

Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

U.S. Foreign Policy in North Africa and the Middle East

Speaker Bios

Keynote

Lynn Roche

*Director for Press & Public Diplomacy,
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs*



Lynn Roche, a member of the Senior Foreign Service, joined the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs as Director for Press & Public Diplomacy in August 2017. Prior to this, in Washington, she held assignments in Public Diplomacy & Public Affairs in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, (2015-2017), as well as the Bureau of African Affairs (2009-12). Overseas she served in public diplomacy positions in Havana, Cuba (2012-2015), Guadalajara, Mexico (2004-2008), and Lima, Peru (2001-2004). She was the Political Counselor in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (1998-2001), a Consular and Economic Officer in Hong Kong (1995-97), and the Consular and General Services Officer in Tbilisi, Georgia (1992-94). She also held a Senior Fellowship at the Atlantic Council in Washington (2008-09). Ms. Roche graduated from the College of William & Mary, and earned a Master in International & Public Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh.

Jamie Sharp

*Deputy Director, Office of Global Educational Programs, Bureau of
Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State*



Jamie oversees the cooperative agreement process, budget planning and implementation, and advises on matters regarding student mobility, internationalization, exchange programming, and U.S. Higher Education. Jamie previously served as the Senior Program Officer in the Near East Programs Branch in the Office of Academic Exchanges, managing the Fulbright Program budget for programs in the Middle East and North Africa, the Bureau's cooperative agreement with AMIDEAST to administer the Fulbright Foreign Student Program for the region, and Fulbright Programs in Egypt. Jamie has also managed a handful undergraduate programs for the Middle East and North Africa and Pakistan during her tenure at the U.S. Department of State. Prior to joining the Department in 2010, Jamie managed special programs for students and scholars in the Middle East and South Asia at the Institute of International Education and the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars. A former Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Jamie has taught English courses focusing on U.S. culture, English Literature, and pronunciation to secondary students in Germany. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan, with Bachelor's degrees in English Language and German Language and Literature.

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SESSION 1 - U.S. Foreign Policy in North Africa and the Middle East

Brinille E. Ellis

*Deputy Director, Office of Public Diplomacy,
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs*



Brinille E. Ellis serves as a Deputy Director for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy. Prior to this, she served as the Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania. She joined the Foreign Service in 1997 as a diplomatic security officer and became a Foreign Service Officer in 2002. Brinille has also served in Senegal, Haiti, Brussels, Turkey, and in Pakistan. In Washington, she served in the Bureau of European Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy and in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Policy Office. Brinille holds a dual B.A. degree in Literature & Rhetoric and in French from Binghamton University, an MPA from The George Washington University and has studied at The Sorbonne in Paris. Brinille speaks French, Italian, Turkish and Urdu. She is a native New Yorker and enjoys fine art photography, American art history and decorative arts.

Tasha Solomon

*Foreign Affairs Officer, Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs,
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs*



Tasha Solomon is a Foreign Affairs Officer in the Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs where she covers consular and law enforcement issues, human rights and religious affairs, post management issues, legislative affairs, and health. In 2015, she began her State Department career as a Graduate Intern in the Political-Military Section of the Office of Iraqi Affairs before joining the Office of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in 2016 as a Liaison Support Officer. She has a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations with a Middle East and North Africa Concentration from the University of Alabama and a Master of Arts from George Mason University in Middle East and Islamic Studies in 2017. She is also a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholar and National Security Education Program Boren Fellow, completing both programs in Amman, Jordan.

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SESSION 1 - U.S. Foreign Policy in North Africa and the Middle East

Rachel Rubin

Press and Public Diplomacy Officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs



Rachel Rubin serves as the Press and Public Diplomacy Officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. In this role she supports educational and cultural exchange programs for Israelis and Palestinians including the Fulbright program, the YES student exchange program, the International Visitor Leadership program. Rachel also serves as the Press Officer for Israel and the Palestinian Territories, supporting the State Department Spokesperson and other officials in addressing related policies on behalf of the Department. In addition to her work on Israel/Palestinian Territories Rachel supports region-wide public diplomacy programs and press initiatives tackling policy priorities. Prior to joining the State Department Rachel did a Fulbright Research grant in Marrakech and a Critical Language Enhancement Award in Fez, Morocco. She also conducted research, studied and worked in Tunisia and Egypt, and received an Aramex Social Entrepreneurship Award which she carried out in Amman, Jordan. She received a master's degree in International Affairs from the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, and an undergraduate degree in French and Organizational Studies from Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. Rachel is fluent in French and proficient in Arabic.

Christopher Polillo

Public Diplomacy Desk Officer for North Africa, Office of Public Diplomacy, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs



Since August 2020, Chris Polillo has served as a Public Diplomacy Desk Officer in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs covering the five countries of North Africa. Before that, he was the Deputy Consul General in Florence, Italy, where he advocated for Americans and their interests in central Italy and the independent Republic of San Marino. Chris has also served in Colombia, Afghanistan, and in Tijuana, Mexico, where he assisted U.S. citizens who found themselves in trouble or in jail. Prior to joining the State Department Chris was a Public Defender in Walton County, Georgia, and worked at a large law firm in Illinois. He has a BS in History from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a JD from the Southern Illinois University School of Law. Chris is married with four children, two dogs, and a cat.

