and even sometimes disappears. ("Slow paper" was the name many veterans gave to judicial assistance requests and citizenship reviews, so named because they were assigned a lower priority than emergency work like the destitution, arrest, death, or illness of Americans abroad.) OIG interviewed several former employees of ACS who echoed the embassies' concern that slow paper sometimes does not move at all. It is easily buried in file cabinets by desk officers who choose not to complete it, and who face no consequences due to the inability to track such casework. Managers expressed similar concerns that legal assistance work, while properly afforded a low priority, sometimes sits for long periods with no action whatsoever. Several officers were known to be very far behind in managing their paperwork and special efforts were taken to make them clear their backlogs. OIG found, through random samples, that many officers' file cabinets contained some very old cases not yet completed.

Recommendation 5: Overseas Citizens Services should overhaul, rationalize, and integrate its various task-tracking systems to ensure that deadlines are met. This should include creation of transparent and easily accessible procedures so that management and staff can know what is due and when, as well as training

in those procedures and expectations for timely completion of assigned tasks.
(Action: CA/OCS)

Several ACS employees cited inequitable division of work as a primary negative morale factor. Many indicated that they do not have enough work to do, while others routinely work significant amounts of unrecorded overtime. In general, workload seems to be proportional to pay level. The secretaries have almost no useful work to perform; the mid-level employees seem to keep busy most of the time and depart regularly at 5:00 p.m.; and the senior-most people stay late almost every night. Employees without enough work to keep busy, seeing superiors with too much work, expressed that they felt disrespected. Many staffers believe that they could and should be performing duties currently performed at the next-higher level.

All managers must make full use of all employees and maximize the efficiency of their human capital. Until work is measured, properly distributed, and seen through to completion, some employees will be underemployed while others do more than their share, and this will be a debilitating factor in the performance of CA's mission.

Recommendation 6: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should implement a system to measure work performed and human capital inputs for measuring the activity and productivity of the Office of American Citizens Services. (Action: CA)

Training/Professional Development

OCS/ACS does not have a program to welcome new arrivals, introduce senior personnel, or provide orientation on procedures, expectations, and available services. Apart from Wednesday Brown Bag lunches and a somewhat dated PowerPoint presentation, new personnel are largely left to learn their jobs through trial and error. Improved orientation could reduce the time required for new personnel to become productive and reduce stress. An orientation could involve workshops for case officers, division directors' secretaries, and others. CA/OCS/ACS should ensure that its new personnel are properly welcomed and briefed on procedures and expectations. Assignment of an experienced person as a sponsor should be considered.

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Recommendation 7: American Citizens Services should establish an orientation program for new employees. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

New ACS personnel, including office management specialists, typically learn their jobs without the benefit of a systematic training program. With 2-year assignments, 50 percent of the Foreign Service personnel assigned to ACS are new each fall, and there is also an annual influx of new Civil Service personnel. Mentoring, when it happens, is informal. Improved training could reduce the time needed for new personnel to become productive. Although many courses are available to office employees, participation is left largely to the individual, and some never volunteer for training. CA/OCS/ACS lacks a systematic approach to ensure that employees are trained to meet the needs of the office.

Training assignments should be made according to the office's needs, not only based on expressions of interest by individuals. A curriculum of training courses should be identified that will ensure that case officers have the opportunity to upgrade their skills to meet the office's needs.

Recommendation 8: American Citizens Services should establish and publish comprehensive guidelines and priorities for employee training, to include, among other things, drafting, dealing with other bureaus, and task force skills. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

CA/OCS/ACS employees have frequently been offered the opportunity to volunteer for temporary duty (TDY) assignments filling gaps in visa sections overseas. Such travel may be broadening in a general way for those making their first overseas trip, but it is hard to see how CA/OCS/ACS benefits from it. On the other hand, few employees have ever had the opportunity for a familiarization visit to the specific countries for which they are responsible. Desk officers in regional bureaus routinely have this professional development opportunity, and CA should fund such trips for CA/OCS/ACS desk officers as well. Management should establish and disseminate guidelines to ensure that desk officers have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the posts they support, and posts have the opportunity to meet their desk officers.

