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Office of Inspector General
United States Department of State

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Office of Inspections

May 2023

Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

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HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General
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What OIG Inspected

OIG inspected the executive direction and policy and program implementation of the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

What OIG Recommends

OIG made 4 recommendations to the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In its comments on the draft report, the mission concurred with 3 recommendations and neither agreed nor disagreed with 1 recommendation. OIG considers all 4 recommendations resolved. The mission's response to each recommendation, and OIG's reply, can be found in the Recommendations section of this report. The mission's formal response is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix B.

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OFFICE OF INSPECTIONS

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What OIG Found

- The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission led the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in a professional and collaborative manner.
- The Ambassador made herself accessible to mission personnel in a variety of ways. Department of Defense personnel at the mission praised the Ambassador for her focus on working collaboratively with them.
- The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission recognized that mission staff worked long hours and looked for ways to restore work-life balance, but efforts to increase staffing were only partially successful.
- The mission's workload increased significantly with Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission led the mission in achieving significant foreign policy successes to gain North Atlantic Treaty Organization support for Ukraine.
- The Ambassador worked with her counterpart at the U.S. Mission to the European Union to improve coordination between the two missions.
- The Political Section staff contributed to the advancement of key mission priorities, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's support for Ukraine and the alliance's adoption of a new strategy document, known as the Strategic Concept.
- The Public Diplomacy Section assisted the Ambassador in conducting meaningful and far-reaching press and public engagements.
- Spotlight on Success: The Public Diplomacy Section responded to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine with innovative visual social media products to combat Russia's disinformation, educate skeptical audiences about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and reinforce the transatlantic alliance.

CONTENTS

CONTEXT	1
NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE	2
EXECUTIVE DIRECTION	3
Tone at the Top and Standards of Conduct	3
Execution of Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives	4
Adherence to Internal Controls	5
Security and Emergency Planning.....	6
Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility	7
Developing and Mentoring Foreign Service Professionals.....	7
POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION	8
Political Section	8
Public Diplomacy	10
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	13
PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS	15
APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY.....	16
APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE.....	17
ABBREVIATIONS	21
OIG INSPECTION TEAM MEMBERS.....	22

CONTEXT

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a security alliance of 31 countries¹ from Europe and North America. NATO's fundamental goal is to safeguard members' freedom and security by political and military means. Article Five of the treaty states that an armed attack against one of the member states should be considered an attack against all members, and other members shall assist the attacked member with armed forces if necessary.

At its June 2022 Madrid Summit, NATO adopted a new Strategic Concept,² its first since 2010, and invited Sweden and Finland to join the alliance. In a statement at the summit, leaders of NATO member states condemned Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and cited other challenges, including China, climate change, and terrorism. NATO members' contributions to the alliance come in the form of indirect contributions—for example, military troops and capabilities—and direct contributions to finance NATO's budget and programs, which total approximately \$2.5 billion per year. Total U.S. government contributions in 2021 were \$611 million.

The U.S. Mission to NATO (USNATO) is the United States' official representative to NATO and represents U.S. foreign policy interests within the alliance. It is located at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The U.S. Ambassador to NATO is also the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO in the North Atlantic Council, which oversees the political and military process relating to security issues affecting the alliance and is the principal political decision-making body within NATO.

USNATO's FY 2022 Integrated Mission Strategy (IMS), approved in July 2022, focuses on:

- Supporting the institutional modernization of NATO, including proper strategic vision and resources and facilitated allied decision-making.
- Reinforcing NATO's deterrence and defense, strengthening shared responsibility for security, and strengthening the alliance's individual and collective resilience.
- Assisting NATO in protecting our democracies against state and non-state threats by projecting stability on a global stage.

USNATO is one of three U.S. missions in Brussels. The others are the U.S. Embassy in Belgium (Embassy Brussels) and the U.S. Mission to the European Union (USEU). The Department of State (Department) refers to the three missions as the Brussels Tri-Mission. At the time of the inspection, USNATO had 57 U.S. direct-hire authorized positions and 11 locally employed (LE) staff positions. Other U.S. government agencies, primarily the Department of Defense, had 139

¹ At the time of the inspection, NATO members were Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Finland joined NATO in April 2023.

² The Strategic Concept is a policy document that NATO issues approximately once a decade outlining its top priorities for the following years. The current Strategic Concept was approved on June 29, 2022.

U.S. direct-hire authorized positions and 1 LE staff member position. USNATO's Office of the Defense Advisor is headed by a senior civilian Department of Defense official who is responsible for the formulation, coordination, and presentation of Department of Defense policies to the Ambassador. The Defense Advisor also serves in a separate role as the Secretary of Defense Representative in Europe. The U.S. Military Delegation to NATO, headed by the U.S. Military Representative, is under chief of mission authority but reports directly to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and represents him on the NATO Military Committee. Embassy Brussels' Joint Administrative Services Section provides management, including information management, support to USNATO. The embassy's Regional Security Office also supports USNATO.