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SESSION 2 – U.S. Foreign Policy in Morocco



Ryan Palsrok

Consular Section Chief, U.S. Mission to Morocco

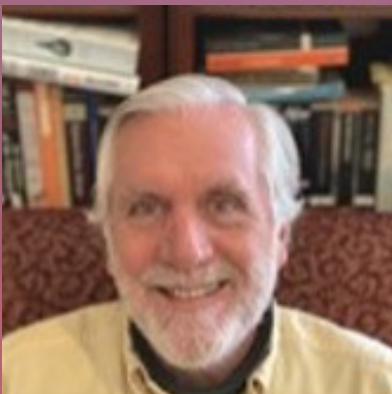
Ryan Palsrok is Consular Section Chief for the U.S. Mission to Morocco. Prior to this position, he served as the Chief of Immigrant Visas and American Citizen Services in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and as the Assistant Director of the New York Passport Agency from 2012-2015. Having worked for the State Department since 2004, he also previously managed American Citizen Services in Beijing, China and spent six years in the Department's Office of Children's Issues. In 2009, Ryan launched a public affairs campaign for the Department aimed at better preparing U.S. college students for a safe experience overseas. Originally from Hawaii, Ryan is a graduate of Middlebury College in Vermont.



Amanda Zeidan

Political Officer, U.S. Embassy Rabat

Amanda Zeidan is a second tour Political Officer in Rabat, Morocco. Amanda focuses on Human Rights. Before arriving in Morocco, Amanda served in Guinea, Conakry for her first tour. She speaks, Arabic, French, and Turkish. Amanda is a Rangel Fellow with previous experience working for the Carter Center, Department of the Treasury, and Senator Harry Reid. She was inspired to apply for the Foreign Service during her time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Azerbaijan.



Stephen Weeks

Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Rabat

Stephen Weeks is the Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, responsible for the professional and academic exchange programs, cultural heritage preservation, university partnerships, and other portfolios. He joined the Foreign Service in 2008, and in addition to Morocco, has served in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, and Trinidad. He speaks French and Arabic. Prior to becoming a Diplomat, Steve worked as a freelance writer, editor, and media consultant in New York, Washington, and Paris. He worked on the staff of several national and local publications, and his journalism has been published in The New York Times, City Journal, Spy magazine, and other magazines and newspapers. A native New Yorker, Steve is married and has three children.

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SESSION 3 – ALUMNI

Jenny Abamu

*Public Diplomacy Information Officer,
U.S. Consulate General Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*



Jenny Abamu is a U.S. Diplomat currently serving as the Public Diplomacy Information Officer for the U.S. Consulate General in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Jenny joined the U.S. Foreign Service from WAMU, the local NPR news station in Washington, D.C. There she worked as an education reporter, appearing on shows and producing local and national investigations. Her work has been nominated for multiple awards. She came to WAMU from EdSurge, where she had been a reporter focusing on K-12 education technology and was also the co-host of the podcast EdSurge On Air. She previously worked at Columbia University's EdLab in the Development and Research Group. In New York, Jenny also worked at NY1 News Channel as a field journalist, researcher, planner, and an overnight assignment editor. A native of Dallas, Texas, she has a bachelor's degree from Baylor University, and a master's in International and Comparative Education from Columbia University's Teacher's College.

Salman Haji

*Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer in the Public Affairs Section
at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers*



Salman Haji is the Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer in the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers. His portfolio covers youth exchange and English programs as well as alumni support. He was most recently on his first tour as Vice Consul in Kingston, Jamaica. Prior to starting with the Department of State, Salman completed his graduate studies at American University and Koc University in Istanbul, Turkey. He speaks Arabic, French, Russian and Turkish and completed NSLI-Y and CLS programs in Egypt, Morocco and Jordan and studied at Sciences Po in France through a Gilman scholarship. Salman is originally from Tanzania but grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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Theresa Gagnon

Gilman Program Officer, USA Study Abroad, Office of Global Educational Programs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Ms. Theresa Gagnon serves as a Program Officer in the USA Study Abroad Branch of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. She is responsible for managing the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and is the USA Study Abroad Branch's liaison for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Theresa is a Civil Service Officer and has been with the Department of State since 2010. Prior to joining ECA, she was a senior analyst in the Strategic Planning and Analysis Division of the Office of Inspector General. She previously worked on strategic planning, evaluation, and resource management issues in the Bureau of Budget and Planning, and helped implement recommendations from the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review during her temporary service in the office of the Deputy Secretary of State. Before joining the Department, Theresa taught English language and American culture in rural Spain through the Auxiliares de Conversación Program, managed by the Spanish Ministry of Education. She is originally from Seattle, WA, and is a graduate of the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University, where she spent her junior year studying Latin American Politics and Spanish language in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

SESSION 4 - NETWORKING SESSION

[Click here](#) to see Networking Session Participants.

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SESSION 5 - CAREERS AT STATE

George Sibley

Diplomat in Residence (DIR) for the Mid-Atlantic Region



George Sibley is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service currently serving as the Diplomat in Residence (DIR) for the Mid-Atlantic Region (North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia). As DIR, he helps identify and guide a diverse cross-section of Americans who want to represent our country by pursuing career or educational opportunities with the U.S. Department of State. Prior to this role he served as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon. He has also served in India, Iraq, Madagascar, Jordan, Nepal, and Indonesia, as well as several tours at State Department headquarters. Mr. Sibley received a B.A. in biology and religious philosophy from Oberlin College in 1977 and in 2002 earned a Masters of Public Policy from Princeton University.

Abigail Barnes

Recruiter, Consular Fellows Program



Abigail Barnes is the Consular Fellows Program (CFP) recruiter. She is a Virginia native and studied International Relations and French at the College of William & Mary. Her first experience with the Department of State was interning for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, where she analyzed human resources management policy reform to provide policy recommendations. She developed an interest in learning about languages and people from completing a five-year Spanish immersion program and a visit to Russia. She enjoys trying new things, and speaks intermediate French, and elementary Russian and Spanish.