Recommendation 9: American Citizens Services should institute the practice standard in regional bureaus and send each desk officer on at least one brief

familiarization visit to the countries for which he or she is responsible. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

ACS management has made some attempts to address human resource issues. In a commendable initiative, each division held an off-site meeting to discuss management areas of concern. The five division chiefs then held a retreat with the director to compile and discuss the results. To date, those concerns have not been addressed, despite an intervening “Town Hall” meeting a few months ago, and a CA/OCS “All Hands” meeting a week before the inspection began. This lack of response has compounded morale problems, and reinforced a negative image of management.

Recommendation 10: American Citizens Services should establish a regular forum for addressing office management issues, such as training, workload tracking, workforce planning, employee performance, office infrastructure, and information technology. The dialogue should generate concrete “deliverables” and milestones. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

Staffing

Notwithstanding the hectic pace that sometimes requires substantial staff overtime to get work done, it is unclear whether, and to what extent, CA/OCS/ACS staffing may be out of alignment. Addressing the workload distribution concerns cited above will help CA/OCS/ACS determine the ideal mix of Foreign Service and Civil Service employees that best meets its needs and can be supported by resource constraints.

American Citizen Services Staffing Pattern by Fiscal Year as of June 30, 2001

	1999	2000	2001
Staffing Levels			
Foreign Service	13	11	12
Civil Service	29	30	34
Total permanent CA/OCS/ACS Staffing	42	41	46

Each division has a ranking desk officer—a “senior citizens services specialist”—designated to fill in when the division chief is absent. Casually called “deputies”, these GS-13 officers in fact perform no role in helping run the division on a daily basis. Their normal duties when the chief is present are indistinguishable, in terms of level of responsibility and authority exercised, from those of their GS-12 colleagues. Beyond constraining career development, this arrangement ignores an experienced resource that could help realign the top-heavy workload, foster delegation and responsibility, and focus more attention on office management issues. CA should reexamine the role of the senior specialists and assign them meaningful management responsibilities to be performed in their own right, not only if the chief is absent. These people are a potentially powerful resource who could serve as true deputies, helping the chiefs manage the division.

Recommendation 11: American Citizens Services should assign specific management responsibilities to the senior citizens services specialists. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

Performance Management

The employees in CA/OCS/ACS have a wide range of experience, varying degrees of professional commitment, and divergent skill levels. Performance management is difficult in this environment. The office director and managing director have not succeeded in devolving responsibility to the first-line supervisors, which in most cases are the division chiefs.

CA/OCS has many incentives at its disposal to reward performance. Promotion opportunities arise upon vacancies, and journeyman-level consular services specialist positions are designed to provide a career ladder from the GS-7 to GS-12 level. Additionally, many regard TDY assignments as a benefit, whether to fill staffing gaps at overseas posts, to attend regional conferences and workshops, or to participate in domestic travel on public outreach programs. Similarly, some employees regard training opportunities as a reward. The ACS director, with occasional input from senior CA management, makes conscious use of all of these tools to reward staff for performance.

These opportunities are not given impartially, however, and some allege that they are used to placate unhappy employees rather than reward the best performers.

In addition, some employees avoid TDY assignments and training opportunities, seeing them as an irrelevant distraction or citing family commitments that preclude extended travel. The fact that a few employees have had multiple TDY assignments, while most others have had one or none, indicates that ACS needs to establish priorities to make more rational and impartial use of these opportunities. TDY and training assignments, while they may be incentives for some employees, should be made according to the office's need to upgrade employee skills.

CA/OCS/ACS has not made effective use of the most obvious performance management tool: direct counseling and annual written performance evaluations. Division chiefs have tended to avoid confronting employees about nonperformance, especially in the case of long-time employees. As noted above, one frequent management response to nonperformance is to reduce the employee's responsibilities, shifting the burden to a more reliable staff member.

The office also has a poor record of completing performance evaluations. The office was delinquent in submitting 21 performance evaluations this year, and 10 remained outstanding at the time of the inspection. This inattention to performance evaluation sends an unfortunate message that performance does not matter. OIG reviewed performance evaluations and noted that although employee weaknesses were generally addressed in the narrative report, most ratings remained "excellent" or "outstanding." This is another instance where division chiefs should be rated more heavily on their performance as supervisors, rather than on their performance as consular service providers.