OIG evaluated the mission's executive direction and policy and program implementation consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.³ Concurrent with this inspection of USNATO, OIG also inspected Embassy Brussels and USEU.⁴ The inspection of Embassy Brussels covers resource management issues, including information management, for the three missions. A related classified inspection report on the Brussels Tri-Mission includes discussion of the security program for the three missions, issues affecting the safety of mission personnel and facilities, and certain aspects of the information management program.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Below is information describing how NATO has supported Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. This information is integral to understanding OIG's findings in this report, particularly those that discuss USNATO's role on issues related to Ukraine.

Ukraine is not a NATO member, and, since Russia's invasion, the NATO Secretary General and officials of the United States and other member countries have emphasized that NATO is not a party to the conflict. However, NATO members regard a strong, independent Ukraine as vital to the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.

NATO's partnership with Ukraine began in the 1990s and intensified following Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014. Beginning in 2016, NATO consolidated support for Ukraine through a mechanism called the Comprehensive Assistance Package, aimed at enabling Ukraine to become more resilient, better provide for its own security, and carry out reforms and institution building in the defense and security sector, including strengthening democratic oversight and civilian control.

The NATO-Ukraine relationship is implemented through various partnership mechanisms, including the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the Partnership for Peace program, and the NATO-Ukraine Commission. In June 2020, Ukraine became an Enhanced Opportunity Partner, a

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ OIG, *Inspection of Embassy Brussels, Belgium* (ISP-I-23-11, May 2023); OIG, *Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the European Union* (ISP-I-23-15, April 2023).

status offered to NATO partner countries that have made significant contributions to NATO operations and other alliance objectives.

In the June 2022 Madrid Summit declaration, leaders of NATO member countries stated that “we condemn Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms,”⁵ calling it a violation of international law and saying that it gravely undermined international security and stability. They announced a strengthened package of support for Ukraine, including non-lethal defense equipment.

Finally, most security assistance to Ukraine from NATO member states is provided bilaterally. Coordination of this assistance takes place through the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, in which more than 50 countries have participated since its first meeting, convened by the U.S. Secretary of Defense, in April 2022.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

OIG assessed USNATO’s leadership on the basis of interviews, staff questionnaires, a review of documents, and observations of meetings.

Tone at the Top and Standards of Conduct

The Ambassador assumed her position as Ambassador and U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO in November 2021. She previously served as a Senior Advisor to the Secretary, as the Acting National Security Advisor and Deputy National Security Advisor to the Vice President, and as the Principal Director for European and NATO Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, arrived in September 2021 to serve as DCM and as Deputy Permanent Representative to NATO. He previously served as director of the Department’s Office for NATO and OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Affairs and as DCM in Cotonou, Benin.

OIG found that the Ambassador and the DCM led the mission in a professional and collaborative manner consistent with the Department’s leadership principles in 3 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 1214b.⁶ Mission personnel told OIG that the Front Office, and especially the Ambassador, were inclusive and welcomed input from all staff members. OIG found that the Ambassador made herself accessible to mission personnel in a variety of ways, including individual mentoring sessions, brown bag lunches and brainstorming sessions, and monthly coffee hours. Department of Defense personnel at USNATO told OIG they appreciated the Ambassador’s leadership and focus on working collaboratively with them.

⁵ Madrid Summit Declaration issued by NATO Heads of State and Government, NATO, June 29, 2022, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm.

⁶ The Department’s leadership and management principles outlined in 3 FAM 1214b include (1) model integrity, (2) plan strategically, (3) be decisive and take responsibility, (4) communicate, (5) learn and innovate constantly, (6) be self-aware, (7) collaborate, (8) value and develop people, (9) manage conflict, and (10) foster resilience.

Front Office Tried to Restore Work-Life Balance

Mission staff told OIG that the Ambassador and the DCM recognized the staff routinely worked long hours. Some employees worked 10- to 11-hour days or longer, especially in the period leading up to and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and that the Front Office looked for ways to restore work-life balance. For example, in its FY 2024 Mission Resource Request, USNATO requested two additional positions to help alleviate pressure on the Political Section, one of which was a rotational position with a staff assistant position in the Front Office. The Department denied the request for the rotational position but approved the other position. However, this additional position would not lead to an increase in staff because an officer in the section occupied a temporary position that was not scheduled to be filled after his departure in 2023.

