

(U) Management Assistance Report: Additional Guidance Needed to Improve the Oversight and Management of Locally Employed Staff Serving at Remote Missions AUD-MERO-20-40, September 2020

(U) Summary of Review

(U) The Department of State (Department) may evacuate an embassy or consulate to ensure the safety of mission personnel during natural disasters, political instability, or other security threats. In some cases, a temporary evacuation may lead to an indefinite suspension of operations where all U.S. Direct Hire (USDH) staff are ordered to depart post. When this occurs, some overseas missions have established operations in a separate location, often in another country, which is referred to as a “remote mission.” Locally employed (LE) staff remain in the host country and may continue to work, depending on the mission’s needs. Those LE staff are often managed by USDH employees who are based at the remote mission. Two such remote missions are the Yemen Affairs Unit (YAU), which operates from the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and the Venezuelan Affairs Unit (VAU), which operates from the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia. The YAU was established in March 2015, and the VAU was established in August 2019.

(U) During an audit of remote diplomatic missions, which is currently underway, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) identified challenges that remote missions face in overseeing and managing their respective LE staff. Department guidance regarding the oversight and management of LE staff of remote missions is broadly outlined in a 2017 policy issued by the Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Overseas Employment (GTM/OE), titled the *Policy on Employment of Locally Employed (LE) Staff at U.S. Missions in Suspended Operations Status*.¹ Among other issues, the policy addresses how posts should make decisions about the continued employment of LE staff based on the ongoing needs of the mission. For LE staff determined to be nonessential, the policy states that posts may proceed with a Reduction-in-Force (RIF) process to remove them from the Department’s payroll. For example, beginning in April 2018, the YAU implemented two consecutive RIFs that reduced the total number of LE staff in Yemen by approximately 72 percent. Similarly, the VAU initiated its first RIF in March 2019 to streamline its operations and reduce the total number of LE staff in Venezuela by 17 percent.

(U) The 2017 GTM/OE policy was developed, in part, to inform the process for identifying those LE staff required to support the ongoing needs of missions in suspended operations status. Nonetheless, OIG identified areas for improvement. For example, although the policy addresses the need to conduct regular staffing reviews, the policy was not widely distributed to those responsible for directly overseeing LE staff working for remote missions, including USDH supervisors. Although they were not familiar with the policy, the YAU independently initiated a review of all LE staff positions in Yemen in December 2019—4 years after the suspension of operations at Embassy Sana’a. According to YAU officials, the staffing review was intended to improve LE oversight and ensure that work requirements reflected the

¹ (U) At the time the policy was issued, the Bureau of Global Talent Management was known as the Bureau of Human Resources. The name was changed to the Bureau of Global Talent Management in February 2020.

needs of the remote mission. The YAU discovered that 21 LE staff in Yemen were not reporting to work on a regular basis.² Of these, 16 had not been consistently reporting to work for more than 4 years, but they continued to receive their full salaries, collectively totaling more than \$2 million.

(U) OIG also identified areas where additional guidance may be needed. Specifically, OIG found that in the absence of more robust Department-wide guidance, some regional bureau officials independently took steps to preempt known challenges faced by other remote missions when establishing the VAU. For example, officials worked to ensure that LE staff had access to secure IT networks to communicate with their USDH supervisors and conduct Department business following the suspension of operations in Venezuela.³ In addition, regional bureau officials implemented a process to identify temporary employment opportunities at other U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to help LE staff remain gainfully employed. Although the 2017 GTM/OE policy addresses a variety of issues that remote missions may need to consider with regard to oversight of LE staff, the policy lacks detail in some areas and has not been updated to reflect lessons learned or documented best practices. Both the VAU and the YAU would have been better informed and more effective in their approach to managing LE staff had challenges related to LE oversight been addressed in a more in-depth policy document or outlined in more detailed guidance.

(U) Furthermore, OIG found that the Department has no policy in place to address the unique circumstances of renewing security certifications for those LE staff working in support of a remote mission. Specifically, remote missions face challenges renewing security certifications when security conditions in the country have deteriorated and information used to inform background investigations becomes difficult to obtain. For example, it may be difficult to obtain reliable police reports or travel restrictions could prevent LE staff from travelling to the country where the remote mission has been established in order to renew their security certifications. Because of these challenges, some LE security certifications at remote missions have lapsed.

(U) OIG made 14 recommendations in this report that are intended to address known challenges encountered when LE staff must be overseen and managed from a remote mission. On the basis of responses from the Under Secretary for Management, GTM/OE, the YAU, and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security to a draft of this report, OIG considers 13 recommendations resolved pending further action and 1 recommendation unresolved. A synopsis of management's comments to the recommendations offered and OIG's reply follow each recommendation in the Results section of this report. Management's response to a draft of this report received from the Under Secretary for Management, GTM/OE, the YAU,

² (U) According to YAU officials, following the review, the YAU instituted remedial work plans or a reassignment of work requirements, as applicable, for the 21 staff.

³ (U) The need to establish secure alternative e-mail accounts for LE staff who lose access to Department IT systems following a suspension of operations is not explicitly addressed in Department policy.

and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security are reprinted in their entirety in Appendices A through D, respectively.
