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

# Report of Inspection

Embassy Tunis,  
Tunisia

Report Number ISP-I-08-03A, December 2007

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

- The Ambassador and deputy chief of mission's (DCM) leadership and policy vision are strong and focused on counterterrorism, political and economic reform, and support for U.S. Middle East policy. They place a premium on close interagency cooperation, making all elements in the mission more effective.
- Embassy Tunis may have more staff than necessary in some functions. Staffing adjustments will require careful planning and management to maintain good service levels, particularly in preparation for the doubling of the number of students at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Arabic Field School by 2012.
- The embassy's combined political and economic section is doing well on significant developments and supporting high-level visits to Tunisia.
- Three years after setting up shop, the Middle East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) regional office in Tunis supports programs in seven Mediterranean countries (including Tunisia), has improved coordination with the U.S. embassy in each country, and is actively engaging in public outreach.
- American and locally employed (LE) staff are strongly supported by embassy leadership, and morale is good.
- Embassy Tunis' management section staff provides good services to its customers. The quality of life at post is very good.
- The FSI Tunis Arabic Field School provides quality instruction. Moving the school to the new embassy compound (NEC) will improve security and administrative support and reduce some of the friction points.
- Overall the security program is excellent. Specific areas for improvement are discussed in the classified annex to this report.

The inspection took place in Washington, DC, between April 9 and 29, 2007 and in Tunis, Tunisia, between May 24 and June 15, 2007. Ambassador Joseph Sullivan (team leader), Moosa Valli (deputy team leader), Craig Cheney, Bohdan Dmytrewycz, Zandra Flemister, Thomas Martin, Janis Scorpio, Robert Torres, William Urbanski, and Roman Zawada conducted the inspection.



## CONTEXT

Tunisia is the northern-most country of the African continent with a coastline that stretches 800 miles along the Mediterranean. On the west is Algeria, and to the

southeast lies Libya. The population is 98 percent Muslim. Arabic is the official language, though French is widely spoken.



Geography has played a major role in shaping the country's history. Mountains of the Atlas range line much of the north, and part of the Sahara lies to the south. A large central plain is quite fertile, and it is here that Carthage rose in ancient times, and Rome later established a large granary to support its empire. The Allies of World War II launched the 1943 invasion of Italy from Tunisia, and 4,000 U.S. service personnel are memorialized at an American cemetery adjacent to Carthage.

Tunisia became independent in 1956 after 75 years as a protectorate of France. Since then, Tunisia has

consistently pursued a moderate, nonaligned foreign policy. The country's first president, Habib Bourghiba, established a one-party state and ruled with a heavy hand for almost 30 years. During that period, he instituted sweeping social reforms, including new rights for women that still remain unmatched among other Arab nations. In 1987, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, the current leader, seized power in a coup. He methodically began instituting political reforms, such as permitting establishment of opposition political parties and regularly holding general elections. However, there are restrictions placed on political activity, the press, and electronic media.

The economy of Tunisia is quite diverse. In addition to agriculture, there is an export mining sector (phosphates), significant energy production (oil and gas, both for domestic consumption), tourism (beaches and archeological sites), and some manufacturing. Agriculture accounts for 55 percent of the workforce and remains vulnerable to recurrent drought. In 1998, Tunisia entered an association agreement with the European Union, its largest trading and commercial partner. Under that accord, it will gradually reduce its tariff structure and remove other trade barriers. The per capita income in nominal terms is nearly \$3,000, and several decades of economic reforms and progressive social policies have helped to improve living standards and conditions. For example, nearly 80 percent of Tunisians live in family-owned homes.

The U.S. mission is staffed by 338 employees, of whom 103 are Americans and 235 are LE staff. FSI's Arabic Field School, with a 20 person staff and 19 students, is located in a fashionable suburb of Tunis. Plans call for a substantial increase in the number of students and instructors, along with the school's move to the embassy compound, with construction beginning in FY 2009. The mission includes representatives of the Defense attaché office (DAO), the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC), the Foreign Agricultural Service, the American Battle Monuments Commission, MEPI, and the U.S. Executive Director to the African Development Bank (ADB). The mission also supports Department of Treasury and Commerce representatives assigned to the African Development Bank.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

The Ambassador is an experienced career officer who has served previously as deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) and deputy coordinator for Iraq before arriving in Tunis in November 2006. He is an economic officer and speaks excellent French. The Ambassador takes an activist approach to management of the embassy as well as U.S. relations with Tunisia, meeting weekly with the country team, and two other times per week with senior staff. He also engages directly in preparation of the mission strategic plan and fine-tuning the mission's goals. He has a broad strategic vision for the mission's substantive agenda and an ambitious agenda for management improvement. The Ambassador and DCM organized three thematic groups on reform, prosperity, and security to track progress and advance mission goals on these cross-cutting policy issues; they participate actively in the groups' deliberations.

The Ambassador has developed good relationships with key Tunisian government officials and uses these strategically to advance U.S. objectives on counterterrorism cooperation and democratic and economic reform, albeit with only partial success. While the Tunisian government shares U.S. counterterrorism objectives and favors moderate regional policies, it also controls and limits its engagement with the United States and other governments and maintains firm control over political and human rights activity in the country. The Ambassador takes advantage of every opportunity to encourage greater counterterrorism cooperation and progress on democratic and economic reform. He seeks to assure that visiting delegations to Tunisia, and Washington officials receiving Tunisian government visitors reiterate the policy message. The Ambassador has promoted greater U.S. economic and commercial engagement with Tunisia and economic liberalization in Tunisia as part of U.S. strategy to provide investment and commercial opportunities for American companies and improve Tunisia's economic growth and stability. He also engages, frequently, with business groups, civil society, and other key actors to advance U.S. policies and advocates frequently on behalf of American businesses.

The Ambassador provides strong support for the embassy's security efforts, closely integrating threat information with security precautions and advice to American citizens in Tunisia. He or the DCM chairs every emergency action committee meeting. The Ambassador also provides leadership and vision to the embassy's management operations, encouraging change and innovation under the theme of



going from good to great.” He is in close contact with embassy personnel, frequently participating in embassy social events, and inviting embassy personnel to receptions and other social events at his residence. The Ambassador and the DCM have held several town hall meetings with American employees, family members, and LE staff. Morale is mostly good, and embassy personnel recognize the strong leadership provided by the Ambassador and DCM and their interest in mission morale.

The DCM is an experienced career officer who has previously served in public diplomacy assignments in Washington, the Middle East, and Africa, and has served as DCM in Tunis since August 2004. He speaks Arabic and French. He provides able assistance to the Ambassador in all the above areas, joins the Ambassador in most internal meetings, and holds his own weekly meetings with all embassy elements to review, in detail, pending issues. The DCM also maintains good contacts with the Tunisian government and civil society.

The Ambassador and DCM provide strong direction, guidance, and support to the DAO, the ODC, and all other U.S. agencies in Tunisia. They have closely integrated the regional MEPI office in Tunisia into the embassy and provide significant management, security, and other support to the American staff of the African Development Bank and the FSI Arabic Field School in Tunis. The executive office seeks to correct occasional disconnects in management support to the field school; communication is good, but there is room for improvement. The Ambassador includes the American Battle Monuments Commission representative and the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Commerce representatives at the ADB on the country team, and the embassy provides limited administrative support to the American Battle Monuments Commission and the ADB.

The Ambassador and DCM give public presentations in fluent French and Arabic to businesses, civic groups, and others to advocate U.S. policy objectives in the region, including counterterrorism cooperation and economic and political reform. However, Tunisia’s closely controlled media coverage is limited to what the government wishes to divulge. The Ambassador and DCM support creative public diplomacy efforts to overcome these limitations and reach out to Tunisians.

## ENTRY-LEVEL OFFICERS AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The embassy provides an excellent mentoring and career development program for entry-level officers (ELO), generalists, and specialists. The DCM meets monthly with each ELO, and ELOs also meet periodically as a group. ELOs serve as control officers for major visits, accompany the Ambassador on meetings and travel, manage projects for MEPI, and have work assignments outside their formal functions. The Ambassador has also hosted lunches for ELOs, and included them in receptions, and he walks around the embassy frequently, where he is accessible to them. ELOs spoke enthusiastically about the DCM's commitment to mentoring and the ELO program. They appreciated efforts made to enable ELOs from Tunis to attend conferences. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) team urged ELO generalists and specialists to take a major role in designing the ELO program so that it is of maximum utility to all.

The embassy leadership is attentive to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) directives and principles. There were no formal EEO complaints in the past year.

## MISSION STRATEGIC PLAN

The Ambassador hosted an offsite meeting of an expanded country team that decided on goals, and the DCM oversaw the drafting of Tunisia's FY 2009 Mission Strategic Plan (MSP). The MSP was reviewed and approved with minor clarifications shortly before the OIG team's arrival at a digital videoconference including the embassy, the Department, and other agencies in Washington. The Department reviewers agreed that the strategic goals are democratic reform and respect for human rights, stronger counterterrorism coordination and cooperation, regional stability and support for U.S. Middle East policy, an open and growing economy, a new facility for FSI's Tunis Arabic Field School, mutual understanding, and new directions in mission management. The embassy convened thematic goal teams to track, coordinate, and adjust efforts on reform, prosperity, and security goals, which are appropriate in view of the difficulty of achieving progress on these goals. The OIG team found mission leadership strong and coordination among embassy elements good, in pursuit of mission goals, but the Tunisian government's resistance to openness or reform is a significant stumbling block to desired progress. This factor requires regular self-evaluation by the mission of its efforts in order to judge which goals have prospects of producing positive results and which do not, and which human and financial resources are well spent and which should be trimmed.

## RIGHTSIZING

Despite undergoing a rightsizing review in August 2006, the overall impression is that Embassy Tunis has more staff than necessary in some functions. But no section should be immune from a close examination of staffing versus function. The National Security Decision Directive-38 (NSDD)<sup>1</sup> review process works reasonably well, but the mission has taken a case-by-case approach rather than examining staffing as a whole. The deputy chief position and two LE staff positions in the consular section have been eliminated. The mission granted a one-time approval for a Department of Defense Olmstead scholar to study Arabic for two years. The embassy does not use all available tools such as providing financial data to assist the chief of mission in making a decision, and the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) council is not provided an opportunity to comment. The OIG team made some informal recommendations.

Unlike many other posts, the shortage of money, quality of staff, or office space has not forced a stringent approach to managing human resources. Mission management is aware of the disconnect between staff size and function, and has begun to gather information upon which to base staffing decisions. The database includes all LE staff positions, including ones that are vacant, and employees that are likely to retire by 2011. However the mission has not taken a comprehensive approach to the issue.

