



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum

Robert Roulston, assistant regional security officer, at the Kadugli Airport in central Sudan.

What a Difference a DRI Makes

By Deborah Graze

U.S. Missions worldwide, often in some of the toughest hardship environments, have already benefited from the two-year-old Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, a program to hire qualified people for critical positions abroad. Thanks to the program's outreach and recruiting efforts, the Department is hiring highly qualified Foreign Service specialists, generalists and Civil Service employees with needed language and technical skills.

DRI hiring has helped the Department respond to crises, handle new missions and better support employees in the field. A dozen junior officers are serving now in Baghdad. Many others are filling in for more experienced colleagues

as are 10 Civil Service colleagues, who volunteered to serve in Iraq.

Two new junior officer positions in Kyrgyzstan freed more senior employees to manage relations between the post-9/11 military presence and the host government. The new hires also opened avenues into the local community by using their language skills to connect with young people.

In Turkey, the mission gained a total of six additional employees to handle increased consular, security and information management assignments. These employees improved protection of the embassy and staff, enhanced screening of visitors to the United States and advanced U.S. interests in Turkey.

Adding a new junior officer to the staff of the U.S. Embassy in the United Arab Emirates made it possible for the head of the political section to serve in Iraq.

Thanks to DRI, the U.S. Embassy in Kampala contributed two junior officers to support President Bush's landmark visit to Uganda last July. Without those critical

Photo by Brian Peterson



Photo by Renell Anderson



Top: Kasey Snyder, information management specialist in Windhoek, works on the satellite dish. **Above:** Health practitioner Mary Ann Murphy, in blue suit, arranges a tour of an Albanian military hospital for a visiting U.S. Special Forces medical unit.

positions, the embassy would have had to borrow officers from other strapped African posts. One of those officers, Matt Becht, an assistant regional security officer, questioned a stowaway on the presidential press aircraft, gaining the suspect's trust and learning how security had been breached. The information laid the groundwork for an investigation involving security services in five countries on three continents and strengthened presidential security.

Yerevan, a high-fraud post, was so short of staff that it suffered from a large backlog of investigations. DRI made it possible to hire a new vice consul to focus exclusively on fraud and establish a separate fraud investigation unit. The move eliminated the investigation backlog and reduced most background investigations to two weeks. In addition, the officer organized training for local airport personnel to detect fraud and coordinated with U.S. law enforcement officials to prevent fraud and help apprehend document fixers. FBI agents and detectives in Los Angeles, who worked with the post, expressed their appreciation for the embassy's coordination. One said, "I never knew what a consular section was. Now I'm dependent on them!"

In Lilongwe, Peter Lord, hired through DRI, has implemented a \$250,000 program targeting HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment for the Malawi Defense Force, one of the nation's hardest-hit groups. The new officer's contributions have allowed the embassy to engage in democracy building, combat money laundering and aid refugees in greater depth, effectiveness and impact.

As the peace settlement in Sudan allowed the U.S. mission in Khartoum to "normalize" operations, Gary Ellis, Perry Gresham and Robert Roulston—all DRI-hired Foreign Service specialists—

established a communications infrastructure, moved staff from temporary to permanent housing and launched a security perimeter vehicle barricade project to protect the building and staff. These highly skilled specialists quickly installed classified and unclassified computer, telephone and satellite connectivity, hired and trained locally engaged staff to support a new U.S. Mission and reported on the security situation in the cease-fire region.



Photo by Chris Hondros

Consular officer Dante Paradiso conducts business in Monrovia while a young rebel soldier cradles his AK47 in the background.

In Tallinn, a former U.S. Marine Corps communicator joined the post last February as the first information systems officer. Shortly after his arrival, his supervisor was medically evacuated and did not return to post. The new officer filled the shoes of his departed boss in addition to doing his own job. Without DRI, the embassy in Tallinn would have had to borrow another post's ISO, break its own budget by hiring a contractor for communications support or suffer a devastating staffing gap.

Some new junior officers hired through DRI are leaving lucrative legal positions to join the Foreign Service. In Monrovia, in the midst of civil war, DRI hire Dante Paradiso not only drafted a confidence-building document that permitted regional peacekeeping forces to move into a strategic area, he facilitated the evacuation of approximately 300 U.S. citizens and other expatriates from war-torn Liberia.

DRI helps the smallest and most isolated posts. The U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat recently received two DRI workers—an office management specialist and a second information program officer. A tightly controlled, authoritarian country

in a dangerous neighborhood, Turkmenistan is a key post in the war on terrorism, which also means promoting democratic development, economic opportunity and security cooperation. These additional specialist positions have allowed the entire mission to do more to further U.S. interests in this crucial region. DRI also added a new cultural affairs officer position to better manage educational and professional exchanges and help develop democratic leadership in Turkmenistan.

In Tirana, the DRI political-economic officer, Stacie Hankins, assumed responsibility for an ever-increasing number of visiting officials. The Oklahoma native improved reporting on Albania's struggling banking sector, organized a major conference on government accountability and orchestrated the mission's observer program for national elections, all tasks that would have been difficult to accomplish without DRI.

Tirana also has a DRI health practitioner, Mary Murphy, who started saving lives on her second day at the post. That's when Ms. Murphy's neighbor and new boss rang her doorbell. There had been a motor vehicle accident

involving an American staff member and a Foreign Service National employee. The FSN had been thrown from the front seat to the back of the vehicle. Local people turned the car upright, pulled the two employees out and placed them on the ground next to the destroyed car. Both were in critical condition. Ms. Murphy worked with the embassy to ensure adequate care and follow-up for the FSN in Albania and in Greece and then escorted the incapacitated American staff member to a medical facility in Athens. Thanks to her intervention, both injured employees are expected to recover fully from their life-threatening injuries. Those who have seen the totally destroyed car can't believe anyone survived the accident.

Congress and the American taxpayer have a right to expect that the resources invested in the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative will result in safer, more efficient and effective U.S. Missions abroad.

People are at the heart of DRI. From Ashgabat to Yerevan, Kiev to Kampala and beyond, the skilled people hired through the initiative have already made a huge qualitative difference in U.S. representation abroad, saving lives, making missions secure, carefully screening visitors to the United States and bringing democratic practices to previously authoritarian political systems. And the program is only two years old.

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