Recommendation 12: American Citizens Services should institute an office policy to ensure timely and accurate completion of performance counseling and evaluation statements, and to hold raters accountable for late or unjustified ratings. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

OFFICE SPACE

CA/OCS/ACS occupies the northwest corner of the fourth floor of Main State, overlooking D and 23rd Streets. The space is too small for the large number of people and files it needs to support. Last renovated decades ago, it is laid out to provide the majority of the employees with small glass-walled offices. The secretaries and the seasonal employees generally work in the open areas.

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There are plans to renovate and recondition the CA/OCS/ACS offices in 2005. Given the dismal layout and the many recent and projected moves, CA should consider improving the space sooner, and should share information about progress with the staff.

Years ago, when all three CA/OCS component units were smaller, Children's Issues (CA/OCS/CI) and Policy Review (CA/OCS/PRI) shared the space and everyone worked closely together. Given the interlocking nature of the work of the three units, proximity fostered successful accomplishment of the common mission. The rapid (and continuing) growth of Children's Issues eventually compelled its relocation to SA-1. The work it does in the fields of international adoption and international parental child abduction cases requires legal and policy support from CA/OCS/PRI, so the PRI unit is in the process of relocating to SA-1 as well. Only a fraction of the vacated space is being given to CA/OCS/ACS; the rest will go to other CA elements moving down from the 6th floor.

Ideally, all parts of CA/OCS would be in one building, but that seems a remote prospect. It is not feasible to move ACS into SA-1 to join the other units, primarily because of a lack of space. Additionally, the work of ACS is properly seen as fundamental to the work of the Department itself, and few would support transferring it from the Main State Building. ACS serves as the only contact that many American citizens and congressional representatives have with the Department. Its primary mission is a key Department mission: to ensure the safety and security of American citizens who travel and live abroad. ACS's regional divisions and country desk officers work constantly with their counterparts in the regional bureaus, and they must remain close together. ACS also plays a key role in the Department's management of crises abroad, which almost always threaten the lives and security of our citizens on the scene. CA/OCS/ACS has its own dedicated space in the Operations Center Task Force suite, and is a key task force participant from its own offices when it is not fielding a squad in the Operations Center.

ACS is thus properly located in Main State. However, CA/OCS cannot function efficiently without close coordination among its three constituent parts (ACS, CI, and PRI). Therefore, the CI and PRI units ought to be brought back from Columbia Plaza. This is also warranted by the high profile that Children's Issues themselves are now commanding. The Congress, the media, and the public are demanding that the Department be more active in cases of international parental child abduction. At the same time, new laws and regulations are increasing the Department workload in cases of international adoption. CA/OCS/CI is growing rapidly and commanding more attention from the managing director, the deputy assistant secretary, and even the Assistant Secretary. For these reasons, Children's Issues should be moved back to the Main State Building to collocate with ACS and PRI.

Recommendation 13: The Bureau of Administration should direct a study to find options that would permit the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Offices of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison and Children's Issues to move from State Annex 1 to the Main State building and be colocated with the Office of American Citizens Services. (Action: A/OPR)

INFORMATION RESOURCES

CA is justifiably proud of its many innovations over the years in resource management. CA is ahead of the rest of the Department in modernizing work processes by using information technology.

In the mid-1990s CA purchased and installed hardware and software to support all consular operations and routine office automation tasks in every consular section at every post around the world. This meant PCs for each desktop and visa interview window in the consular section, application and database servers, regular and document production printers, photo-capture cameras, and individual power back-up units as needed. CA also funded training of embassy systems personnel and users. By the end of 1999, automated consular systems of one sort or another were in operation at all Foreign Service posts.

To maintain these high standards, CA sends "Refresh Teams" around the world on a continuous cycle of post visits. These visits ensure that the consular systems are up-to-date with the latest software, deal with hardware problems, and verify that the systems are running smoothly. The teams offer extensive training for consular and systems personnel in the consular applications. Most CA-supplied hardware is scheduled for a three year life cycle replacement, but the Refresh Teams plan to visit each post at least every 18 months.

CA has spent and continues to spend a great deal of money and effort to field and maintain the most reliable systems possible. These new systems allow consular officers to produce travel documents that are more reliable and secure than ever before, and allow the Department to cooperate with law enforcement agencies in new and effective ways. Consular modernization has been driven by a legislative mandate in the 1990 Aviation Security Improvement Act (P.L. 101-604) to tighten, through automation, the nonimmigrant visa name-check system.

