

Reinstituting the ESTH Cone Within the US Foreign Service

Justine F. Chen

Corresponding author: ms.justinechen@gmail.com

Keywords: science diplomacy; public diplomacy; Foreign Service; environmental; science and technology; health; diplomatic relations; foreign relation.

I. US Foreign Service cones

The diplomats serving in the United States Foreign Service are some of the best and brightest in the country, as only three percent of about 20,000 people who take the Foreign Service Officer (FSO) Test annually are offered a position.¹ Their mission is to promote peace, support prosperity, and protect American citizens while advancing the interests of the U.S. in more than 270 posts (embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions) around the world.² Some of these areas are in difficult, even dangerous, environments, like warzones and disaster sites. But since its inception in 1924, the Foreign Service has not evolved with America's dynamic foreign relations needs. By reinvigorating its dedication to environmental, science & technology, and health (ESTH) initiatives, the Foreign Service can empower needed discourse regarding the intersection of science and foreign diplomacy.

Currently, the Foreign Service includes five "cones," or career tracks: Consular, Economic, Management, Political, and Public Diplomacy. These important functional specializations determine what type of work a FSO will do for most of his/her career, and each cone is crucial to the Department's mission.³ For example, Economic Officers work with foreign governments and other US government agencies on trade, monetary policy, economic development, and commerce both domestically and overseas.⁴ The Economic cone portfolio also includes ESTH issues, in addition to traditional economic issues. ESTH officers work closely with other US government agencies and support their efforts by raising key issues at the diplomatic level. They cooperate with NGOs to raise awareness of ESTH issues as broad and diverse as climate change, disease pandemics,

biotechnology, and space exploration, and advocate the use of ESTH core issues to strengthen diplomatic relations. They also represent the US in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the European Union.⁵

Given the increased volume of diplomacy topics that now involve the environment, sustainability, science and technology, and global health, the Foreign Service is long overdue for a change in how its officers engage with the rest of the world. In order to ensure the United States plays an important role in future ESTH discourse, it reinstitute the 1987 Executive Order 12591, which encouraged the Secretary of State to recruit scientists and engineers from Federal agencies, academic institutions, and industry to become United States FSOs.⁶

II. ESTH officers and their essential role in science diplomacy

According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), in 2004, there were 163 posts that dealt with ESTH issues, 60 of which were dedicated solely to those issues.⁷ By 2013, there were only 50 ESTH officers posted abroad.⁸ The number of FSOs in ESTH positions with degrees in science or engineering has shrunk in the past 15 years from more than 25 to about 15.⁹ Though ESTH issues are generally part of the Economic cone, Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) from any cone can bid on ESTH postings, even if they lack a science background or any specialized ESTH training. ESTH postings are also filled by temporary detailees from agencies that have a science mandate, such as Department of Energy, but are one-off assignments and feature a rotating cast of civil servants that may not have adequate FS training. As a result, an increasing number of FSOs lack sufficient knowledge

and training to report on activities of interest to American ESTH communities.¹⁰ In contrast, most industrialized countries and many developing nations staff key embassies with technically trained specialists.^{11,12}

By better facilitating ESTH communication with foreign nations and entities, FSOs can help establish stable countries and relationships worldwide. As Anthony Rock, former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs under the George W. Bush Administration, noted, "...issues of environment, science and technology...address economic stability and the welfare of people around the world."¹³ As such, facilitating productive international discourse about ESTH issues can promote solutions to these challenges. Similarly, Robert D. Hormats, Undersecretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment for the Obama Administration, stated that, "Science diplomacy is a central component of America's 21st century statecraft agenda."¹⁴ Specifically, by increasing our involvement in ESTH discussion, the US can "mak[e] our economy more competitive, tackl[e] global health issues, and deal with climate change."¹⁵

ESTH officers are in a unique position to advance these critical interests. As the practice of science becomes increasingly collaborative, interdisciplinary, and international, ESTH officers versed in science communication are necessary to facilitate scientific partnerships with other nations, international collaboration between universities and research labs, and a strengthening of our diplomatic relationships in order to address shared challenges. These relationships are based on technical disciplines that transcend politics, languages, borders, and cultures. ESTH officers are uniquely skilled in balancing these interdisciplinary interests and qualifications.

Although they would not be an expert in all ESTH issues, a coned officer's in-depth competence in one aspect of ESTH significantly enhances his or her capability to understand key concepts of other complex ESTH issues. Furthermore, because a specialized ESTH officer would develop a record of advanced personal technical achievements, the officer could better facilitate access to and improve rapport with high-level officials of the foreign governments. Technically trained Science

Counselors are able to establish personal credibility with foreign colleagues. This credibility, in turn, provides continued access to important organizations and specialists beyond what would normally be available to other FSOs.¹⁶ A continuity of access and open lines of communication between our international partners can only help in the effort to address urgent issues such as rising sea levels, frequent natural disasters, and infectious pandemic diseases like Ebola.