The mission needs to pare and, equally important, realign existing staff to meet current and anticipated goals. Beginning in 2009, the Department is planning to construct a new facility on the current embassy compound to house an expanded Arabic Field School. An anticipated 45 will be about 40 percent of the mission's American complement. The larger school will inevitably require more embassy support and, probably, a different mix of skills. Rightsizing this mission will require close coordination between the embassy and the Department, specifically FSI, NEA's Executive Office, and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO). Coordination among the various elements will be essential. The issue is not simply getting the building ready in time for the start of the school year. FSI must identify, hire, and train 12 instructors. The embassy must prepare for an annual turnover of at least 60 percent or more of the total American population. Adding to the mix

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<sup>1</sup>National Security Decision Directive-38, Staffing at Diplomatic Missions and Their Constituent Posts, issued on June 2, 1982, assigns ambassadors the authority and responsibility to determine the appropriate size, composition, and mandate of all staffing operating under their authority.

of decisions is the fact that the students arrive and depart as a group. They arrive within a one to two-week span every August and depart over one or two weeks every June. The Department and embassy must devise an operational model to handle the deluge without overstaffing the post for the entire year.

**Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tunis, in coordination with the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs, Management, Overseas Buildings Operations, and the Foreign Service Institute, should conduct a rightsizing review of staffing at mission Tunis, taking into account the expected increase in language students in 2012. (Action: Embassy Tunis, in coordination with NEA, M/PRI, OBO, and FSI)



## POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

The embassy's medium-sized political and economic section (P/E) is very effectively reporting on developments in Tunisia, explaining and advocating U.S. policies and values, and representing U.S. foreign policy and business interests. The staff is equally split between a political unit and an economic/commercial unit. The activities and reporting of the two units are closely integrated and fully incorporated into the embassy's MSP. The section holds regular weekly staff meetings, which include officers from both units, the section's four LE staff, and the Office of Agricultural Assistance. The counselor and section deputy are fluent Arabic speakers, using that skill adroitly to gather information and expand contacts. The counselor chairs bi-weekly meetings of the embassy's good governance – sometimes referred to as “super-MEPI” – committee, while the deputy co-chairs a prosperity committee that also meets bi-weekly. The Ambassador and DCM turn frequently to the section to support high level visits, which have averaged about one per month over the last year.

The political unit receives high marks from Washington consumers for solid reporting that is full of detail and laced with nuance. Developing information and insights in Tunisia, though, is a decidedly uphill effort. As a matter of principle, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires that a formal diplomatic note be submitted in order to request a meeting with any official of a Tunisian government entity. In addition, diplomatic notes often go unanswered, necessitating persistence and follow-up. The requirement for a diplomatic note is methodically enforced: appointments made directly rather than through the Foreign Ministry invariably get canceled at the last minute. The net effect is to dampen the embassy's outreach efforts, reduce official contact with reporting officers, and minimize the level and types of information that may be collected.<sup>2</sup> In discussions with the OIG team, there was strongly voiced frustration about the Foreign Ministry's heavy-handedness and nontransparent procedures.

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<sup>2</sup>The OIG team perceived that the difficulty of effective engagement, imposed on the entire P/E section, as well as PAS, could raise questions about the appropriateness of staff size for various embassy sections.

The primary focus of the political unit's reporting is human rights developments in Tunisia, internal dynamics of the country's ruling elite, political Islam, political-military issues (notably, the status of Guantanamo detainees and bilateral agreements), human rights, occasional labor disputes, and women's issues. The OIG team was especially impressed with a recent two-part message entitled "Tunisia and Freedom," which first explored the country's quagmire of political controls and statist policies and then mapped out steps that the U.S. government might take to encourage reform and liberalization. A carefully prepared post reporting plan assures that all Congressionally-mandated annual reports -- such as human rights, religious freedom, and narcotics control -- are completed and submitted on a timely basis. The unit's reporting is closely coordinated and cleared with other interested sections, such as the public affairs section (PAS) and the DAO. Official-informal messages from NEA's Office of Maghreb Affairs provide instant feedback on reporting and suggestions from Washington readers. Spot reports on sudden developments or the Ambassador's meetings with key ministers typically go out the same day and include comment paragraphs providing analysis.

The economic unit's efforts are split equally between doing straight economic reporting and performing commercial work. It, too, faces the Foreign Ministry-imposed restrictions on meetings with government officials. The economic unit faces another, related challenge -- pervasive and persistent uncertainty on the part of Tunisia's officialdom on whether to engage with the United States on economic and commercial issues. Two examples illustrate the challenge. In 2002, the United States and Tunisia signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which was heralded as a springboard for negotiations leading to a bilateral trade agreement. Although Tunisia has an association agreement with the European Union and is moving toward implementation of a customs union in 2008, the United States and Tunisia have not met under the TIFA since 2005. Repeated calls to reinvigorate the TIFA process have gone unanswered. Similarly, in early 2007, Tunisia's Minister of Transport publicly expressed interest in concluding a bilateral open skies aviation accord. Washington hurriedly transmitted a draft negotiating text, which the embassy presented by diplomatic note in early March. Three months have since passed, and despite repeated inquiries by the embassy, Tunisian authorities have gone silent. (See section on business support for further discussion of embassy efforts to promote trade and investment.)

In spite of the challenges posed by this environment, the economic unit is keeping tabs on developments in the Tunisian economy. Twice monthly "Economic Highlights" cables present useful summaries on reforms, investment developments, and macro-economic trends. These have earned repeated kudos from readers in Washington and in U.S. embassies in neighboring countries. Other economic

reporting was rather limited last year, and the Ambassador has urged the economic unit to expand its output. The OIG team informally recommended that the unit give special priority to preparation of an energy sector report, given the considerable interest U.S. companies have recently expressed in helping to exploit Tunisia's known oil reserves. On a separate note, a member of the economic unit is currently designated as the embassy's coordinator for MEPI programs. (See section on Middle East Partnership Initiative). The economic unit also serves as the embassy coordinator on anti-terrorist financing issues. Tunisia established a financial intelligence unit in 2003, following passage of a comprehensive anti-money laundering and terrorist finance law. The embassy is exploring possible ways of providing technical assistance and training to the new financial intelligence unit. (See section on counterterrorism coordination).

The embassy's classified web site is not being updated or maintained on a regular basis. Typically the updating of the classified web site is assigned to the post's political section/unit. Checks by the OIG team indicated that a number of key sections – for example, ones entitled “hot topics” and “in-depth coverage” – have not been updated in well over a year. Several hyperlinks did not function, and none of the numerous Intellipedia entries from 2005 appeared to have been modified. As a result, the embassy's reporting product is not getting the wide readership it deserves; and the web site is not serving as the U.S. government reference tool that it could be.

**Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tunis should conduct a thorough review of its classified web site and assign an officer or eligible family member responsibility for daily content management and a regular schedule for updating the site. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

The political and economic section serves as the embassy coordinator for compliance with the Leahy amendment, which mandates vetting of all foreign candidates for training at U.S. government expense. At present, the leading submitter of names for vetting is the ODC, though in the past the regional security officer (RSO) and Defense attaché have made submissions. Following a February 2006 visit by the Government Accountability Office, the embassy conducted a thorough review of the vetting procedures that had been in place and developed a new set of written guidelines. The OIG team found that, with the new guidelines in place, the embassy is in full compliance with the Leahy amendment's requirements.



## COORDINATION OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

The Ambassador and DCM are very effectively coordinating the counterterrorism efforts of concerned agencies represented in the embassy. Countering terrorism, an overarching priority for the country team, ranks as one of the embassy's top two goals in the MSP. In that context, the government of Tunisia supports our counterterrorism efforts outside Tunisia but shares very little information on internal security incidents. A spike in locally-based but transnational terrorist threats to U.S. facilities and personnel that occurred in December 2006-January 2007 served as a reminder of the threat and a test of the embassy's response capabilities. The primary vehicle for coordination is a principals group – comprised of Office of Regional Affairs, the Defense attaché, RSO, and P/E – that usually meets with the Ambassador and DCM in pull-asides after country team or senior staff meetings. In fast-breaking events, the foursome convenes on an ad hoc basis to respond to developments. The foursome process for coordination and information sharing is further re-enforced by a schedule of regular front office meetings with section/agency chiefs<sup>3</sup> and periodic meetings of the emergency action committee. Embassy interlocutors with whom the OIG team spoke indicated, without exception, that this structure works well. They attributed its success to a high level of trust and collegiality, and several indicated that a January 2006 crisis management exercise had been instrumental in cementing the linkages.

Another dimension of the embassy's counterterrorism efforts is the need to encourage Tunisia, a strategically located and politically moderate Muslim country, to step up to a more active role in the global war on terror. Following the December-January incidents, Tunisian authorities were slow to consult on their investigations and arrests and then provided very little concrete information. Similarly, the same authorities have chosen, over the past two years, to stop participating in various exercise activities and training opportunities – most notably, those funded by the Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Bureau and Anti-terrorist Training and Assistance programs – in which Tunisia had previously been active. The Ambassador has responded by pressing Tunisian authorities, repeatedly and at various levels, to overcome official reluctance to stepped-up engagement with the United States. At the same time, the RSO is actively encouraging greater participation and engagement by Tunisian law enforcement authorities, as well as more forthcoming exchanges of information. On similar tracks, in the past year, regional

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<sup>3</sup>In these meetings, which typically take one hour, the section/agency chief meets one-on-one with the DCM or – in some cases -- with the Ambassador and DCM together.

representatives of the Department of Homeland Security and the Drug Enforcement Administration (both based in Paris) and of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (based in Rabat) have traveled to Tunis for meetings with local counterparts, looking for new ways to enhance bilateral law enforcement cooperation. However, the results, thus far, have been sparse.

One traditional area of close bilateral cooperation has been military-to-military relations. Although the Ministry of Interior has the lead on counterterrorism in Tunisia, the military plays a very important role in patrolling the country's porous borders with Algeria and Libya. Similarly, the military's assets – most of them previously supplied by the United States and now maintained with U.S. assistance – provide invaluable mobility and response capabilities.<sup>4</sup> And, on a related note, U.S. training – over several decades – has been instrumental in shaping Tunisia's cadre into a professional and apolitical officer corps that subscribes to civilian control and is the most pro-American institution in the country. The Ministry of Defense has requested a substantial multi-year increase in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to help upgrade and modernize Tunisia's military hardware and be prepared to engage in multilateral military activities. The embassy has endorsed that request, incorporating it into the MSP for FY 2009. At the same time, the embassy has coordinated closely with the U.S. regional military command (EUCOM) on a request for section 1206 (special counterterrorism) funding for Tunisia -- to help meet military and other needs related to counterterrorism. (See section on coordination of bilateral assistance for additional details). Meanwhile, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Proposal – a new joint interagency initiative by EUCOM and the Department aimed at developing a multi-faceted cross-Sahara regional counterterrorism assistance program – remains in the planning stages.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>	<u>Foreign Military Financing</u>	<u>International Military Education &amp; Training</u>
FY-05 (actual)	\$10.406 million	\$1.860 million
FY-06 (allocated)	8.415	1.856
FY-07 (estimated)	8.562	1.975
FY-08 (requested)	2.062	1.975

Source: Office of Defense Cooperation, Embassy Tunis

<sup>5</sup>During the inspection, embassy officers attended a three-day TSCTP conference in Washington, hosted by the Department to discuss planning. At that point, though, Tunisia had received only limited funding.