The Ambassador established a workforce advisory committee that began interviewing staff in May 2022 seeking to recommend ways to manage workloads and reduce overtime. The committee prepared a report with recommendations in August 2022 and presented them to the Ambassador, who provided initial feedback in an email to all USNATO staff and emphasized her continued commitment to work-life balance. Staff told OIG the Ambassador led by example in leaving the office whenever work did not require overtime and encouraged the staff to do the same. The Ambassador and the DCM also encouraged staff not to send electronic messages after hours and on weekends except in emergencies and not to work on U.S. holidays unless necessary to represent the United States in a NATO committee meeting. Nonetheless, USNATO staff told OIG that working hours continued to be excessive and that they looked to the Ambassador to take further steps to reduce workloads. The Ambassador told OIG that she had spoken with outside experts on work-life balance and would welcome suggestions on further steps. She also scheduled a town hall for staff to raise their concerns and offer suggestions.

Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission Promoted High Ethical Standards

OIG found that the Ambassador and the DCM promoted high ethical standards consistent with Department guidance in 3 FAM 1214b(1). For example, the DCM discussed respect for colleagues, transparency, and accountability in his meetings with all new employees. In addition, the Ambassador routinely consulted with the Department before accepting invitational travel to NATO activities. However, during the inspection, OIG brought to the attention of the tri-mission Front Offices that their gift registries lacked information on the valuation and disposition of gifts as required in 2 FAM 964b. USNATO and the other missions then brought the registries into compliance. As a result, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue. In addition, after discussion with OIG, the tri-mission updated and reissued its ethics policy during the inspection, replacing one issued in 2016.

Execution of Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives

OIG found that the Ambassador led the mission team in accordance with 1 FAM 013.2a to exercise full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and supervision of all U.S. Executive Branch employees and 2 FAM 113.1c(7) to obtain support for U.S. policies or positions. Department interlocutors and those of other agencies in Washington told OIG the Ambassador

was well-respected and influential in decision making in interagency discussions. Mission personnel told OIG the Ambassador's access to the highest levels of NATO was unparalleled among ambassadors to NATO and that her interventions advanced U.S. foreign policy goals, as described in more detail below. Public diplomacy interlocutors described the Ambassador as a master messenger and media superstar in explaining to varied audiences the U.S. response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

OIG's interviews highlighted that the DCM's role as Deputy Permanent Representative to NATO required him to focus more on policy and representing the United States than was typical for DCMs at other missions. Mission personnel said the DCM was effective in these two areas given his breadth of knowledge on NATO issues and his visibility among NATO allies.

Mission Consumed by Issues Related to Ukraine But Achieved Foreign Policy Successes

The Ambassador told OIG that USNATO had been completely consumed by issues related to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Under her leadership and that of the DCM, USNATO achieved significant foreign policy successes consistent with its principal IMS goals. For example, Washington and mission personnel told OIG that the Ambassador's marshalling of information from multiple U.S. government sources was crucial in forging and maintaining unity among NATO members in the run-up to and after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In addition, NATO's new Strategic Concept incorporated several U.S. foreign policy goals, including recognizing Russia's aggressive behavior as a threat and referencing the security challenges of a more assertive People's Republic of China. The summit also endorsed increases in NATO's civil budget for each year through 2030, a key priority for the Ambassador and the DCM that had been opposed by some NATO countries. In September 2022, the Ambassador led a review of the IMS to track progress and make adjustments, consistent with Department guidance in 18 FAM 301.2-4(D)c on effective use of strategic planning.

Ambassador Took Steps to Increase Coordination With the U.S. Mission to the European Union

OIG found that the Ambassador, together with her counterpart at USEU, took steps to increase coordination between the two missions and the organizations to which they were accredited, consistent with the IMS objectives of both missions. Washington interlocutors told OIG that coordination between the two missions was especially notable at the ambassadorial level on Ukraine-related matters and generally good overall. The ambassadors were in frequent contact and on occasion hosted joint briefings and collaborated on reporting cables. NATO's Summit Declaration, issued in June 2022, highlighted the alliance's unprecedented cooperation with the European Union. The Ambassador acknowledged that the European Union's expanding role in member security created the potential for friction between the two organizations and thus close coordination between the two U.S. missions was a high priority.

Adherence to Internal Controls

OIG found that the mission completed the FY 2022 Annual Chief of Mission Management Control Statement of Assurance in accordance with Department guidance in 2 FAM 022.7(5)

and 2 FAM 024d and with cable 22 STATE 85378⁷ to develop and maintain appropriate systems of management controls and to submit the annual statement of assurance. The Statement of Assurance updated one significant deficiency that had been identified in FY 2021. A Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations project was underway to address the deficiency. During the inspection, the mission provided documentation that the Statement of Assurance included input from all mission sections in accordance with guidance in cable 20 STATE 123846.⁸

A July 2021 Department study of the tri-mission's management platform found it understaffed to support growing numbers of mission personnel.⁹ To better control overall mission growth, the tri-mission in February 2022 instituted a twice-yearly "open season"¹⁰ for new NSDD-38 position requests¹¹ to evaluate and prioritize such requests across the three missions at one time rather than in isolation.

