

U.S. Foreign Service: On the Front Lines in Egypt

by [Michael Singh \(/experts/michael-singh\)](/experts/michael-singh)

Feb 3, 2011

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Singh \(/experts/michael-singh\)](/experts/michael-singh)

Michael Singh is the Lane-Swig Senior Fellow and managing director at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

Michael Singh describes the function of the Foreign Service in protecting the well-being of U.S. citizens in Egypt.

While we debate the intentions of President Mubarak, the attitude of the military, and the likely place of various groups and figures in a successor government, many in Cairo worry about sounds of gunfire outside their windows and reports of looters in their neighborhoods. Their friends and relatives inside and outside Egypt struggle to get information on their safety and whereabouts, frustrated by the interruption of email, mobile phones, and other means of communication.

Looking after the welfare of Americans abroad -- particularly during a crisis -- is one of the core missions of the State Department and a foremost responsibility of U.S. diplomats stationed overseas. U.S. diplomats are rarely noticed, much less celebrated, but their service and sacrifices deserve the American people's recognition.

When a crisis such as this erupts, the local U.S. Embassy will scramble to understand and report to Washington on events and offer its advice on U.S. policy. But it will also initiate a massive effort to account for and care for American citizens, both those who wish to leave and those who remain behind. Right now at the Cairo airport, our Foreign Service officers and other U.S. personnel are putting in days-long shifts to assist Americans who want to leave Egypt. The same officers who are responding to Washington's demands for analysis of opposition figures and the latest reports on protests in Tahrir Square are also comforting weary travelers, serving them food and water, and packing them on to evacuation flights.

Among those the officers have seen off are their own families, whom the State Department yesterday ordered to depart Egypt. The farewells are hasty -- families must leave quickly once the order is given -- and sometimes do not take place at all if the employee is needed elsewhere. The families do not know when they will be able to return, if at all, and must make accommodations for housing and schools on the fly. When their families are long gone, the officers stay on to perform vital work to advance U.S. national security.

The experience of the officers in Cairo is hardly unique -- many diplomats are stationed at embassies and consulates overseas where conditions do not permit their families to accompany them. Alongside other civilians and of course members of the military, they make daily sacrifices to serve their country. Few Americans are actually aware of what they do, and fewer still will ever have need to call upon their help. But they are there when Americans require, and for Americans stranded in Egypt, that is a deep relief.

Michael Singh is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute and former senior director for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council. ❖

ForeignPolicy.com

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Egypt (/policy-analysis/egypt)