Unfortunately, ACS automation has not been as successful as the nonimmigrant visa automation program. ACS work does not lend itself to automation as easily as

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visa work does. ACS work abroad is a collection of highly disparate processes that yield a wide range of products, such as a 200-page deposition, a 24-page passport, or a one-page birth certificate. In many cases—aiding crime victims, helping a gravely ill traveler get medical treatment, or providing advice on local conditions and practices—ACS work results in no document at all.

However, several forces are now making ACS software development³ a priority. One reason for this is that CA finally has the time and money to work on ACS systems after getting visa applications into such good shape around the world. Another pressure is the continuing need to do more consular work with fewer human resources. Finally, the obvious utility of having a consul in the field and an ACS desk officer in Washington working on the same case at the same time using shared modern databases is compelling. The ability to do this will come directly from CA's latest automation initiatives: replication and data warehousing.

Progress on ACS software has not been smooth. No other topic received as many negative comments from the field, and OIG's survey telegram did not ask specifically about computer systems. The most frequent complaints from overseas concerned general functionality—the ACS computer program is not well designed for what the users need. The second most frequent comment suggested that there was a lack of training. This could be the result of the Foreign Service shuffle - Embassy "A" receives the new software and people assigned there get trained; Embassy "B" does not get the new software and therefore personnel assigned there are not trained. Then comes transfer season, and everyone changes places. Thus, embassies with the new software receive untrained people, and vice versa.

During the on-site phase of the inspection, OIG surveyed CA/OCS/ACS personnel to learn how they assess the hardware and software systems they use. The problems they cited fall into several areas, the most serious having nothing to do with the modernized ACS software:

- **Passport Records:** the number one complaint. Consuls abroad and CA/OCS/ACS employees in Washington were unanimous that they need faster access to passport records.
- **Cable Express:** more people in CA/OCS/ACS need it, and they need to be trained to use it. This computer program gives users incoming and outgoing telegrams directly from their computer screens. The software, allegedly for

³ Consular software is a collection of computer programs written for the purpose by contractors, not commercial off-the-shelf software. Designing, writing, testing, and deploying consular software is a considerable undertaking.

security reasons, makes it difficult to search for old cables, and intentionally delays any reply to such search commands. Overseas, Cable Express runs only on classified local area networks (NT-CLAN) of which there are too few, and which usually do not host consular users.

- NT-CLAN: CA/OCS/ACS employees usually need classified word processing only when dealing with threat assessment. While this need does not arise daily, the need is urgent and critical when it occurs. CA/OCS/ACS case officers are cut off from e-mail contact with their geographic bureau counterparts who operate primarily on classified local area network (NT-CLAN) terminals on their desktops. Officers on regional desks also complained about the Department's divided e-mail system and complained that, lacking unclassified terminals, they could not easily communicate with ACS. The Consular Systems Division (CA/EX/CSD) has a program under way to provide most CA/OCS officers with NT-CLAN terminals.

Recommendation 14: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should provide all American Citizens Services desk officers with NT-CLAN access. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)

Many CA/OCS/ACS personnel reported that the ACS software was a valuable aid in the performance of their work, while others found it unhelpful. OIG noted a direct correlation between an employee's training level and opinion of the program: those who knew it best liked it most. All users expressed a desire for more training, a good user's manual, and a forum for user input into future design improvements. Many of the newer employees in CA/OCS/ACS have arrived since ACS software training was provided there several years ago.

Recommendation 15: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should create a "refresh" training program for American Citizens Services staff to improve the use of current and future American Citizens Services software. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)

Those most familiar with the ACS software cited technical shortcomings of it. The software has on several occasions, for example, lost fiscal data that has been entered in repatriation cases. In OCS Trust cases, where funds are being transferred through Department facilities to a destitute traveler abroad, officers frequently have trouble creating and clearing the accounts.

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Recommendation 16: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should expedite the design and delivery of new American Citizens Services software, addressing technical concerns, and try to issue a new package within 18 months. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)

On the hardware front, everyone complained about the frequency and duration of system downtime. Outages (unscheduled system failures) were noted almost daily during the three weeks OIG was on-site. There seems to be a significant reliability issue with the ACS software or the network on which it runs that CA/EX/CSD must address.