The embassy will experience considerable personnel transition during the summer of 2007, with the departure of the DCM, Defense attaché, and the Office of Regional Affairs chief. With that in mind, the Ambassador decided to move forward on formalizing coordination mechanisms. During the inspection, a new security group – parallel to the embassy’s prosperity and good governance groups – held its inaugural meeting. Plans called for the group to gather every two to four weeks in the future.

## MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

MEPI’s regional office in Tunis is one of two that NEA established in 2004 to assist with program coordination and implementation.<sup>6</sup> The office has two Foreign Service officers – the director and deputy – an office management specialist, an eligible family member, and four LE staff. It shares a suite with the embassy’s Office of Agricultural Affairs, in rather close quarters. The staff is an enthusiastic group, and morale is excellent.

The mandate of the MEPI-Tunis office is to facilitate and oversee its programs in seven Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, and the West Bank/Gaza Strip), enhance coordination with the U.S. embassies in each of those countries, and conduct public affairs activities throughout the region. The office has made great strides in all three areas:

- Programs. The program planning and selection that MEPI-Tunis does for its seven-country area of responsibility has evolved over the past three years. In 2004-05, there appeared to be momentum for major change, especially in Lebanon and Egypt, but beginning in 2006 there was significant pushback from governments in the region. In response, MEPI-Tunis began shifting from lumping countries together in large programs to designing smaller programs that acknowledged the countries’ differences and distinct priorities. One person with whom the OIG team spoke summarized MEPI’s program evolution by saying “We’re adjusting as we go along.”

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<sup>6</sup>MEPI’s other regional office is in Abu Dhabi.

- Cooperation. Responsibility for individual countries is divided equally between the director and his deputy. The former covers Egypt, Lebanon, and West Bank/Gaza Strip; the latter does Morocco, Algeria and Libya; both cover Tunisia. Each travels about 25 percent of the time and is in daily telephone contact with their assigned embassies – serving as an on-call advisor to these clients – when not traveling to their countries. In the case of Embassies Algiers and Cairo, MEPI pays for contract positions to provide administrative support to the embassy officers who are designated MEPI coordinators. (See section on public affairs for discussion of unreimbursed support to MEPI that Embassy Tunis provides). In October 2006, the office presented a three-day training course on MEPI and grants for two employees from each embassy in the region – i.e., the officer designated as MEPI point of contact (i.e., program manager) and an LE staff member supporting that officer. Rather than waiting for MEPI-Washington to develop reference materials, the Tunis office went ahead and developed two manuals, one for MEPI grant applicants (to help with the application process) and one for MEPI grant recipients (to simplify implementation and contract compliance) – and then cleared both with the Department. These measures have done much to smooth relations with the embassies.
- Public affairs. MEPI-Tunis is active in the field and in Washington. In the region, the office experimented with a regional newsletter. After six months, though, embassies said the product was too general, and the office discontinued it. The next step was a web site, but from the beginning it was clear that to be truly effective the site would need to be trilingual (Arabic and French, in addition to English). When it became apparent that the most hits were occurring on the Arabic pages, the office decided to do full translations – ensuring the credibility of content and thereby enlarging its reader base. The product was then moved to the Bureau of International Information Programs' Content Management System, which greatly helped on several technical dimensions. However, the talented LE staff member, who also translates articles into Arabic and French, reports that loading new pages is often time-consuming. The present product is a well received web site, whose pages MEPI-Tunis updates every month. (See section on public affairs for discussion of other on-going website efforts by the embassy). The office “advertises” the latest edition by sending out a monthly e-mail, containing a short summary of the new articles and hyperlink to the MEPI-Tunis web site. The listserv, which constitutes the section's contact database, contains nearly 1,000 addressees. On the Washington front, the MEPI-Tunis director and his Abu Dhabi counterpart team up each spring and fall to conduct a door-knock campaign, visiting the think-tanks and key Congressional staff

Given the magnitude of MEPI's overall program funding and a number of issues identified in a recent OIG inspection of MEPI-Washington,<sup>7</sup> the OIG team took a close look at the grants management performance of MEPI-Tunis. The grants unit of the MEPI-Tunis office administers 58 grants for a total value of about \$10 million. Those include small grants that are locally administered as well as grants issued by MEPI-Washington and other embassies in the MEPI-Tunis area of responsibility. The unit is staffed by an eligible family member serving as the grants management coordinator who has extensive audit and government contract experience, a financial analyst, and a grants administrator. The grants management process has undergone a period of transition as the MEPI-regional office brings its grants operations into accordance with Department and Federal regulations. The OIG team found that the overall management of the grants program was excellent, and procedures on how to award, monitor, and evaluate grants were clear and precise. Financial payments procedures are closely monitored, and required technical reports are tracked closely. Periodic financial and programming audits are performed. A sample review of MEPI grants showed that they were in order and well maintained in hard copy and on an electronic tracking system. Close-out procedures are followed meticulously. The deputy director, who received grants management training, has a grants warrant up to \$100,000.

In Tunis, the director of the MEPI section is a full member of the country team. He works closely and coordinates very thoroughly with the entire range of sections/agencies in the embassy, particularly the public affairs and political/economic sections. (See section on bilateral assistance coordination, too). Outside the embassy, though, receptivity to MEPI personnel and programs is highly selective. The country is not a democracy, and restrictions on freedom of expression and association are pervasive. The government of Tunisia has welcomed activities in nonsensitive areas such as trade development and economic growth, but opposed programs on political reforms or direct outreach to independent civil society organizations. On more than one occasion, Tunisian officials have prevented well-known U.S. nongovernmental organizations from implementing MEPI-funded programs. However, in the last two years, two MEPI programs proved especially successful. One was a commercial law development program, in which the U.S. Department of Commerce provided techni-

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<sup>7</sup>Review of Middle East Partnership Initiative Coordination and Implementation Report, Number ISP-I-06-18, March 2006

cal assistance in areas such as intellectual property rights protection, development of standards, and translation of submissions to the World Trade Organizations to comply with international obligations. The other was a roundtable series, organized by an independent Tunisian media group, which began with an initial event on the benefits of open trade that was well-publicized and generated new calls for trade liberalization.

## SUPPORT FOR U.S. BUSINESS

Geography and tradition have combined to make Europe, rather than the United States, Tunisia's foremost partner in international commerce. For many years, the United States was Tunisia's fourth leading supplier of merchandise goods, after France, Italy, and Germany. In 2006, the United States slipped to seventh place, behind Libya and China. The first substantial – and still largest – U.S. investments were in the hydrocarbons sector. More recently, offshore manufacturing industries – companies that receive tax breaks to produce goods entirely for export markets – have taken on increased importance, especially in auto and electronic components, and footwear. In the tourist industry, a major force in Tunisia's economic development, only three of the country's more than 800 hotels are affiliated with U.S. groups. On the plus side, though, a favorable framework for business expansion exists. A 1985 treaty guarantees U.S. companies freedom from double taxation; a bilateral investment treaty took effect in 1991; and a TIFA accord was signed in 2002. (See section on political and economic affairs for further details on some of the challenges.)

With that in mind, the Ambassador, an economic cone officer, has made increasing U.S. exports and private investment one of his top priorities. A Foreign Service commercial officer in the P/E section, supported by a Department-funded LE staff commercial assistant, provides a full range of support activities for U.S. firms. For example, during the inspection, the embassy provided Gold Key service to an Oregon-based medical products company. The ODC further assisted the company by arranging meetings at the Ministry of Defense, a potential customer. The U.S. Foreign and Commercial Service's regional representative, based in Casablanca, periodically travels to Tunis to assist in various commercial efforts. The embassy's Office of Agricultural Assistance consists of three LE staff who receive good support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's regional attaché in Rabat. The Office of Agricultural Assistance effectively expands access for U.S. agricultural commodities, works with U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperators to build new markets, and provides technical assistance. The public affairs section provides public relations support to the business promotion activities of each of these sections. Working with

P/E and PAS, MEPI-Tunis funds several small but quite effective grants programs that have been successful in stimulating greater public support for free trade and developing Tunisian entrepreneurship. A U.S. Foreign Commercial Service officer, who is resident in Tunis and assigned to the office of the U.S. Executive Director to the African Development Bank, monitors proposed bank projects to help spot opportunities for U.S. firms.

A prosperity committee, one of several thematic groups established by the Ambassador in April 2007, is chaired by the P/E section. It meets every other week to bring together officers and LE staff from all these sections to exchange information, coordinate ongoing programs, and brainstorm on new initiatives. At the time of the inspection, one of the leading agenda items was the Ambassador's concerted effort to bring a high-level official economic team from Washington, followed by a heavy-duty private sector delegation, in cooperation with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Corporate Council on Africa. A second agenda item was an initiative to work with and invigorate the local Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce so that it can become a more active player in promoting U.S. business<sup>8</sup>. Another priority issue was finding ways to facilitate franchising, an area where U.S. investments could help diversify the Tunisian economy and serve as a magnet for U.S. products and technology.<sup>9</sup>

## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PRIORITIES

Tunisia has not had a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) program since 1992, when the agency formally terminated its operations. The embassy has turned to other forms of foreign assistance, besides development assistance, to promote domestic reforms and advance U.S. foreign policy interests.

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<sup>8</sup> The Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce, despite its formal title, is not affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. U.S. companies account for less than one-third of its membership, and the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce's primary focus has traditionally been on promoting Tunisian exports to the United States.

<sup>9</sup> One world-renowned U.S. fast food chain recently chose to withdraw from Tunisia after several years of operation due to entrenched resistance from influential local business interests. Another U.S. chain came very close to entering the market, but then backed away for similar reasons, the OIG team learned.

In this context, the embassy's planning and coordinating efforts are centered in a good governance committee, one of several thematic groups that the Ambassador has established. The group, in essence, is an expanded and more formal version of a MEPI consultative group that had been set up several years before to coordinate the embassy's support for and participation in MEPI programming (see section on MEPI for discussion of programs and activities). The committee, which the Ambassador and DCM attend, meets regularly every other week to discuss possible new programs as well as indicators and metrics for measuring the work of on-going programs in-country. It is chaired by the chief of the P/E section and maintains records of its deliberations. Participation includes interested officers and LE staff from P/E, PAS, MEPI-Tunis, the consular section, and on occasion, ODC and RSO. When selected country team members move into the MSP process, the DCM assumes the chair. The deputy chief of the P/E section is the coordinator and drafter on foreign assistance priorities in the MSP process.

