

# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 1: Life as a New Foreign Service Officer



**Taylor Cofield**

*Political Officer, U.S. Embassy Tanzania,  
Bureau of African Affairs*

Taylor Cofield currently serves as a Political Officer with the U.S. Department of State and is completing her first diplomatic assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where she focuses on human rights, gender, trafficking in persons, and refugee issues in the political section. Most recently, she held a graduate fellowship at the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, where she helped support Burma's political and economic reforms through the lens of women, peace, and security. In 2018, she was also a fellow in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, where she focused on advancing U.S. foreign policy in the Arabian Peninsula, with an emphasis on Yemen and the UAE. Taylor is a Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellow and a national Harry S. Truman Scholar, as well as an alumna of the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship for Arabic. She earned a master's degree in international affairs from Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government and Public Service and a bachelor's degree in political science and peace studies from the University of Missouri where she was also a track and field student-athlete.

#### Room 2: Transitioning from an Action Officer to a Leader in Foreign Policy



**Hermes Grullon**

*Watch Officer, Operations Center, Executive Secretariat*

Hermes Grullon is a Foreign Service Officer since 2015. He currently serves as a Watch Officer in the Department of State's 24/7 Operations Center. He previously served as the sole Political Officer in Embassy Djibouti and as a Consular Officer in Embassy Managua. He is an alumnus of the Pickering Fellowship, Rangel Scholars Program, and Gilman Scholarship Program. As a first-generation college student, he completed his BA at DePauw University and his MA at Johns Hopkins SAIS. He is from Brooklyn, New York, born to Dominican parents. He and his wife, Audrey Lopez, have a 16-month old daughter, Aaliyah.



# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 3: From Gilman to Rangel to the State Department



**Brittany Hardy**

*Public Diplomacy Desk Officer, Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Bureau of African Affairs*

Hailing from Arizona by way of Gary, Indiana, Brittany Hardy graduated from Princeton University in June 2014. She majored in Religion and minored in African American Studies and Spanish. She graduated with her Master of Public Diplomacy from the University of Southern California in May 2016. She has been in the State Department since September 2016 and has served in Rio de Janeiro and Nogales. She is currently a Public Diplomacy Desk Officer for the Bureau of African Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

#### Room 4: Careers in Public Diplomacy and Life as a Foreign Service Officer



**Michael Hayes**

*Youth Engagement Assistant, Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Bureau of African Affairs*

Michael Hayes is a Public Diplomacy Officer who recently served in the Immigrant Visa section of the U.S. Consulate General Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Prior to serving in Ciudad Juarez, he worked in the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy New Delhi where he focused on Nonimmigrant Visas and the Embassy's Consular Information Unit. Previously, Michael also worked as a fellow in the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Namibia.

Before joining the U.S. Department of State, he worked as a management consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton in Washington, D.C. Michael holds a bachelor's degree in Communications from Clark Atlanta University, a Master of International Affairs from Columbia University, and a Master of Public Policy from Sciences Po in Paris, France.

Michael was born in the Bay Area, CA.



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## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 5: Conflict Prevention and Stabilization Work



Georgia Jewett

*Stabilization Advisor, Office of African Affairs, Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations*

Georgia Jewett is a Stabilization Advisor with the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations (CSO). As a member of CSO's West Africa team, Georgia covers the Lake Chad Basin and manages CSO's programs and partnerships in Nigeria. Since March, Georgia has been virtually deployed to U.S. Embassy Abuja to support data analysis and conflict reporting. In 2019, Georgia deployed to Niger where she led development of Embassy Niamey's interagency stabilization strategy. She also coordinated the United States' support to Niger's defection and rehabilitation program. Previously, Georgia worked for Creative Associates International, an international NGO, in the education in conflict division. She is also a Teach for America corps member. Georgia holds an MA in international relations and international economics with a concentration in conflict management from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and graduated valedictorian from the University of Vermont with a BA in political science.



# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 6: Careers in Public Diplomacy and Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at State



Liz Liu

*Special Coordinator for the Young African Leaders Initiative, Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Bureau of African Affairs*

Liz is a Public Diplomacy-coned Foreign Service Officer currently serving in the Africa Bureau's Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (AF/PDPA) as Special Coordinator for the Young African Leaders Initiative, the U.S. government's signature effort to invest in the next generation of young African leaders. In August 2021, she will move on to serve as Senior ASEAN Affairs Officer in the East Asia Pacific Bureau. She is also currently serving as Vice President of the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association, a State Department employee affinity group (EAG) representing over 800 members. In this role, she helps lead AAFAA's 15-member executive board and partners with fellow EAGs to promote professional development opportunities and advocate for crosscutting diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to create a more equitable and welcoming workplace for all Department personnel. Liz previously served in AF/PDPA as the Assistant Cultural Coordinator and as a Press Officer in the Bureau or International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Her overseas assignments include Taiwan and the Philippines. Liz holds an MA in International Affairs at the University of California, San Diego, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Florida. Prior to the Foreign Service, she served as an AmeriCorps volunteer at a Washington, D.C.-based NGO. She is married with two children, Sebastian and Olivia.



# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 7: Advancing Foreign Policy through Public Diplomacy Programs in Africa

Li Ping Lo

*Public Diplomacy Desk Officer for Southern Affairs and Nigeria, Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Bureau of African Affairs*

Li Ping joined the State Department's Africa Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in September 2019 as the Public Diplomacy Desk Officer responsible for Southern Africa and Nigeria. She supports eleven countries, assisting Embassies and Consulates with programming, resources, budgets, and synching Washington foreign policy priorities.

Previously Li Ping served as the Cultural Affairs Officer in Addis Ababa where she conceptualized, developed, and implemented a holistic strategy to strengthen higher education partnerships among American and Ethiopian universities. As the Cultural Affairs Officer in Karachi, she oversaw four university partnerships and developed a new partnership with the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and three universities in Quetta, Balochistan. Li Ping also oversaw key Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation grants in Ethiopia and in Karachi's consular district, strengthened alumni engagement, developed new American Spaces, and promoted English Language learning opportunities. She served as a Consular Officer in Johannesburg and Mumbai.

Prior to joining the Foreign Service in 2009, Li Ping worked in Hong Kong for 12 years at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center (ASHKC) and Hang Lung Properties Limited. Li Ping was born in Taiwan and immigrated to the United States at the age of four with her family. A native of Northern Virginia, she earned a BA in East Asian Studies from the College of William and Mary.



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## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 8: How Reporting and Analysis Support Policy Development



**Ron Rhinehart**

*Program Officer for Africa, Office of Analytic Outreach,  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research*

Ron Rhinehart is a Foreign Service Officer currently serving as Program Officer for Africa in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research's Office of Analytic Outreach. He is responsible for bringing non-governmental experts together with analysts and policymakers throughout the Executive Branch and Intelligence Community on priority issues for Sub-Saharan Africa. He has previously served as a Narcotics Affairs Officer at Embassy Kabul, as a Consular Officer at Consulate General Rio de Janeiro, and as a Political-Economic Officer at Consulate General Lagos. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, he was a sales and finance executive in the software industry. He has an undergraduate degree from San Jose State University and an MBA from Santa Clara University.



# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 9: Pickering Fellowship



**Sammie Tafoya**

*Pickering Fellow, U.S. Embassy Khartoum*

Sammie Tafoya is from Siloam Springs, Arkansas. There Sammie completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Arkansas with majors in Political Science, Journalism, African and African American Studies, and a minor in anthropology. With support from the Gilman Program, Sammie was able to create a documentary thesis while studying abroad in South Africa. Throughout this process Sammie worked with the Amy Foundation and Sunday Times while she interviewed academics, government officials, citizens across multiple provinces, and leaders in South Africa's revolution to end Apartheid. The practice of interviewing various segments of a country's population to inform her analysis led Sammie to pursue a career in the Foreign Service. After graduating, Sammie moved to Washington, D.C., to work on West and East African programs for Search for Common Ground. In 2019, Sammie was selected as a Thomas R. Pickering Fellow. Since then she has worked on sanctions and human rights portfolios on the State Department's Iran Desk, drafted legislation on Iraq and Red Sea issues for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, worked on the climate and human rights portfolios for Embassy Khartoum, and graduated from American University with a MA in International Affairs with a focus on U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security. In September she will begin diplomatic training for her career in the Foreign Service.



# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 10: State Department Exchange and Study Abroad Programs



**Amelia VanderLaan**

*Outreach Officer, USA Study Abroad, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*

Amelia VanderLaan is a Foreign Service Officer currently serving as the USA Study Abroad Outreach Officer in the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. She previously served as the Assistant Public Affairs Officer at U.S. Embassy Cyprus from 2017-19 managing exchange and cultural programs along with outreach initiatives. From 2015-17 she served in Canada heading the Investment Visa section of the U.S. Consulate in Toronto. Prior to the Foreign Service, she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in Sinop, Turkey, for one year. She also advised students on pursuing international opportunities when she worked as a fellowships advisor at Smith College, and served as a Teaching Fellow at Athens College. Amelia graduated from Smith College with a BA in Government. She received her MA from the University of Athens in Southeast European Studies. She speaks Greek, Turkish, and Spanish.

#### Room 11: Work as a Political Officer



**Kristin Mencer**

*Political Unit Chief, U.S. Embassy in Tanzania*

Kristin Mencer joined the Foreign Service in 2010. She is currently serving as the Political Unit Chief in the Political/Economic Section at the U.S. Embassy in Dar Es Salaam. Prior to joining the team in Dar, Kristin served as a Political Officer at the U.S. Embassy in London, where she covered a range of policy issues including NATO, cyber security, space security, and defense trade controls. Before London, Kristin served in the Bureau of European Affairs on the NATO desk and at the Embassies in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and Bridgetown, Barbados. Kristin is a graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C., and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. She is a native of Tennessee.