The 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa exemplifies a scenario in which specialized ESTH officers could provide invaluable insight and support in solving global crises. The American public was generally unfamiliar with and unconcerned about the Ebola outbreak until the United States' first Ebola patient, Thomas Eric Duncan, was infected and later killed by the disease. For the remainder of 2014, Ebola cases in Liberia and Sierra Leone declined as a result of international mobilization. Additionally, the U.S. Department of State held a weekly strategic communication (StratComm) meeting on Ebola response. By December 2014, these weekly meetings became biweekly. By the end of February 2015, these meetings ceased altogether as the issue-attention cycle shifted. Ironically, Ebola's death toll peaked at 10,000 in March 2015.¹⁷ By this time, the Department had gone through several high-level staff changes in the Ebola Coordination Unit. As a result, the StratComm meetings became inconsistent and unstable, and leadership failed to foster effective communication amongst the members. The StratComm group went from having all regional bureaus represented to having just two in addition to the Public Diplomacy bureau.

Although nearly all members of the StratComm group were FSOs, only two members had science backgrounds. If the group had more members with public health backgrounds, it could have better maintained strong and effective alliances with its OECD allies in the relief effort as the pandemic continued to plague West Africa. This messaging was critical, particularly to overcome public and donor reluctance to relief efforts. In January 2015, the UN Special Envoy on Ebola reported that the epidemic had cost \$4 billion. At the same time, the UN requested an additional \$1 billion through June 2015 to continue its efforts, yet donors were reluctant to respond with funds.¹⁸ Had the StratComm

committee included a strong number of public health FSOs, it might have better communicated the urgency of additional funding and secured the resources necessary to defeating the pandemic.

As international issues become increasingly interdisciplinary, it is imperative that our diplomatic corps possess both the technical background as well as the communication skills to maximize such opportunities for mobilizing international partners and optimizing our collective financial, intellectual, and natural resources toward developing, strengthening, and maintaining the safety and security of the world. Such efforts will, in turn, bolster the United States' safety and security.¹⁹

III. Reinstating the ESTH cone

By reestablishing an independent ESTH cone, the United States can better advance its science diplomacy goals and signal to the world that science diplomacy is an important factor in resolving political conflict, negotiating trade treaties, and facilitating cultural exchange. ESTH officers would be fully integrated into the diplomatic lifestyle. Contrast that with utilizing temporary ESTH detailees, who may be career civil servants, but unused to the hardships of living overseas and untrained in the nuances of diplomacy.

The State Department once utilized an independent ESTH in this manner. Executive Order 12591 issued in 1987 stated that, "The Secretary of State shall develop a recruitment policy that encourages scientists and engineers from other Federal agencies, academic institutions, and industry to apply for assignments in embassies of the United States."²⁰ Thus, the Department established skill code 6020, which established ESTH as a stand-alone cone.²¹ But as the Cold War ended, science and technology issues receded to the background of diplomacy and international affairs.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, national security and related science issues have returned to the forefront of diplomatic discourse, recreating a need for an independent ESTH cone.²² To satisfy this need, the Management Bureau should reconvene a promotion panel for skill code 6020. Given that, the skill code still exists in the Foreign Affairs Handbook, reconvening this panel should not be difficult.²³ FSOs

will then have an incentive to take ESTH posts in order to receive promotions and increase their levels of responsibility. It is important to note, however, that hiring enough ESTH-specific officers to staff the necessary posts will require a substantial budget increase.

Developing this new cone will prove less challenging than advocating Congress for funding. In the past, the AAAS provided ESTH training to FSOs, and the prior curriculum could be reconstituted into a new A-100 (basic Foreign Service training) class for the ESTH cone. Currently, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) offers a six-week ESTH course twice a year that gives an introductory overview to FSOs assigned to an ESTH post. This curricula could be expanded into a full A-100 class in collaboration with OSTP and other relevant agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy, among others, but still administered by FSI.

Once the ESTH cone is established, the demand for competent, credentialed candidates will be created and trickle down to higher education programs and even secondary education programs. International relations schools will view the ESTH cone as an incentive to expand or enhance existing science and technology programs or create new programs. For example, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government created a new concentration in International and Global Affairs, and the program can model its curriculum based upon the needs of ESTH FSOs. Additionally, the FS can recruit ESTH officers from master's and PhD students in energy, science, and technology concentrations at international relations schools and from science communication programs. Magnet high schools, such as the Bronx High School for Science and San Diego High School of International Studies, could be early feeder programs for the cone by fostering increased interest in a science diplomacy career.