Also in this context, military programs – in the form of FMF and International Military Education and Training (IMET), along with EUCOM's humanitarian assistance – coupled with MEPI-funded programs are the embassy's principal sources of funding for bilateral assistance to Tunisia. In the MSP for FY 2009, the country team has requested substantial increases in FMF and IMET. The Ambassador has bolstered that request with a personal appeal to Department principals for FY 2008 FMF and IMET funding. (See section on coordination of counterterrorism, for further discussion). Humanitarian assistance is providing much needed relief on a number of fronts. Having designated Tunisia as "priority Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans-Sahara country," EUCOM has assigned it a humanitarian assistance target of \$400,000 per year. Projects are chosen by the embassy in a selection process that includes ODC, P/E, PAS, MEPI-Tunis, and the Ambassador. The embassy carefully reviews applications submitted by a wide range of Tunisian civil society organizations. Whenever possible, EUCOM provides funds well in excess of the target level. In fact, over the past six years Tunisia has received more than \$6 million.

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PAS, a small-to-medium sized unit, is energetically pursuing an ambitious agenda in the face of systemic budget difficulties and a difficult operating environment that prevents it from realizing its full potential. A public affairs officer (PAO), an information officer (IO), a cultural affairs officer (CAO), and a dozen LE staff – most of who have worked for the embassy for more than 25 years – staff the section. The PAO is an Arabic speaker, and the IO has exceptional French language skills. The



DCM, who is a public diplomacy cone officer and an Arabic speaker, affords further support to the section's efforts. The embassy's public diplomacy agenda is contained in a carefully constructed three-page plan that integrates the efforts of the section with related activities of other sections and agencies. That plan underpins the embassy's MSP. Coordination with other sections – most notably on the day-to-day activities of the political/economic and consular sections, and on public outreach by the ODC and the DAO – is close, careful, and continuous. PAS drafts nearly all of the Ambassador's speeches. The section does occasional in-depth and well-sourced reporting on media and cultural/social developments, but more would be well received.

The section faces a perennial budget crunch. In real terms, PAS funding for key programs is shrinking at a time when the embassy needs more. Despite repeated requests, the PAS baseline budget for public diplomacy has been essentially flat and unable to keep up with salary increases, benefits, and inflation. Over the past five years, expense codes 1100 and 1200 for salaries and benefits have risen steadily from 50 percent to 75 percent of the baseline budget. As a result, each year the embassy has had to go in with one-time supplemental requests for additional funds, which ranged from \$100,000 to \$150,000<sup>10</sup> and of which the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs was supportive. This uncertainty over funding levels and timing makes it extremely difficult to plan effectively and is a source of considerable frustration throughout PAS. In addition, it greatly complicates efforts to mount public diplomacy initiatives outside the capital. The net effect is to leave substantial areas of southern and western Tunisia largely untouched by U.S. public diplomacy programs.

## Press Activities

The media environment in Tunisia makes it very difficult to utilize the tools of public diplomacy. Cumbersome Tunisian bureaucracy, pervasive security, and media control limit the embassy's ability to carry out press objectives. Press freedom is restricted and has regressed over the last 15 years. While there is no formal censorship, the government exerts direct influence through financial subsidies. Endemic

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<sup>10</sup> In FY 2005, for example, the section ran out of funds mid-year and had to be bailed out by NEA.

self censorship further ensures that certain redlines are not crossed. In recent years, several private daily newspapers have emerged, but they practice tabloid sensationalism with a routinely anti-American tone. Similarly, private radio and television stations are allowed to broadcast, but their programming is purely entertainment and devoid of investigative reporting. In short, opportunities for promoting reform and American values are extremely limited. In summer 2006, the section prepared a detailed traditional overview study of this Tunisian media environment. PAS and the embassy's political unit do very useful reporting, in classified channels, on Tunisian officials' methods of maintaining media control and on the occasional efforts by journalists of independent publishing houses to push the limits.

Reporting by the local media is monitored very effectively. Each morning, an LE staff member from the political section prepares an English summary of articles that have appeared on domestic political issues, while an LE staff member in the information unit of PAS does a parallel summary of local coverage of international developments. In the afternoon, the IO – using a high-tech template developed earlier this year – melds the two summaries and adds coverage of the U.S. and embassy activities. This consolidated product – which also includes color scans of selected local front pages, a political cartoon of the day, and an often-telling list of significant stories from the international press that did not appear locally – then goes to the Ambassador, other embassy staff, official Washington consumers, and military addressees who follow North African developments. The OIG team found this to be one of the very best daily press summaries that they had seen in the past two years. The information unit also submits several media reaction reports during the course of each week. Finally, it draws on this range of reporting to submit regular reports to the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and to the International Information Program's results database.

The information resource center (IRC), overseen by the IO, is a walk-in research library located inside the embassy. It offers a 6,000-volume collection of English-language books, current issues of 40 popular magazines, six Internet stations, and access to several international research databases. The IRC averages some 600 patrons per month. It has three groups of customers: academics (both students and professors), government officials and diplomats, and journalists. The IRC makes use of the Bureau of International Information Programs' extensive range of programs and products, subject to available funding. The IRC also manages and maintains the embassy's multi-media facility, a multi-purpose meeting room that can accommodate up to 40 persons. That facility is used for press conferences, such as one held for a Congressional delegation that visited during this inspection, as well as frequent digital video conferences with Washington and other posts.

Finally, the IRC also helps maintain the embassy's Internet site, because the post does not have a formal webmaster. At present, the web site's content is mainly in English, with some French and very minimal Arabic. To be effective in the Tunisia media climate – to reach remote areas beyond Tunis and to offer information not otherwise available to local Internet users – the site would need to be fully multilingual. Checking the web site on a daily basis and addressing technical difficulties as they arise would require someone with solid technical skills. Creating and maintaining multilingual offerings would require that the same person be able to translate between English and Tunisia's two languages, Arabic and French. At present, PAS does not have such a person. Public diplomacy budget submissions for the last several years have included a request for an LE staff webmaster but not received approval. The Ambassador has expressed strong interest in improving the embassy's web site. With that in mind, during the inspection, the embassy advertised an opening for an LE staff webmaster/translator position. The OIG team informally recommended that PAS management, in moving forward, coordinate closely with the MEPI-Tunis office, which had made remarkable strides in developing a tri-lingual web site during the past year.

## Cultural Activities

Tunisia is an especially challenging venue in which to conduct cultural and exchange programs. For all meetings with government officials, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires that the embassy submit a request by formal diplomatic note and receive formal approval. Preparation of the diplomatic notes is a time-consuming process, especially because follow-up is often necessary to ensure a response. This process extends to visits to academic institutions and the PAS staff's official travel outside the capital. In addition, there is a general atmosphere of reluctance – fostered by the government – to participate in embassy-organized activities. It has become standard practice for the embassy to submit by diplomatic note, for approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the names of all Tunisian officials nominated for exchange programs. In addition, anti-Americanism is growing in Tunisia. Nongovernment individuals have been suspicious of – and often reluctant to participate in – visitor exchange programs and embassy-hosted events because of dissatisfaction over U.S. foreign policy.

There is no Fulbright Commission in Tunisia. PAS, therefore, does recruiting, conducts interviews, and provides predeparture service for all Fulbright exchanges. The consular section assists with orientations. Eight Fulbright nominees were approved and fully funded in FY 2007, but the numbers go up and down from year to year.

Despite the environmental challenges, the section has very effectively developed a “younger and broader” focus in its public diplomacy efforts. In early 2006, the embassy’s first American Corner opened in downtown Tunis at a language training facility operated by an American nongovernmental organization, AMIDEAST. A joint Tunisian/Bluegrass music initiative was so successful that NEA funded a tour in North Africa and Europe in 2006-07.<sup>11</sup> In 2007, the section launched a new electronic newsletter that has increased PAS outreach from 1,000 to 5,000 contacts, most of whom are young people. The Tunisian government is very interested in expanding English language instruction, so the section has teamed up with the Ministry of Higher Education to sponsor an English language summer camp for over 1,000 university students. PAS management reports that with additional funding, each of these efforts, along with book distribution programs, could be expanded to wider audiences. PAS staff, officers, and LE staff, unanimously voiced the opinion that the embassy should support a wider range of activities and exchanges than it is currently doing.

The American Corner is an especially useful adjunct to embassy-sponsored cultural activities. Its downtown location, proximity to universities, and convenient public transportation make it especially attractive to urban young people. Capitalizing on this, the CAO has launched an embassy speakers program that features two or three events every month and has been very well received. The American Corner is also a convenient venue for roundtables and film showings that target audiences who would not otherwise be inclined to attend events held in the embassy. PAS informed the OIG team that scheduling speakers and networking with program alumni are easier at the American Corner because there is no need to obtain the approval of Tunisian officials. The embassy is interested in establishing a second American Corner in the southern port city of Sfax, but it is unclear whether Tunisian government officials will grant the necessary approval.

## Grants

The PAO is designated, in writing, as a grants officer and has a current warrant. She and other members of the PAS staff provide extensive support to the in-country programs of MEPI. Specifically, the PAO signs public diplomacy-funded grants and

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<sup>11</sup>The focus of the initiative is a bi-national, five-musician group called Kantara (Arabic for “bridge”). During the inspection, the group – which is well-known in the Maghreb and has toured in France and Italy -- appeared before a full house at the Kennedy Center in Washington.

other agencies' grants as needed,<sup>12</sup> especially when the deputy director of MEPI's regional office – the only other embassy officer with grants authority – is traveling. The CAO and two LE staff advertise for MEPI participants and exchange candidates, conduct interviews, and make recommendations on candidate selections, as well as draft documents, work with partners to collect document signatures, periodically check on performance, solicit technical and financial reports, and maintain files. PAS estimates that this takes 10-15 percent of the three individuals' time. The IO dedicates 5-10 percent of his time to providing logistical and media support to MEPI events. In addition, PAS often draws on its own very limited program funds to pay for placing advertisements and recruiting announcements in the local media. In short, PAS – whose budget and staff are already stretched thin – provides extensive unreimbursed support to MEPI's implementation of programs in Tunisia.

**Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tunis should conduct a structural analysis of the total staff support for the Middle East Partnership Initiative's programs that is presently provided by the public affairs section and that could be conducted by eligible family members. It should then request adequate financial resources from the initiative to fund that work. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

## CONSULAR OPERATIONS

Tunis' small consular section is a well-run and efficient operation providing a full range of consular services. The MSP identifies consular services as important national interests. The Ambassador and DCM fully support consular objectives, and the consular section chief exercises effective control over consular policy and management. The section has a formal orientation/training program for new American and locally employed staff. The Tunis consular section also processes visas for Libyan applicants. Embassy Tripoli's consular section processes only diplomatic and official visas in addition to providing American citizens services (ACS). The regional consular officer from Damascus and a Consular Management Assistance Team from Washington visited Tunis in 2006 to assist the section in identifying areas for improvement.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, the PAO signs grants for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, but not for the Department of Defense – which has its own grants officer at post.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The consular section is located within the chancery. Both American citizens and visa applicants enter through the same public access control perimeter entrance but have separate indoor waiting areas. Visa applicants also use an outdoor covered waiting area during the busy summer season. The exterior waiting area is equipped with a speaker system that allows officers to call visa applicants into the main visa waiting room for interviews. The section's work area and waiting spaces are adequate for current consular workloads.

The indoor visa waiting room has five contiguous interview windows. One window is enclosed for privacy and another is wheelchair accessible. The consular subcashier's specially designed booth with a locking door has a service window facing into the waiting room. The ACS waiting room has one interview window and built in racks containing forms and informational materials on Tunisia. Both waiting areas provide applicants access to restrooms and a water fountain.

## American Citizens Services

There are just over 600 American citizens registered with the consular section. U.S. citizens may visit the ACS unit any weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The ACS unit is adequately staffed with an ELO who also works in the nonimmigrant visa (NIV) unit, and one LE staff member. In FY 2006, the unit handled 420 notari-als, 300 passports applications, 30 reports of birth, 10 welfare/whereabouts cases, and two reports of death. During the same period there were no reported arrests of Americans.

The ACS unit communicates with 15 U.S. citizen wardens spread throughout the country. The Tunis warden notification system relays routine messages via e-mail directly to Americans registered with the embassy. In an emergency, wardens receive information via e-mail and then distribute the message by e-mail, phone, fax, and whatever other means to the Americans in their zone. The consular section has prepared an action plan for assisting private American citizens in an emergency.

## Visa Operations and Staffing

The NIV unit accepts applications from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and no appointment is required. The section's visa units adjudicated over 7,300 nonimmigrant, 1,096 immigrant and 877 diversity visa applications in FY 2006. In November 2006, the NIV unit began accepting only the

electronic visa application form. Applicants who do not use the electronic form are required to reapply using the correct form. The section also collects machine readable visa fees and schedules appointments. Because of the small volume of visas, off-site fee collection is not practical. Tunis remains the primary location for Libyan visa applicants. Because security advisory opinion processing is required for over 70 percent of these applicants, they represent approximately a third of Tunisia's NIV workload. The embassy's well defined visa referral policy enjoys strong support from the Ambassador. The section chief adjudicates class A referrals in accordance with the Bureau of Consular Affairs' standard operating procedures and uses every opportunity to publicize the post's visa referral policy.

Immigrant visa interviews are by appointment only, and applications are received Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays at 12:30 p.m. Until February 2007, Tunis had also been processing immigrant and diversity visas for Embassy Algiers, which made up over 60 percent of Tunis' diversity visa workload. Through improved workflow and efficiency, the consular section will not replace its FS-03 deputy position when the incumbent leaves in June 2007. Consular officer staffing will be reduced to the FO-02 consular section chief and two ELOs. In FY 2006, local staffing was decreased by 25 percent, and the section currently has five LE staff. The section is scheduled to implement 10-print finger scans within a few months. With the additional workload it is now unclear if further cuts in consular LE staffing could be made. All LE staff are cross-trained and serve as Arabic translators for applicants who speak neither French nor English.

## Outreach

Consular officers actively participate in public outreach, and many have spoken at schools, community centers, and the American Corner. The section hosted a press roundtable for the local print media, and conducted a media tour of the consular section. The event generated positive press coverage for the section, and for U.S. immigration policies. The consular section chief is a member the post's avian influenza working group and has hosted town hall meetings for U.S. citizens on the threat of avian influenza. The consular section also provides the latest guidance on avian influenza on the embassy's web site.

## Visas Viper Program

The Visas Viper program requires that information held by mission elements on "people who may threaten the welfare of the U.S." be shared with the consular section for submission to the Department. (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)





## FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE TUNIS ARABIC FIELD SCHOOL

The FSI Arabic Field School has produced well-trained language officers for 31 years. Some of the Department's senior officials are graduates of the school. Nonetheless, the debate continues to rage over whether Tunis is the right place to teach Arabic. No other Arabic speaking country has the right mix of language resources, facilities, security, and quality of life that Tunisia offers. Once the new facility is built, the argument will be rendered moot. Several senior instructors pointed out that Arabic, as spoken in the Levant, is being superseded by Arabic as it is spoken on international television. Local nuances and accents created by geography are now being changed by television and radio.

The Department has conducted Arabic language training at FSI Tunis since 1976. The school has a Foreign Service officer director, 19 students, 13 faculty, and five support LE staff. The school is currently located in a residential villa. The Department plans to begin construction of a new school facility on the current embassy compound in 2009. With the U.S. government's added emphasis and interest in Arabic language training, the new facility will be able to accommodate 45-50 students and about 25 instructors plus support staff. The current building has a maximum capacity of 13 instructors and 26 students.

The school is an integral part of the embassy, but managing that relationship is a constant challenge. Both sides make extra efforts to coordinate, but friction does occur. There is a natural tendency, particularly among the LE staff, to forget at times about the unique situation of the school (out of sight, out of mind) or to resent the unusual demands placed on the embassy by students, some of whom can be very demanding. Likewise, students forget that they have no operational role, come on 10-month tours of duty, and sometimes place unusual demands on the embassy. The current class had a difficult adjustment. The director position was not filled at the time that the school year commenced, and even though both FSI and the embassy provided temporary substitutes, the sense of abandonment permeated the first half of the school year, a complaint shared by the teachers and staff.

Because the arrival and departure of students coincide with the school year, the embassy is deluged with work within very small timeframes. Any confusion, lack of documentation, or mistakes are magnified. The students naturally want to focus on their studies and do not appreciate the slow and bureaucratic nature of the host government processes. In a self-contained environment, anything that affects one student appears to affect all, and issues sometimes get blown out of proportion. The director is the connecting link, articulating student needs and moderating occasionally immoderate demands of students. The absence of a full-time director

last fall only added to the school's perception of being treated differently. The OIG team found that students were serviced by the embassy no worse or better than the community as a whole. When the school moves to the chancery compound, many of the old complaints should disappear, but new ones are likely to arise. One issue already being debated is whether the school facility should serve only the Arabic Field School or be a platform for broader regional training. The embassy argues the latter, FSI the former.



## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Agency	U.S. Direct-Hire Staff	U.S. Local-Hire Staff	Foreign National Staff	Total Staff	Total Funding FY 2007
State – D&CP	21	3	11	35	\$1,204,688
State – ICASS	7	3	159	169	3,726,300
State – Public Diplomacy	3		12	15	371,806
State – Diplomatic Security	5	1	14	20	764,176
State – Marine Security	7			7	73,270
State – Representation					38,230
State – OBO	1			1	1,252,062
State -- MRV	4		2	6	151,328
State -- MEPI	3	1	4	8	291,841
State -- FSI	20		17	37	909,986
American Battle Monuments Commission	2		10	12	N/A
Defense Attaché Office	6		1	7	239,968
Office of Defense Cooperation	6	1	1	8	N/A
Office of Agricultural Affairs	0		3	3	77,741
Office of Regional Affairs	9		1	10	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>\$9,101,396</b>

### Overview

Embassy Tunis has an effective management section that provides good service to its clients as reflected by the OIG Workplace and Quality of Life Questionnaire (WQLQ) scores. The good scores would be expected given the new state-of-the-art embassy complex and, despite the difficulties in conducting official business with the host government, living and social conditions are very good. Administrative practices and requirements of the government of Tunisia, while cumbersome and cause extra work and delays, eventually do work. The issues that exist are manageable, and

most problems can be ascribed to a lack of transparency causing invidious comparisons, rather than a lack of resources. At the time of the inspection, the embassy was vigorously addressing areas of complaint. The Department's Arabic Field School is an integral component of the embassy that adds some unique administrative and security requirements. Problems are of a routine nature, and none adversely impact the embassy's ability to provide services. As described in the Rightsizing Section of this report, the OIG team determined that a careful review of mission staffing should be conducted.

## MANAGEMENT SECTION

The management section has qualified American and LE staff, but like the mission overall, has an over-abundance of resources. The profusion of resources has occasionally led to a lack of rigor in decisionmaking that detracts from an overall well-managed operation. The section operates within regulations as evidenced by the few formal recommendations in this report.

The section has had to adapt to the stresses of supporting a routine influx and departure of language students. All posts have a busy summer cycle, but Tunis' is unusual because it is driven by two school years that coincide. Twenty percent of arriving mission Americans come within a two-week period and depart within a one-week period. Also, the embassy provides limited support to teachers at the American school who likewise depart and arrive on a similar schedule.

Even though the section is overstaffed, rightsizing the section is not a simple matter. There are two factors that the embassy must consider: many management section local employees' skills are not transferable, and the Department plans to double the number of students at the Arabic Field School in 2011 or 2012. Doubling the number of students and instructors with the already disproportionate impact of the timing of the transfers requires a careful look at staffing, and perhaps, innovative approaches to handling the deluge of arrivals every August and the mass exodus every June. Even though there may be a surplus of people now, within three years, the current number of staff or the mix of skills may not suffice. Moreover, the management section has a mix of white collar and blue collar employees. Blue collar employees may not have the educational background or English language skills to do clerical work.



bassy officials was warranted or useful. In the end, they concluded that the embassy was doing all that needed to be done for the present, and it was best to see what the courts did before escalating the issue.

## GENERAL SERVICES

The general services office (GSO) section provides the full range of support services to the embassy which includes five agencies. A core of experienced and long-serving LE staff employees serves as the backbone for the various sections and has a good understanding of regulations. In general, while most GSO services received good scores above the worldwide average in the WQLQs, several were rated lower than others. Lower scores and commensurate customer complaints could be resolved if there was better communication. Also, the Arabic Field School students are not on the NEC, and serving them poses particular problems, not all attributable to GSO.