Security and Emergency Planning

OIG interviews and reviews of documentation found that the Ambassador and the DCM mostly supported the mission's security program, consistent with 2 FAM 113.1c(5) to develop policies and programs to protect U.S. officials abroad and their dependents. Following the Ambassador's arrival, the mission issued its security directive on safeguarding classified information. In addition, the DCM included talking points on security in his initial meetings with new employees.

USNATO in late 2022 resumed security briefings it had suspended during upsurges of COVID-19 cases. The mission also started a contest among sections to reduce security incidents. By late October 2022, security incidents had declined 50 percent from 2021 and more than 60 percent from 2020. During the inspection, the tri-mission approved the annual review of the security memorandum of agreement between the chiefs of mission and the geographic combatant commander, which clarified responsibility for Department of Defense personnel when not in USNATO offices. The review was due in June 2022.

However, OIG found that the Ambassador had not participated in a security drill since her arrival. As such, she had been unable to emphasize that emergency preparedness was a priority for the mission in accordance with Department guidelines in 12 FAH-1 H-762a. This occurred because the mission scheduled drills while the Ambassador was away from the mission or out

⁷ Cable 22 STATE 85378, "Instructions for Reporting Templates in your FY 2022 Statement of Assurance," August 2, 2022.

⁸ Cable 20 STATE 123846, "Your Role in Assuring Strong Management Controls and Oversight Over Post Operations," December 23, 2020.

⁹ Office of Management Strategy and Solutions, Overseas Presence Review U.S. Tri-Mission Brussels, July 2021.

¹⁰ The open seasons provide the tri-mission front offices the opportunity to assess and prioritize position requests and evaluate the collective impact of position increases across all three missions on the shared management and security platforms.

¹¹ National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 38, dated June 2, 1982, gives chiefs of mission control of the size, composition, and mandate of overseas full-time mission staffing for all U.S. government agencies.

of the country. Non-participation by the Ambassador could weaken the culture of preparedness within the mission to respond to a crisis.

Recommendation 1: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should schedule mission-wide drills when the Ambassador is present and able to participate, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

OIG determined that the mission's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) were consistent with Department standards in 3 FAM 1511.1a, the Department's leadership principles in 2 FAM 1214b(6), and the Secretary's guidance on diversity and inclusion in cable 21 STATE 60514.¹² Mission personnel and the Ambassador told OIG of her commitment to increase diversity within USNATO, especially to recruit and retain women, and of her participation in DEIA activities. OIG's review of the Ambassador's calendar confirmed her participation in DEIA activities as well as her mentorship of staff. USNATO personnel also told OIG that the mission emphasized diversity during the Foreign Service bidding season in 2022. For example, the mission set up diverse panels to interview bidders and dropped prior experience at USNATO as a criterion when evaluating bidders in order to attract more diverse candidates. The DCM included points on the importance of inclusion and diversity in his introductory meetings with newly arrived personnel and addressed EEO and harassment complaints raised to him in 2022. OIG found EEO and DEIA information posted on USNATO bulletin boards and on the tri-mission's intranet site.

Developing and Mentoring Foreign Service Professionals

OIG found that, while the Ambassador and the DCM both provided some individual mentoring to personnel assigned to the mission, USNATO did not have an active, structured professional development program for First- and Second-Tour (FAST) employees as required in 3 FAM 2713b. Mission leadership and personnel told OIG the program became dormant during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, they said that the press of business and the distance from Embassy Brussels and USEU inhibited FAST participation in tri-mission FAST activities. The lack of an active FAST program limits the employees' ability to sharpen critical skill sets and for officer career candidates to demonstrate the ability to serve successfully across the normal officer career span.

Recommendation 2: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should implement a structured First- and Second-Tour professional development program in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

¹² Cable 21 State 60514, "Policy Statements on Diversity and Inclusion and Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment," June 11, 2021.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

OIG assessed USNATO's policy and program implementation through a review of the work of the Political and the Public Diplomacy Sections. OIG found that the sections generally met Department requirements for policy and program implementation, with further observations discussed below.

Political Section

OIG reviewed the Political Section's leadership and management, policy implementation, and reporting and advocacy and found that the section generally met Department standards. OIG's findings, including two recommendations to address issues identified by OIG during the inspection, are discussed below.