IV. Conclusion

As it becomes a greater part of American statecraft, science diplomacy practitioners such as ESTH officers, should become a more integral part of the Foreign Service. Though the Department has made recent improvements to incorporate science into the policy-making process, such as creating a Science Advisor position in 2000, many of these issues

demand additional urgent action. America's national security, international standing, and scientific enterprise would benefit tremendously if the Foreign Service reinstated an independent ESTH cone in equal standing with the Foreign Service's five existing cones. Doing so would allow American diplomats to adequately prepare for, prevent, and mitigate foreign policy crises. Therefore, reinstating the ESTH cone must become a top priority.

References

- ¹ Lewin, Tamar. "Rarely Win at Trivial Pursuit? An Embassy Door Opens." *The New York Times*, December 17, 2006. Accessed February 10, 2015.
- ² "Foreign Service Officer." *U.S. Department of State*. Accessed February 8, 2015. <http://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/>
- ³ Adams-Smith, Kelly. "Which Career Track is Right for Me?" In *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*, edited by Shawn Dorman, 215. Foreign Service Books, 2011.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ "OES Overseas – Regional Environmental Hubs." *US Department of State*. Accessed 3 December 2013. <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/hub/>.
- ⁶ Executive Order 12591 of April 19, 1987. Facilitating access to science and technology. *Federal Register*. 52 FR 13414, 3 CFR, 1987 Comp., p. 220
- ⁷ AAAS. "Foreign Service Officers at AAAS Explore Issues of Science, Environment and Health". 19 July 2004. <http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2004/0719service.shtml>. Accessed 3 December 2013.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Committee on Science, Technology, and Health Aspects of the Foreign Policy Agenda of the United States, National Research Council. "The Pervasive Role of Science, Technology, and Health in Foreign Policy: Imperatives for the Department of State," 49. National Academies Press. 1999.
- ¹⁰ Committee on Science, Technology, and Health Aspects of the Foreign Policy Agenda of the United States, National Research Council. "The Pervasive Role of Science, Technology, and Health in Foreign Policy: Imperatives for the Department of State," 49. National Academies Press. 1999.
- ¹¹ New Zealand Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "Who is in the Embassy." New Zealand Embassy Washington, United States of America. Accessed 29 May 2015. <http://www.nzembassy.com/usa-washington/about-the-embassy/who-is-in-the-embassy>
- ¹² Embassy of India. "Departments." Accessed 29 May 2015. <https://www.indianembassy.org/pages.php?id=10>
- ¹³ US Department of State. OES Overseas – Regional Environmental Hubs. <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/hub/>. Accessed 3 December 2013.
- ¹⁴ US Department of State. 2012 Remarks From the Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment. "Science Diplomacy and Twenty-First Century Statecraft". March 2012. <http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rmk/2012/182545.htm>. Accessed 3 December 2013.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Gostin LO, Friedman EA. A retrospective and prospective analysis of the West African Ebola virus disease epidemic: robust national health systems at the foundation and an empowered WHO at the apex. *The Lancet*. 2015; 385: 1902–09.
- ¹⁸ Nabarro, David. "Statement by David Nabarro, Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Ebola, to the WHO Executive Board Special Session on Ebola. Geneva, Switzerland, 25 January 2015. Global Ebola Reponse. Accessed 29 May 2015. https://ebolaresponse.un.org/sites/default/files/150125nabarro_who_execboard.pdf
- ¹⁹ Copeland, Darryl. "A Role for Science Diplomacy? Soft Power and Global Challenges – Part I." *Guerilla Diplomacy*. 15 November 2010. <http://www.guerrilladiplomacy.com/2010/11/a-role-for-science-diplomacy-soft-power-and-global-challenges-part-i/>
- ²⁰ Executive Order 12591 of April 19, 1987. Facilitating access to science and technology. *Federal Register*. 52 FR 13414, 3 CFR, 1987 Comp., p. 220
- ²¹ U.S. Department of State. 3 FAH-1 H-2620 Skill Code Change Procedures: Specialist and Generalist. *Foreign Affairs Handbook Volume 3 Handbook 1 - Personnel Operations Handbook*. 1 May 2003. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/89580.pdf>
- ²² Copeland, *supra* note 19.
- ²³ U.S. Department of State, *supra* note 21.

Justine F. Chen

Justine F. Chen is a contractor at the US Department of Health and Human Services. She was formerly a contractor at the US Department of State Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and at the USAID President's Malaria Initiative, as well as a Science Assistant at the National Science Foundation's Office of the Director. Her research interests lie in public diplomacy, particularly in the areas of science, health, sports, and music. The author holds a MSPH in Human Nutrition from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and

a BA in Political Science from the University of California, Los Angeles. The author would like to thank Al Teich, Lynn Poulton, and Bud Rock for their assistance; Mary Tang for editing; and her father Shih Lin Chen for always encouraging her to change the world through her writing.