Most LE staff focus on their own jobs and do them well, but few take the initiative when other parts of GSO or the embassy must become involved in completing tasks or resolving problems, for example in shipping, travel, or customs. When problems occur, communications between sections is neither apparent nor routine. As a result, much of the coordination so essential for efficient resolution of service delivery is lacking, and problems that could otherwise be easily resolved linger unnecessarily. In OIG interviews, some employees complained of poor service delivery. They perceive service providers as unresponsive at best, or incompetent at worst. In a society sensitive to age and rank, student clients may well be perceived and treated with less than equal respect. Several FSI students said they felt slighted by some senior LE staff supervisors who, they said, treated them dismissively because they were students. On the other hand, some students are very demanding and did not appreciate the efforts made on their behalf. There was also a broader perception that agencies other than the Department and some FSI students were treated less than equitably. The OIG team surmised that the compartmentalization of the LE staff may be a factor, because other agencies often have different rules and procedures than the Department. FSI students often come with unique transfer orders and, if a mistake is made in Washington, correction requires considerable effort by the embassy management section staff with commensurate angst among students.

## Procurement and Contracts

In FY 2006, the procurement section processed 1,092 transactions with a value of \$2,443,607. For the current fiscal year, the section has already processed 697 actions for a value of \$2,617,485. The section is in the process of ratifying with the Department several unauthorized commitments extending from 2004 to 2006, in varying amounts and for various purposes. (See section on Management Controls).

The OIG team found that procurement files were properly set up and notated, and included the necessary supporting documentation. A random sample of purchase orders showed that competitive quotations were obtained for purchases above the micro-purchase threshold and included transactional information regarding competition, price reasonableness, and cost. With delays or partial shipments, employees took appropriate follow-up action.

The embassy makes effective use of a broad range of blanket purchase agreements which have been competed and bulk funded. These are used regularly, particularly by the maintenance section for needed supplies. The OIG team found that blanket purchase agreements are reviewed periodically and modified whenever market conditions or sources of supply change. There are a handful of contracts, including for packing and shipping as well as gardening services. The section consults closely with the Department's procurement executive for advice and guidance, and an examination of the contract files confirms that contracts have been competed and administered in accordance with regulations.

## Property and Supply

Embassy Tunis manages its property well. Annual inventories of government-owned property were completed and submitted to the Department on time. Several residential inventories lacked the occupant's signature when vacating the residence. Employees were appropriately assessed for lost or damaged items prior to departure from post.

The relatively small warehouse on the compound is clean and well organized. The embassy installed shelving after the move-in and expanded storage space somewhat. The supply room is well organized and neatly arranged. The receiving area is fenced off, and access is controlled. New household furniture and appliances still in their original packing lined the shelves awaiting the arrival of incoming summer transferees. A second leased warehouse, located a short distance from the embassy, lacks shelving and has an unfinished and uneven floor. Dust is a major problem, and the uneven floor can easily damage furniture and appliances. The embassy has tried,



unsuccessfully, to find an alternate warehouse, and the pressure to relocate will only increase because the area surrounding the warehouse is changing rapidly as new up-scale apartment buildings are being built, resulting in the warehouse rent increasing. This warehouse contains mostly property of other agencies not participating in the furniture pool (ODC, DAO, and Food and Agriculture Organization). If the furniture pool were to be consolidated, it would be beneficial in several ways: the need for additional warehouse space would diminish dramatically, man-hours spent moving furniture into and out of nonparticipating agency residences would be eliminated, saving time and unnecessary wear and tear, and the current duplication of furniture pools would end.

## Motor Vehicles and Transportation

In the WQLQ survey, respondents rated the efficacy of the embassy's motor pool services very highly. The motor pool supervisor, an experienced long-term employee, stresses customer service and is very attentive to preventative maintenance, driver training, and accurate vehicle record keeping. The supervisor schedules overtime and manages temporary duty travel for drivers transparently and equitably. The mechanics and some drivers speak limited or no English, so completing necessary paperwork is challenging for them as well as for the motor pool supervisor (the embassy language program stalled for lack of funds, and only recently has been revitalized). Because the Tunisian government assesses duties on engine size and not a vehicle's age, several older vehicles are still being used in the motor pool fleet. For the same reason, vehicles scheduled for disposal generally attract low prices because buyers cannot afford the high duties assessed.

The OIG team observed that vehicle repair facilities are well maintained and clean, and the two mechanics appear to be supplied adequately with appropriate tools and equipment but find understanding English language manuals challenging. The facility handles routine maintenance and most vehicle repairs. Turnaround time for routine vehicle maintenance is generally two to three hours and for repairs two or three days.

The embassy's motor vehicle policy, updated in February 2007, prescribes policies for business and other authorized use. Annexes attached to the policy include separate Chief of Mission authorizations for other authorized use as well as how charges have been calculated. The Ambassador has authorized all exceptions.

## Shipping and Customs

Household shipments to Tunisia can be shipped prior to an employee's arrival, but personally owned vehicles cannot be cleared until after the employee arrives. The transit time for shipments directly from U.S. east coast ports is relatively short, but if necessary, trans-shipment through Antwerp adds considerably to the time because of consolidation and rebooking of cargo. Because of the embassy's excellent contacts with customs and immigration officials, and despite a cumbersome Tunisian bureaucracy of rules and regulations, incoming household effects and personal vehicle shipments are cleared and delivered shortly after arrival. The OIG team reviewed a sample of shipping files and found them well organized and complete. The shipping section clears all shipments and registers the personal vehicles of all American teachers (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) (b) (6)(b) (6). The section had been doing so since 1984 following an exchange of diplomatic notes between the embassy and the government of Tunisia to avoid taxes and customs fees. Given the substantial time and resources involved, the embassy may need to revisit the need for providing the service. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to this effect.

Several respondents, including FSI students complained about inordinate delays in receiving and registering personally owned vehicles. Registration of vehicles is a time-consuming process requiring clearances by several Tunisian government departments with exacting and precise requirements. The resulting delays frustrate many employees and contribute to a poor perception of the section's service delivery and customer service. Welcome information to incoming employees accurately describes procedures and timelines to clear incoming household effects and register personally owned vehicles. Even armed with this information, employees will likely experience frustrating delays as long as Tunisian government processes remain unchanged. The efficacy of shipping and customs received among the lowest WQLQ scores.

## Travel Unit

The travel unit provides administrative support for official travel, visits, and hotel reservations. It also supports high-level visitors. Currently the embassy's local travel service provider has limited resources to handle international travel. This fall, the embassy plans to change to Carlson Wagonlit, the General Services Administration European contractor. At that time, the embassy also intends to discontinue the use of Government Travel Requests and switch to a government travel card.

Of all the GSO sections, the efficacy of travel services received the lowest WQLQ scores. The OIG team found that the section had recently been in turmoil which led to the resignation of one employee and the hiring of a new supervisor

with considerable embassy experience but little travel experience. Official travel from Tunis to the United States does not qualify for business travel, and the only business travel authorizations involve travel on transfer orders. The embassy issued a very small number of business class tickets this fiscal year. These were properly authorized. The embassy did not issue any first class tickets during this period.

## HOUSING

In spite of considerable angst among a few families, the embassy provides good and appropriate housing, with the majority of employees commenting favorably on their residences. However, the housing assignment process has lacked transparency, generating complaints of favoritism and inconsistency. Simply put, the housing officer and board did not function well together, and efforts by management only added to the perception of a lack of transparency. The OIG team observed that the various elements of the process did not have a clear understanding of their authorities and roles. For example, the housing board insisted on dropping the lease on a property for aesthetic reasons before the housing officer had an opportunity to negotiate with the landlord to modernize the house. The embassy subsequently reached agreement with the landlord to make modifications and will continue leasing the property. One single officer was housed in a six-bedroom house. Some criticized the housing officer for not renting in a desirable area without knowing that the housing officer has not been able to identify owners who wanted to rent in that area. Also, the housing officer created some bad public relations by housing himself in one of the best residences in the housing pool.

Some students at the FSI Field School complained that they were being treated differently from the rest of the mission. The embassy had leased small but attractive units during a time when the Department had a different housing policy regarding students. There remain three units (not all occupied by students) in the housing pool, and the embassy plans to drop them when the current occupants transfer. The OIG team found that there was no pattern of discrimination in housing assignments. Complaints and praise were equally random among all sections and agencies at post. The OIG team spent considerable time counseling the various people involved in housing assignments including the housing officer, management officer, chairperson of the housing board, and the DCM. The new board should operate more smoothly. The OIG team made several informal recommendations.

## FACILITIES AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Embassy Tunis is blessed with a superlative state-of-the-art NEC on 22 acres. Occupied in 2002, the facility includes a main chancery building, marine security guard quarters, and two office buildings for GSO and facilities maintenance section operations and a warehouse. The 2004 Post Occupancy Evaluation by OBO noted as its first major finding the “exceptionally functional design,” and “the consolidation of all post functions in the total design...” A recreation center was added in 2005. Irrespective of the fact that the facilities maintenance section could benefit from a review to determine if the right balance of skills exists, the section does a good job in maintaining all properties with good record keeping and management controls. Such issues that occur are due to design/construction faults and decisions by management (see housing above). The FSI Arabic Field School is located in a separate facility about a 20-minute drive from the NEC.

The U.S. government owns 10 residential properties including a beautiful residence for the Ambassador and a stately residence for the DCM. All the U.S. government-owned residences are large, functional, and well maintained. However, five are located in areas closer to the former chancery and away from areas where most embassy Americans currently reside. In spite of the units being perceived as less attractive, the embassy has used them effectively.

The entire NEC facility is very attractive and is in good technical condition. However, there is a growing problem with electrical and plumbing/sewer lines throughout the compound as structures settle and conduits crimp or break. The site is a landfill recovered from a lake. The water table is only two to three feet below the surface, and most external lines are buried below the water line. As lines get crimped, water enters the conduits and causes electrical shorts and burnt cable. In some cases, the crimping is so severe that the damaged cable or new cable can no longer be pulled through the conduit. This problem also affects water and drainage lines. At the time of the inspection, the outdoor fountain water line had broken and tracking the break was proving difficult because the water was seeping directly into the Mediterranean instead of percolating to the surface.

The Department is planning to build a new building to house an expanded FSI Arabic Field School. Planning commenced in 2007, with construction to start in 2009. However, the land settling issue must be addressed not only to avoid similar problems, but also to incorporate remedial work if economies of scale can be achieved.

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tunis should request, and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should approve, a plan to repair or replace the external new embassy compound conduits either as a stand-alone project or in conjunction with the construction of the building for the Arabic Field School. (Action: Embassy Tunis, in coordination with OBO)

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The financial management section effectively supports all embassy personnel. Led by a dynamic and experienced financial management officer, the section's scores on all of the financial management categories on OIG's questionnaire were high. The section received praise from financial management section personnel of other U.S. embassies in the region. An LE staff financial management specialist certifies vouchers up to \$35,000 and makes expert use of financial software programs. The accounting staff, supervised by an experienced and highly regarded LE staff accountant, is scrupulously tracking obligations and updates the funds status reports monthly. The voucher examiners process a high volume of vouchers in a timely manner. A cash count was performed during the inspection and all accounts balanced.