Washington Praised Political Section as a Respected Team Working on Key Issues

Washington consumers interviewed by OIG regarded USNATO's Political Section as a hardworking and capable team that ably supported the mission's leadership in carrying out key U.S. government policy objectives. The Political Counselor arrived shortly before the beginning of the inspection, but staff members told OIG that he made a good start. They particularly appreciated his efforts to foster work-life balance under challenging circumstances and his steps to reduce workload, including streamlining the section's editing process for reporting cables and briefing memos for high-level NATO meetings. In addition, staff members regarded the deputy political counselors who headed the section's two teams—Operations and Policy and Partnerships and Security Policy—as capable managers who did a good job of communicating expectations and providing feedback.

OIG found, however, that coordination between USNATO's and USEU's political sections was a longstanding challenge, partly because heavy workloads, combined with the time needed to travel between the two missions, which are about 4 miles apart, made meeting in person difficult. Recent developments, including Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the EU's efforts to expand its defense capabilities, and NATO's statement of intent in its 2022 Strategic Concept to strengthen its strategic partnership with the EU, illustrated the importance of coordination between the missions. Staff members of the political sections in both missions acknowledged the need for better communication. Before and during the inspection, they took steps to develop closer ties, including in-person meetings at USEU and USNATO and a joint briefing at a USNATO-hosted political-military symposium.

Through their own participation on NATO committees and their staff work for higher-level NATO meetings, section staff members contributed to NATO's political and practical support for Ukraine's defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity against Russia's aggression. Staff also contributed to deliberations on NATO's new Strategic Concept.

Section Staff Members Would Benefit From More Formal Training

Political Section staff members told OIG that they had felt unprepared upon arrival at USNATO to negotiate in NATO committees, which was an important part of their responsibilities. OIG interlocutors at USNATO and in Washington said that representing the U.S. government on NATO committees required a unique set of skills. Responsibility for identifying training needs and developing training programs is spelled out in 13 FAM 101.2-2: the Foreign Service Institute is responsible for designing appropriate training courses and programs to meet the Department's needs, bureau executive directors are responsible for identifying bureau training needs, and managers and supervisors are responsible for determining the specific training needs of their employees and ensuring that employees receive training for effective job performance. While the Department's Foreign Service Institute offers training on multilateral diplomacy, it does not offer specific training on serving on behalf of the U.S. government on NATO committees. Newly arrived staff members did not receive formal training on working at NATO but instead received informal instruction from colleagues. Section staff members said that they would have benefited from more formal training, and section managers agreed that this would be useful.

Recommendation 3: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training program on how NATO works and how to negotiate in NATO committees. (Action: USNATO, in coordination with EUR and FSI)

Section Had Cooperative Relationship With Department of Defense Colleagues

The Political Section had a close and cooperative relationship with the Office of the Defense Advisor. Political officers served as the U.S. government's representatives on some NATO committees while the Office of the Defense Advisor's staff members served on others. Representatives of the two offices often attended committee meetings together, with one sitting in the United States chair and the other taking notes. They also divided responsibility for preparing briefing papers and cables on NATO meetings.

Staff Members Worked Long Hours; Mission Saw Need for Increased Staffing

Political Section staff members had a heavy workload that included preparing for, attending, and reporting on NATO committee meetings; attending meetings with representatives of other NATO member states; supporting Front Office participation in higher level meetings, including meetings of the North Atlantic Council, NATO's principal political decision-making body; and serving as control officers for USNATO's steady stream of high-level visitors. The NATO meeting cycle and related clearance process, the time difference between Brussels and Washington, visitor support responsibilities, and the short lead time on documents circulated by NATO's international staff all contributed to long workdays even during relatively quiet periods. The Front Office leadership and section staff members believed the situation could be addressed only through increased staffing.

On average, staff members told OIG they worked 11 hours a day. Beginning with the leadup to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Political Section's workload, along with that of the rest of USNATO, increased significantly. During the peak of activity surrounding the invasion, the mission temporarily instituted a shift system. Shortly before the inspection, the section's leadership reshuffled portfolios to allow for more even workloads.

Reporting Praised but Washington Readers Would Appreciate More Timely Readouts on Meetings

Washington readers praised USNATO's reporting, specifically highlighting cables on North Atlantic Council meetings and on the run-up to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but some readers complained about delays in reporting on council meetings. OIG's review of reporting cables from February through September 2022 found that timeliness of reporting varied. Some cables on high-level NATO meetings were sent on the day of the meeting or the next working day, but others were not sent until a week or more after the meeting. USNATO sent updates to the Department by email in the interim, but distribution on those emails was limited.