Recommendation 17: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should undertake a formal analysis of American Citizens Services outages and take appropriate action to reduce downtime. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

As worldwide consular workload expands each year, it is becoming increasingly difficult to perform within current resource limitations. The Department is generally doing an excellent job of providing protective and emergency services to the public, management controls in several areas can be improved.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The Department has three programs used by consular officers to assist American citizens in financial or medical distress:

- (1) OCS Trust, which involves funds transmitted by a relative or friend to a U.S. citizen abroad through a Department trust account.
- (2) Emergency Medical and Dietary Assistance (EMDA) loans, which fall into two types: (a) medical or dietary assistance to American citizens incarcerated abroad where adequate meals are not furnished by the prison (EMDA I), and (b) short-term emergency medical assistance that requires advance guarantee of payment (EMDA II).
- (3) Repatriation loans that are made to American citizens in financial distress who require limited funds to cover immediate expenses necessary to permit their return to the United States.

OCS Trusts

The procedure for transmitting funds from private sources in the United States to Americans overseas, known as OCS Trust, is cumbersome. The party in the United States wires funds to the Department through the bank with a concession in the Main State building. CA/OCS/ACS collects the funds and makes a deposit to government accounts. Fiscal data written against those funds is sent by telegram to the Foreign Service post expected to make the disbursement. Embassy personnel at the post draw cash from the financial management office at the embassy. The cash is then handed over to the recipient, once that party has come to the post to collect the funds.

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Despite a declining number, OCS Trusts continue to consume valuable staff time. CA/OCS staff handles approximately 100 OCS Trusts per month, totaling more than \$1 million per year.

According to Volume 7 of the *Foreign Affairs Manual*, Section 341, funds from private sources in the United States intended for American citizens overseas must be transmitted through commercial channels whenever possible. OCS Trusts are to be used only when the following criteria are met:

- (1) The payee of the OCS/TRUST fund is a U.S. citizen (in exceptional circumstances involving permanent residents, the post may request Department approval);
- (2) The funds are required in order to extricate the citizen from an emergency situation;
- (3) The funds are not to be used in routine business transactions;
- (4) Commercial facilities for transfers of funds are determined by the post to be inadequate, unreliable, or too slow; and/or
- (5) The post has determined that the nature of the emergency makes it preferable that the post controls the disbursement of funds, as opposed to direct payment to the payee.

In order to minimize the number of OCS Trusts and reduce the concomitant workload, it is necessary to limit OCS Trusts to those situations that meet the criteria outlined in the FAM, especially number 4, above.

Recommendation 18: American Citizens Services should emphasize to posts the need to apply the current guidance regarding OCS Trusts. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

Repatriation Loans

Emergency loans for repatriation are made available to destitute American citizens abroad under provisions of Public Law 98-164, which requires, in part, that borrowers provide the Department with a verifiable address and social security number, as well as a written loan agreement and repayment schedule.

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Consular sections, however, often must aid American citizens whose destitution is chronic, who have no fixed address due to homelessness, who lack relatives, or who do not understand the obligation a loan entails. These are perhaps the most in need of U.S. government assistance to be repatriated, but the repatriation loan program is designed for people with fixed addressees, references, and the intent and means to repay their debt. Foreign Service posts therefore do not always enforce required management controls. Lacking any other way to aid the citizen in financial distress abroad, posts sometimes feel compelled to make loans to individuals who cannot provide a verifiable address or social security number, hampering future collection efforts.

Over the past 5 years, the annual amount loaned under the Repatriation Loan Program has averaged \$688,000. About 800 loans are made each year, averaging \$860 per loan. Historically, only 20 percent of the loans are repaid. To encourage repayment, the individual's name is recorded in the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) until the loan is satisfied. The loan recipient is thereby theoretically precluded from obtaining a new passport or any additional loans until the loan is repaid.

According to information from the Bureau of Finance and Management Policy office that tracks these loans, posts continue to submit packages that do not include the required information for contacting the individual or referring the matter for collection. In the first three quarters of fiscal year 2001, the loan balance written off as uncollectible due to insufficient information submitted by an embassy is over \$14,000, or about three percent of the total delinquencies.