At the time of the inspection, the employees of the section were being trained on Direct Connect, the on-line embassy-level version of the Department's Regional Financial Management System, which provides real-time processing of financial transactions. This eliminates the former one-to-two-day delay in batch processing. The post expects to have a smooth transition into this new financial system.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

The ICASS council meets at least quarterly. Relations among the 16 participating members are professional and productive, although it has been challenging at times, to get all members together to hold meetings. Some council members, including the newly elected chairperson, have not received ICASS training. The OIG team suggested that the embassy identify ICASS training courses for interested council members. The council has instituted a budget working group to ensure a fuller understanding of services and costs.

The embassy has not been evaluating its service standards annually as required (6 FAH-5 H-161). During the course of the inspection, the mission updated its ICASS standard services. Although embassy personnel are satisfied with the majority of ICASS services, this is not the case for customers located at the FSI Arabic Field School. The embassy does not have a mechanism in place to measure performance against ICASS standards. In addition, the ICASS council has not addressed issues such as establishing a furniture pool or the possibility of outsourcing functions like janitorial services. Given the small number of other agencies at post, it is possible that cost savings could not be achieved. However, the ICASS council needs to discuss and prepare a cost-saving analysis to make this determination or act otherwise. The OIG team left informal recommendations addressing these issues.

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION SECURITY

Embassy Tunis operates a comprehensive information management (IM) program including unclassified and classified computer networks, communications, mail, diplomatic post office, pouch, radio, and telephone. The IM section provides services for approximately 300 employees. Embassy customers seem satisfied with IM services, and the IM section received good scores in the WQLQs.

The IM section has four direct-hire American positions, 13 LE staff including five in the IM section, three in the mailroom, two maintaining the telephones, and two operating the telephone switchboard. Similar to other operations in the embassy, the LE staffing levels may be excessive, requiring further review.

### Local Information Technology Change Control Board

Embassy Tunis has not established a local information technology (IT) change control board (CCB) as required by 5 FAM 862. A local CCB is responsible for approving locally developed and implemented software on the embassy's network. Although there were e-mails in the past addressing the need for a local IT CCB, no formal application to have a CCB was submitted to the Bureau of Information Resource Management for approval as specified in 5 FAM 862.3. As a result, the embassy has never been granted authorization by the Department to approve any hardware or software locally.

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tunis should complete the Department's application process to formally establish a local information technology change control board to be authorized the right to approve locally used hardware and software. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

## Systems Documentation

Although the embassy's computer system contingency plan was updated in April 2007, the plan has never been tested. Per 12 FAM 622.3-2, the data center manager and the system manager should test the contingency plan annually, or when major modifications are made. Without testing the contingency plan, the embassy may be vulnerable to not being able to recover and resume emergency operations after a disaster.

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tunis should develop and test its computer system contingency plan annually or when major modifications are made. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

## Unauthorized Application

The server-based application service request system (SRS) used to initiate and track service requests was developed at Embassy Tunis and is used extensively by other embassies worldwide. The extensive use worldwide of the SRS application is evidenced by the list of 50 embassies worldwide who have contacted the developer, requesting by e-mail information or assistance with application. However, the SRS application has never been submitted for systems authorization to either the local CCB or to the Department's IT CCB for authorization, and is, therefore, not authorized on any of the Department's computers. As established in 5 FAM 600 and 5 FAM 800, the IT CCB ensures that changes (i.e., new applications) that potentially impact the global IT infrastructure are reviewed and formally approved prior to being implemented.

The reason why the application was never submitted for formal authorization is unclear, but it is likely a combination of uncertainty over the IT CCB authorization process and a lack of follow through on the part of the previous IM staff. Because the application is no longer just a “local application” but instead used worldwide, the application must be included in the Department’s baseline.

**Recommendation 7:** Embassy Tunis should complete and submit the required paperwork to the Department’s Information Technology Change Control Board for approval to have a locally developed server-based application, now used worldwide, added to the Department’s information technology baseline. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

## Individual Development Plans

The information management officer does not have individual development training plans for either American or LE staff employees. According to 5 FAM 121, the information management officer is responsible for developing individual development training plans for staff to ensure that employees have the skills necessary to support mission programs, and to encourage their own professional growth. Without individual development training plans, IT management is unaware of areas where training may be required to ensure sufficient customer service. The OIG team made an informal recommendation to correct this deficiency.

## EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The mission has three EEO counselors, two of whom are certified, and a Federal Women’s Program Coordinator. Their names and general information about EEO laws and policies are prominently displayed on a bulletin board next to the cafeteria in English and French. Given that there are four buildings on the embassy compound and most LE staff do not use the cafeteria, it would be more effective to place EEO information on bulletin boards in other buildings. An informal recommendation was made on this issue.



The Federal Women's Program Coordinator is also an EEO certified counselor. This arrangement presents a major conflict, because the Office of Civil Rights prohibits the EEO counselor and Federal Women's Program coordinator from being the same individual. The OIG team made informal recommendations to improve the EEO program and bring it into compliance with Department regulations.

## AVIAN INFLUENZA

Charged with formulating the mission's overall policy to combat the disease, the embassy's interagency avian influenza task force is headed by the embassy's Foreign Service nurse practitioner, and includes the active participation of several sections. Coordination among the players is excellent, as evidenced by the mission's comprehensive contingency plans with accompanying tripwires. The mission has mounted a broad outreach effort that includes town hall community meetings, presentations, strategies, and preparing educational material and advice on what to do when symptoms appear. The medical unit has stocked substantial quantities of the drug Tamiflu as well as sufficient supplies (masks, gowns, gloves, etc.) to cover most of the mission's American and LE staff populations.

Poultry sales in Tunisia fell following the initial reports of outbreaks in other places, prompting the government of Tunisia to mount a public information campaign to reassure the public that it had the problem in hand. Information about avian influenza risks has been openly discussed and disseminated in the press, including state-run media. The government of Tunisia has a national plan, but when embassy officials met to discuss the issue, their Tunisian government counterparts showed them a copy of the plan but refused to share or divulge its contents. The embassy believes that the Tunisian government has reliable testing capabilities and will probably react quickly if an outbreak occurs. Local facilities are generally reliable and could likely handle patients initially but would be overwhelmed if the outbreak spreads.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

### MEDICAL UNIT

The medical unit is staffed by a Foreign Service nurse practitioner, an LE staff doctor, and an LE staff office manager. Employees ranked the unit highly on their WQLQs. The post also has a medical advisor who provides back-up medical consultations as needed. The medical unit provides full service primary health care to all direct-hire U.S. employees and their eligible family members. The unit is equipped to handle common health problems, injuries on an outpatient basis, and basic laboratory tests. Local doctors and facilities are often used because they offer acceptable care. Patients with major medical and surgical problems are stabilized and evacuated to London, the embassy's medical evacuation point, or to the United States. The OIG team review of the unit confirmed that patient records are competently safeguarded. A small supply of controlled medical supplies is kept in a secure container, and access is controlled. The embassy's family advocacy program is working well, and both the DCM and RSO are aware of their respective roles.

### COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICE

A community liaison office (CLO) coordinator and one assistant staff the CLO office. Responses to the WQLQs revealed a relatively high level of satisfaction with CLO programs and services. The CLO coordinator organizes a variety of programs to take advantage of the wealth of cultural opportunities locally, and those programs are well supported by the mission community. Programs target singles as well as families. The lack of French and Arabic inhibits interaction by some employees and spouses, but the embassy's language programs are popular and well attended, including by spouses. The CLO-organized orientation programs were informative and well received. The CLO coordinator did not include a presentation on cultural differences in the orientation program nor were any ongoing workshops organized to explore cross-cultural issues, and the OIG team offered suggestions on programming. Sponsorship programs are working well.

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## U.S. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' RECREATION ASSOCIATION

The U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association (USGERA) plays a valuable role in support of the embassy's morale by providing a range of services and activities for the benefit and welfare of the employees of the embassy and their families. The general manager under the supervision of the USGERA board is in charge of day-to-day operations and the association's financial viability. In CY 2006, the association had a net income of \$2,784.

The association operates a commissary, recreation center, video rentals, and other services under a charter from the Department. Just a short time prior to the arrival of the OIG team, the association assumed responsibility for cafeteria services. The association is up to date on its audit and financial reports. The OIG team made several informal recommendations to improve overall oversight of operations.



## MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

Management controls at Embassy Tunis are generally effective. The Risk Assessment Questionnaire completed shortly before the inspection and scored by the Bureau of Resource Management showed acceptable scores in all sections. Between 2004-06 employees without delegated contracting authority in GSO, PAS, information management, and the human resources office incurred five unauthorized commitments, in varying amounts, for employee health insurance, translation services, diplomatic post office services, official residence expense staff health tests, and video equipment rental. By the time of the inspection, the embassy had already taken action to have the unauthorized commitments ratified by the Department's Office of the Procurement Executive. To prevent future unauthorized commitments, management implemented ongoing measures to educate embassy sections on acquisition regulations and proper procurement procedures, including instructions on who is authorized to buy goods and services on behalf of the U.S. government. The procurement section has also received a combination of in-house, Office of the Procurement Executive, and regional training. However, the annual Chief of Mission's Certification submitted on July 27, 2006, makes no mention of the unauthorized commitments. Because they constitute a material weakness, they must be reported with an accompanying plan to correct deficiencies.

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tunis should submit a revised annual Chief of Mission Certification to identify past unauthorized commitments as a material weakness and a plan to correct these deficiencies. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

### Subcashiers Cash Counts

With the exception of consular subcashiers, the cash verifications of subcashiers in Embassy Tunis have not been consistent. Two particular American supervisors are not performing regular unannounced cash verifications as required by 4 FAH-3 H-397.2-3. This issue was highlighted in the last OIG inspection report. Prior to the arrival of the OIG team, the financial management section requested unannounced

cash verifications from American supervisors. During the course of the inspection, the financial management officer addressed this issue by establishing a tracking system and sending reminders to American supervisors with subcashier responsibilities quarterly and monthly depending on the amount of the petty cash. The OIG team is satisfied that the system established by the embassy will address this issue.

In April 2007, the USGERA executive board received the results of an independent audit performed by Ernst & Young. The audit discussed several management controls weaknesses, among them that the conversion rate between dollars and local currency is not updated regularly. Two different accounting applications are used for the association's operations. Inventory procedures like physical counting are not consistent. In addition, the report noted that few recommendations from the previous year's audit were not yet implemented. To the association's credit, it was addressing the previous year's recommendations and implementing the recommendations from this year's audit report during the course of the inspection. The OIG team left an informal recommendation that the embassy continue implementing the recommendations from the independent audit.