The National Security Strategy, issued by the White House in October 2022, identified NATO and the United States' other alliances and partnerships as "our most important strategic asset and an indispensable element contributing to international peace and stability." In addition, 2 FAM 113.1c(15) assigns chiefs of mission the responsibility for reporting on the activities of international organizations. Stakeholders and Political Section staff members told OIG that competing responsibilities and the large number of staff who must clear on reporting contributed to the delays. Nevertheless, delays in transmission of cables on North Atlantic Council meetings leave many consumers at the Department, at embassies, and in the interagency community without timely information on developments there, making it important for USNATO to address the issue.

Recommendation 4: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should identify the reasons for delays in transmission of cables on North Atlantic Council meetings and implement a plan to improve the timeliness of these reports. (Action: USNATO)

Public Diplomacy

OIG reviewed the Public Diplomacy Section's leadership, strategic planning and reporting, resource knowledge management, grants administration, media, social media, and strategic content development. Overall, OIG found the section met Department standards and guidance. OIG determined that the section's efforts were in line with the mission's IMS goals supporting enhanced U.S.-NATO engagement and encouragement of audiences in NATO countries and beyond to be more supportive of the alliance, especially since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.¹³ Additionally, OIG noted that the section's American officers sit near the Political

¹³ Consistent with the narrower and specialized targeted audiences of a multilateral mission, the section did not oversee any American Spaces and had a limited exchange program. American Spaces are Department operated or supported public diplomacy facilities, providing digitally enhanced physical platforms for effective engagement with foreign audiences in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Section in a controlled access area, which promoted a cohesive focus on policy between the two sections. Although this arrangement separated the officers from the section's LE staff, OIG observed section leadership providing clear direction to the small but well-trained LE staff press and program teams.

OIG also found that the section's coordination with the tri-mission's other two Public Diplomacy Sections was productive and positive, facilitated through twice-weekly coordination calls at the section head or deputy level and many informal exchanges at other levels. One of the weekly calls, moderated by the regional Media Hub,¹⁴ focused on the media and helped coordinate the three sections' efforts in this area, given the many U.S. government high-level visitors to Brussels and the fast pace of U.S. government officials' messaging on the war in Ukraine.

Section Assisted the Ambassador in Press and Public Engagements to Support Mission' Policy Agenda

OIG determined that the Public Diplomacy Section successfully assisted the Ambassador to conduct extensive press and public engagements. The section's press team used its prominent contacts, with help from the Media Hub, to arrange timely and relevant interview opportunities for the Ambassador. For example, the Ambassador had three back-to-back interviews with major U.S. and European television channels immediately prior to the NATO Defense Ministerial and U.S.-hosted Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in October 2022. Just days before those interviews, the press team also arranged an interview with a major pan-Arab network to reach new and NATO-skeptical audiences. During these interviews, which reached millions of viewers, the Ambassador articulated the U.S. government position on unifying the alliance in support of a strong, independent Ukraine. Similarly, the section's program team supported the Ambassador in public remarks at an event with two leading think-tank figures on Trans-Atlantic security, drawing in 100 high-level guests and journalists.

Spotlight on Success: Innovative Social Media Products Help Combat Russia's Disinformation, Advance Mission Goals

USNATO's Public Diplomacy Section responded to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine with innovative visual social media products to combat Russia's disinformation, educate skeptical audiences about NATO, and reinforce the transatlantic alliance. Staff worked quickly to get U.S. government messaging out ahead of Russia's disinformation and counter Russia's narratives. For example, in one video posted on Twitter and Instagram, the section combined images and statistics to show how U.S. and European Union sanctions were in fact crippling Russia's economy, debunking Russia's disinformation that their economy was holding strong. The section also advanced mission diversity goals through messaging by its female ambassador in ways that demonstrated that national security was not gender specific. This messaging also paired her with the Deputy Secretary and with the U.S. Ambassador to Germany (both women). Additionally, the section extended staff resources by collaborating

¹⁴ The regional Media Hub, located in Embassy Brussels, is under the Bureau of Global Public Affairs' International Media Engagement Division. It serves as a regional press office engaging on specific issues with regionally focused media outlets and journalists. It also serves as the office of the Department's Russian language spokesperson.

with prominent American influencers to co-create products about NATO's role in global security and then post them jointly for more reach. The section shared its innovative creations with other posts and Washington policymakers through a reporting cable. Audience engagement figures across USNATO's social media sites speak to the success of the section's efforts: 239,000 on Twitter, 193,000 on Facebook, and 169,000 on Instagram. The figures were the highest among missions in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs region in 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OIG provided a draft of this report to Department stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings and recommendations. OIG issued the following recommendations to the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The mission's complete response can be found in Appendix B.

Recommendation 1: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should schedule mission-wide drills when the Ambassador is present and able to participate, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

Management Response: In its April 26, 2023, response, the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty scheduled mission-wide drills when the Ambassador was present and able to participate, in accordance with Department guidance.