Although the numbers of cases and dollar amounts are small, ACS should reiterate to posts the need for mandatory information before approving repatriation loans. At the same time, however, guidance could be improved with respect to processing loans so as to avoid delaying loans to citizens who desperately need the assistance but are clearly not going to be able to provide sufficient contact information.

Recommendation 19: American Citizens Services should reemphasize to posts the need for mandatory information before approving repatriation loans. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The Department should seek a National Security directive to clarify responsibilities and procedures for the implementation of the No Double Standard Policy. (Action: CA, in coordination with S/CT)

Recommendation 2: CA should revise Volume 7 of the Foreign Affairs Manual to provide thorough and reliable current guidance to consular officers. (Action: CA)

Recommendation 3: The Office Director for OCS/ACS, in coordination with the Office Director for PPT/PAS, should establish standard written procedures for performing administrative reviews of loss of nationality cases. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS, in coordination with CA/PPT/PAS)

Recommendation 4: The Office of American Citizens Services should develop a list of courses and a training schedule for those who will be asked to work on task forces so that volunteers acquire the skills necessary to participate effectively in crises. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

Recommendation 5: Overseas Citizens Services should overhaul, rationalize, and integrate its various task-tracking systems to ensure that deadlines are met. This should include creation of transparent and easily accessible procedures so that management and staff can know what is due and when, as well as training in those procedures and expectations for timely completion of assigned tasks. (Action: CA/OCS)

Recommendation 6: The Bureau of Consular Affairs should implement a system to measure work performed and human capital inputs for measuring the activity and productivity of the Office of American Citizens Services. (Action: CA)

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Recommendation 8: American Citizens Services should establish and publish comprehensive guidelines and priorities for employee training, to include, among other things, drafting, dealing with other bureaus, and task force skills. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

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- Recommendation 13:** The Bureau of Administration should direct a study to find options that would permit the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ Offices of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison and Children’s Issues to move from State Annex 1 to the Main State building and be colocated with the Office of American Citizens Services. (Action: A/OPR)
- Recommendation 14:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should provide all American Citizens Services desk officers with NT-CLAN access. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)
- Recommendation 15:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should create a “refresh” training program for American Citizens Services staff to improve the use of current and future American Citizens Services software. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)
- Recommendation 16:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should expedite the design and delivery of new American Citizens Services software, addressing technical concerns, and try to issue a new package within 18 months. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)
- Recommendation 17:** The Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, Consular Systems Division, should undertake a formal analysis of American Citizens Services outages and take appropriate action to reduce downtime. (Action: CA/EX/CSD)

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Recommendation 18: American Citizens Services should emphasize to posts the need to apply the current guidance regarding OCS Trusts. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

Recommendation 19: American Citizens Services should reemphasize to posts the need for mandatory information before approving repatriation loans. (Action: CA/OCS/ACS)

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PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Arrival Date
Assistant Secretary	Mary A. Ryan	May 1993
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary Overseas Citizens Services	George C. Lannon	June 2001
Deputy Assistant Secretary Passport Services	Georgia A. Rogers	August 2000
Deputy Assistant Secretary Visa Services	Wayne G. Griffith	July 2001
Managing Director, Overseas Citizens Services	Dianne M. Andruch	September 2000
Director, Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management	Patrick H. Hegarty	August 1998
Executive Director	Frank E. Moss	September 1998

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American citizen services
CA	Bureau of Consular Affairs
CA/EX	Office of the Executive Director, CA
CA/EX/CSD	Consular Systems Division, CA
CA/EX/CSD/PS	Passport Systems, CA/EX/CSD
CA/OCS	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Overseas Citizens Services
CA/OCS/ACS	Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management, CA/OCS
CA/OCS/CI	Office of Children's Issues, CA/OCS
CA/OCS/PRI	Office of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison, CA/OCS
CA/PPT	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Passport Services, CA
CA/PPT/IML	Office of Information Management and Liaison
CLASS	Consular Lookout and Support System
CLN	Certificate of Loss of Nationality
CRIS	Crisis Report Information System
EMDA	Emergency Medical and Dietary Assistance
NT-CLAN	New Technology - Classified Local Area Network
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OSAC	Overseas Security Advisory Council
PFM/OTIS	Passport File Miniaturization/ Original Tracking Information System
SA	State Annex
S/CT	Office of the Coordinator for Counter-terrorism
TDY	Temporary Duty