The OIG team noted that the purchasing manager for the recreational association is also the purchasing manager for cafeteria operations. He receives petty cash daily for purchases of both cost centers. It was not evident that this employee keeps separate purchase receipts for these cost centers. While executive board members expressed their satisfaction with the performance of this particular employee, there is no system of checks and balances in place to ensure that cash and cost from these cost centers are kept separated. Proper supervision and implementation of management controls are essential for the association's operations. An informal recommendation was made on this issue.

## Consular Internal Controls

The deputy consular section chief is the accountable consular officer. Both the accountable consular officer and the consular subcashiers are fully familiar with the Consular Management Handbook instructions and follow the appropriate accounting and reconciliation procedures for collection of consular fees. Controlled items such as passport books, visa foils, and official seals and stamps are secured in a safe in the deputy section chief's office. No vulnerabilities were found in the management of consular fees or controlled items.

## FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tunis, in coordination with the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs, Management, Overseas Buildings Operations, and the Foreign Service Institute, should conduct a rightsizing review of staffing at mission Tunis, taking into account the expected increase in language students in 2012. (Action: Embassy Tunis, in coordination with NEA, M/PRI, OBO, and FSI)
- Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tunis should conduct a thorough review of its classified web site and assign an officer or eligible family member responsibility for daily content management and a regular schedule for updating the site. (Action: Embassy Tunis)
- Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tunis should conduct a structural analysis of the total staff support for the Middle East Partnership Initiative's programs that is presently provided by the public affairs section and that could be conducted by eligible family members. It should then request adequate financial resources from the initiative to fund that work. (Action: Embassy Tunis)
- Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tunis should request, and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should approve, a plan to repair or replace the external new embassy compound conduits either as a stand-alone project or in conjunction with the construction of the building for the Arabic Field School. (Action: Embassy Tunis, in coordination with OBO)
- Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tunis should complete the Department's application process to formally establish a local information technology change control board to be authorized the right to approve locally used hardware and software. (Action: Embassy Tunis)
- Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tunis should develop and test its computer system contingency plan annually or when major modifications are made. (Action: Embassy Tunis)



**Recommendation 7:** Embassy Tunis should complete and submit the required paperwork to the Department's Information Technology Change Control Board for approval to have a locally developed server-based application, now used worldwide, added to the Department's information technology baseline. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tunis should submit a revised annual Chief of Mission Certification to identify past unauthorized commitments as a material weakness and a plan to correct these deficiencies. (Action: Embassy Tunis)

## INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

### **Political and Economic Affairs**

In the year prior to the inspection, reporting by the economic section was rather limited. The OIG team learned that one area in which there is significant potential for large new direct investment by U.S. companies is crude oil production. Although the embassy had prepared a required investment climate report, there were no recent energy sector reports in the embassy's files.

**Informal Recommendation 1:** Embassy Tunis should submit an energy sector report that surveys the potential for new oil and gas production in Tunisia and the investment opportunities for U.S. companies.

### **Public Affairs**

The embassy lacks a designated full-time Internet webmaster with technical expertise and ability to translate. Also, the content of the embassy's web site is mainly in English with little French or Arabic. Meanwhile, MEPI-Tunis over the past two years has made great strides in developing a web site that is fully multilingual and updated monthly.

**Informal Recommendation 2:** Embassy Tunis should coordinate closely with the Middle East Partnership Initiative-Tunis as it implements plans to overhaul the embassy's internet website.

### **Rightsizing**

Embassy Tunis does not have a clear NSDD-38 policy outlining steps and action of-fices when the chief of mission is asked to make a NSDD-38 decision.

**Informal Recommendation 3:** Embassy Tunis should prepare a National Security Decision Directive-38 policy outlining duties and action offices.

Embassy Tunis does not have a mission-wide comprehensive file of NSDD-38 actions.

**Informal Recommendation 4:** Embassy Tunis should prepare a comprehensive National Security Decision Directive-38 file.

The Department's Office of Rightsizing recommends that chiefs of mission when making NSDD-38 decisions should request comment from the ICASS council.

**Informal Recommendation 5:** Embassy Tunis should provide the chief of mission with comment from the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services council when making National Security Decision Directive-38 decisions.

Embassy Tunis does not provide the chief on mission data showing the financial impact of any potential NSDD-38 decision.

**Informal Recommendation 6:** Embassy Tunis should provide the chief of mission with data showing the financial implications of any National Security Decision Directive-38 decision he may make.

### **Shipping and Customs**

Embassy Tunis' shipping and customs unit handles all shipping and vehicle registrations for 23 teachers at the (b) (6)(b) (6)(b) (6) (b) (2)(b) (2) based on a 1984 exchange of notes between the embassy and the government of Tunis. Given the additional workload and diminished embassy resources, the justification for continuing this service may no longer be warranted.

**Informal Recommendation 7:** Embassy Tunis should re-evaluate the need for handling the (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) (b) (6)(b) (6) teachers shipping and vehicle registration requirements.

### **Housing**

There is a lack of understanding of the roles each person or office (housing officer, housing board, CLO, human resources office, maintenance supervisor, management officer, DCM) plays in the assignment of housing.

**Informal Recommendation 8:** Embassy Tunis should convene all the people who are part of the housing process and review their roles, responsibilities, and authority in the housing process.

Embassy Tunis does not strictly adhere to the Department's lease text.

**Informal Recommendation 9:** Embassy Tunis should either use the prescribed leasing text or seek the appropriate waiver from the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations .

### **International Cooperative Administrative Support Services**

Some members of the ICASS council, including the newly elected chairperson, have not received ICASS training.

**Informal Recommendation 10:** Embassy Tunis should provide International Cooperative Administrative Support Services training to those members who have not received it.

Embassy Tunis ICASS council has not addressed issues such as establishing a furniture pool or outsourcing functions like janitorial services.

**Informal Recommendation 11:** Embassy Tunis should discuss and prepare a cost-saving analysis for a furniture pool and outsourcing general service functions like janitorial services.

The ICASS council does not maintain adequate minutes of its meetings.

**Informal Recommendation 12:** Embassy Tunis should fully document discussions held by its International Cooperative Administrative Support Services council.

The embassy does not have a mechanism in place to measure performance against the ICASS standards.

**Informal Recommendation 13:** Embassy Tunis should establish a mechanism to measure performance against the established International Cooperative Administrative Support Services standards.

### **Equal Employment Opportunity**

The names of EEO counselors and the Federal Women Program manager along with general information about EEO laws and policies are prominently displayed in a bulletin board by the cafeteria in English and French. The embassy has four other buildings and not all the employees use the cafeteria.

**Informal Recommendation 14:** Embassy Tunis should place Equal Employment Opportunity information in bulletin boards in other buildings in the embassy compound.

The Federal Women's Program Coordinator is also an EEO certified counselor.

**Informal Recommendation 15:** Embassy Tunis should designate an individual other than the Equal Employment Opportunity counselor to be the Federal Women's Program coordinator.

One of the three EEO counselors, who serves as the chairperson for EEO issues, has not taken the EEO training.

**Informal Recommendation 16:** Embassy Tunis' Equal Employment Opportunity chairperson should take the required Equal Employment Opportunity training.

### **U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association**

The association's board of directors does not conduct unannounced cash counts on a monthly basis in any of the cost centers.

**Informal Recommendation 17:** Embassy Tunis should direct the association's board of directors to conduct unannounced cash counts of the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association on a monthly basis.

The board of directors does not review and reconcile bank statements monthly.

**Informal Recommendation 18:** Embassy Tunis should instruct the board of directors to review and reconcile bank statements of the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association monthly.

The U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association is providing cafeteria services to embassy personnel on a trial basis.

**Informal Recommendation 19:** Embassy Tunis should prepare a corrected charter and license agreement for the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association and submit it to the Office of Commissary and Recreation staff if it decides to provide cafeteria services.

The U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association seems to have too many employees for its administrative and management functions.

**Informal Recommendation 20:** Embassy Tunis should direct the board of directors to examine the staff of the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association to determine if a reduction in force is possible.

The U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association only charges a nominal fee for temporary duty employees who use the commissary if they are at post longer than two weeks.

**Informal Recommendation 21:** Embassy Tunis should charge a nominal fee for all employees who are on temporary duty and use the commissary of the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation regardless of the length of the stay.

The U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association does not have a mechanism in place to determine who is on temporary duty or who is assigned to post.

**Informal Recommendation 22:** Embassy Tunis should issue commissary usage cards for employees who are assigned and for those who are on temporary duty.

An independent audit performed by Ernst & Young discussed several management control weaknesses in the operations of the U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association.

**Informal Recommendation 23:** Embassy Tunis should implement the recommendations from the independent audit for the U.S. Government Employee' Recreation Association.

The purchasing manager for the recreational association is also the purchasing manager for cafeteria operations.

**Informal Recommendation 24:** Embassy Tunis should establish adequate oversight systems to the association's purchasing operations.

### Information Technology

The IT section does not have individual training plans as required in 5 FAM 121.

**Informal Recommendation 25:** Embassy Tunis should develop an individual development training plan for each American and locally employed information technology employee based on assigned job responsibilities, mission needs, and professional development.

## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Arrival Date
Ambassador	Robert F. Godec	11/06
Deputy Chief of Mission	David Ballard	08/04
<b>Chiefs of Sections:</b>		
Management	Clyde L. Jardine	09/06
Consular	Sean Cooper	07/05
Political/Economic	Dorothy Shea	06/06
Public Affairs	Patricia K. Kabra	08/05
Regional Security	James J. Murphy	08/05
Foreign Service Institute		
Arabic Language Field School	Lynn E. Donovan	01/07
Middle East Partnership Initiative	Peter Mulrean	08/04
<b>Other Agencies:</b>		
Department of Defense		
Defense Attaché Office	Col. Bradley Anderson	06/01
Office of Defense Cooperation	Lt. Col. Christopher Herndon	11/05
Department of Commerce		
Resident in Casablanca	Enrique G. Ortiz	06/05
Department of Agriculture		
Resident in Rabat	Michael J. Fay	08/04
Federal Bureau of Investigation		
Resident in Rabat	Andre Khoury	08/06





## ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American citizens services
ADB	African Development Bank
CAO	Cultural affairs officer
CLO	Community liaison office
DAO	Defense attaché office
DCM	Deputy chief of mission
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
ELO	Entry-level officer
EUCOM	European Command
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
GSO	General services office
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
IM	Information management
IMET	International Military Education and Training
IO	Information officer
IRC	Information Resource Center
IT	Information technology
IT CCB	Information technology change control board
LE	Locally employed
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
NEA	Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NEC	New embassy compound
NIV	Nonimmigrant visa

NSDD	National Security Decision Directive
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
ODC	Office of Defense Cooperation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAO	Public affairs officer
PAS	Public affairs section
RSO	Regional security officer
SRS	Service request system
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USGERA	U.S. Government Employees' Recreation Association
WQLQ	Workplace and Quality of Life Questionnaire

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

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