Recommendation 2: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should implement a structured First- and Second-Tour professional development program in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

Management Response: In its April 26, 2023., response, the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization concurred with this recommendation.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty implemented a structured First- and Second-Tour professional development program in accordance with Department guidance.

Recommendation 3: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training program on how NATO works and how to negotiate in NATO committees. (Action: USNATO, in coordination with EUR and FSI)

Management Response: In its April 26, 2023, the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization concurred with this recommendation. The mission noted an estimated completion date of October 2023.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty developed and implemented a training program on how NATO works and how to negotiate in NATO committees.

Recommendation 4: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should identify the reasons for delays in transmission of cables on North Atlantic Council meetings and implement a plan to improve the timeliness of these reports. (Action: USNATO)

Management Response: In its April 26, 2023, response, the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization neither agreed nor disagreed with this recommendation. The mission noted that it concurred that timely reporting on North Atlantic Council meetings is essential. Additionally, the mission reported that in September 2022, the newly arrived Political Counselor implemented changes to streamline drafting and clearance process, which has ensured the prompt transmission of key North Atlantic Council readouts while also improving work-life balance for section personnel.

OIG Reply: OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty identified the reasons for delays in transmission of cables on North Atlantic Council meetings and implemented a plan to improve the timeliness of these reports.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

Title	Name	Arrival Date
Chiefs of Mission:		
Ambassador	Julianne C. Smith	1/2022
Deputy Chief of Mission	Richard A. Holtzapple	9/2021
Chiefs of Sections:		
Management	Steven P. Adams-Smith	8/2021
Political	Mark A. Tervakoski	8/2022
Public Affairs	Katherine L. Gilez-Diaz	7/2021
Regional Security	Julia E. Power Sweeney	8/2022
Other Agencies:		
Department of Defense		
Office of the Defense Advisor	Rachel A. Ellehuus	2/2022

Source: Generated by OIG from data provided by Embassy Brussels.

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

This inspection was conducted from August 29, 2022, to January 11, 2023, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2020 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspections Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

Objectives and Scope

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved and U.S. interests are accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy; and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; and whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

Methodology

OIG used a risk-based approach to prepare for this inspection. OIG conducted portions of the inspection remotely and relied on audio- and video-conferencing tools in addition to in-person interviews with Department and other personnel. OIG also reviewed pertinent records; circulated surveys and compiled the results; and reviewed the substance of this report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, and organizations affected by the review. OIG used professional judgment and analyzed physical, documentary, and testimonial evidence to develop its findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations.

APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



UNITED STATES PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
ON THE
NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

DATE: April 26, 2023

FROM: Ambassador Julianne Smith, Chief of Mission, USNATO

TO: OIG – Arne Baker, Acting Assistant Inspector General for Inspections

SUBJECT: Response to All Recommendations from ***Draft OIG Report: Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*** (originally transmitted March 23, 2023); and Response to Recommendations 5 and 15 from ***Draft OIG Report: Inspection of Embassy Brussels, Belgium*** (originally transmitted March 10, 2023; and revised with Recommendations transferred to action for USNATO on April 3, 2023)

The U.S. Mission to NATO has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report ***Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization***. We provide the following comments in response to the four recommendations provided by OIG:

OIG Recommendation 1:

Recommendation 1: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should schedule mission-wide drills when the Ambassador is present and able to participate, in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

Mission Response: USNATO concurs with the recommendation that it schedule drills to ensure the Ambassador is able to participate in accordance with Department guidance. Mission disagrees with the report's text suggesting that the mission deliberately "scheduled drills while the Ambassador was away from the mission or out of the country", and mission notes that the Ambassador is outside of the mission between one-third and two-thirds of official working hours

of any typical week due to a heavy schedule of official travel, and the fact that all official NATO meetings are held in Allied spaces outside the mission. The Ambassador did promote emergency preparedness through participation in NATO-wide exercises. Mission appreciates, in any case, the report calling attention to Department guidance, which we understand to be a reference to 12 FAH-1 H-765.2 that states that “COM/PO participation is required in at least 50 percent” of the four mandatory semi-annual post-wide drills (bomb, duck and cover, fire, and movement to safehaven). In order to meet the requirement mission now schedules drills specifically coordinated with the COM’s schedule to ensure a minimum of 50 percent participation, and the Ambassador has participated in all three such drills held since the end of the inspection. (Timeline for completion: Completed.)

OIG Recommendation 2:

Recommendation 2: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should implement a structured First- and Second-Tour professional development program in accordance with Department guidance. (Action: USNATO)

Mission Response: The U.S. Mission to NATO concurs with this recommendation. Mission notes that it already provides structured mentoring of mission’s FAST personnel in the form of senior level supervision within their sections, and with the DCM serving as the rating officer for all untenured officers and specialists. Mission has also revived the mission’s structured FAST program through a series of steps: 1) Mission has designated a USNATO FAST program coordinator to organize programs and coordinate FAST professional development events with their counterparts at the US Mission to the EU and the Embassy to Brussels; 2) DCM and the newly designated USNATO FAST coordinator met with the FAST coordinators of the other two missions to plan upcoming events; 3) In February, USNATO hosted the Tri-Mission FAST group for briefings on the work of NATO; 4) Tri-Mission FAST coordinators agreed to restore virtual options even for in-person events to the extent practicable, to allow for broader participation wherever the events are held; 5) Tri-Mission FAST coordinators agreed to coordinate whenever possible with the regular meeting schedule of NATO committees (as well as other constraints such as Consular hours) to promote greater accessibility for FAST events; 6) USNATO has established more flexible transportation options between NATO Headquarters and the downtown missions to facilitate participation; and 7) USNATO Front Office holds regular events on professional development with a

mix that are either targeted at FAST personnel (a session on EERs was held in March with the DCM, and a subsequent on bidding will be held in June) or open to FAST participation, such as monthly coffee mornings with the Ambassador. (Timeline for completion: Completed.)

OIG Recommendation 3:

Recommendation 3: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and the Foreign Service Institute, should develop and implement a training program on how NATO works and how to negotiate in NATO committees. (Action: USNATO, in coordination with EUR and FSI)

Mission Response: Mission concurs with this recommendation and is developing a robust training program for incoming and current political section personnel. USNATO will recommend that all incoming political officers take FSI's in-person International Negotiation: Art and Skill course (PP501). USNATO will also work with EUR and FSI to create a one- or two-day workshop that can be delivered in Brussels to prepare officers specifically for the complexities of NATO committee work and negotiations, with the aim to pilot this workshop in the fall of 2023, geared to newly arriving officers, but also available to current staff, including those from other agencies, many of whom also engage in committee negotiations. These formal training opportunities will be complemented by an informal professional development program to enhance negotiation skills across the Mission, including by having new officers backbench more experienced colleagues in committee negotiations before being asked to sit in the U.S. chair and arranging outside speakers on negotiation. A first event was held in March with former NATO Deputy Secretary General, Under Secretary of State, and U.S. nuclear arms negotiator Rose Gottemoeller. (Timeline to completion: October 2023.)

OIG Recommendation 4:

Recommendation 4: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should identify the reasons for delays in transmission of cables on North Atlantic Council meetings and implement a plan to improve the timeliness of these reports. (Action: USNATO)

Mission Response: The U.S. Mission to NATO concurs that timely reporting on North Atlantic Council (NAC) meetings is essential. In September 2022, the newly arrived Political Counselor implemented changes to streamline the drafting and clearance process, which has ensured the prompt transmission of key NAC readouts while also improving work-life balance for section personnel. Mission therefore believes it has already addressed this recommendation, which was not raised with the Ambassador, DCM, or Political Section leadership during the inspection. Mission notes that the inspection report refers to the timeliness of reporting prior to these changes (February to September 2022). Mission has done a comprehensive analysis of mission reporting from September 2022 through March 2023. This analysis found the section reported to Washington within 24 hours on all priority NAC meetings via either front channel cable, or an emailed “Quick Hits” sent to Department and relevant interagency counterparts. The inspection report describes distribution of the Quick Hit emails as “limited”, but the mission tailors the recipient lists of each report to include all relevant action offices on the relevant topics, and they always include EUR/RPM, OSD Policy, and the NSC. Furthermore, all the Political Section’s front channel cables with full distribution following up these emailed Quick Hits were transmitted within an average of 2.39 workdays. (Timeline to Completion: Completed.)

(NOTE: Mission observes that the OIG report also noted that political section “staff members had a heavy workload” and faced “long workdays even during relatively quiet periods” and that “the Mission’s workload increased significantly with Russia’s February 2024 invasion of Ukraine.” USNATO believes the current practice of reporting within hours of each NAC via “Quick Hits,” followed within two working days as the standard by cable, is the best way to report in a timely manner without requiring drafters, clearers and approvers to extend their workdays further and exacerbating work-life challenges. In our surveyed period covering 28 work weeks from September to March, there were 73 NACs, or just under three NACs a week, so asking staff to stay late to draft, clear and approve front channel cables would mean longer hours for all concerned on average three days a week every week – just for NAC reporting. END NOTE.)

ABBREVIATIONS

DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
DEIA	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
FAST	First- and Second-Tour
IMS	Integrated Mission Strategy
LE	Locally Employed
USEU	U.S. Mission to the European Union
USNATO	U.S. Mission to NATO

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