

(U) Information Report: Review of Department of State Preparations to Return Personnel to Federal Offices During the Global Coronavirus Pandemic

(U) AUD-MERO-21-22, March 2021

(U) Summary of Review

(U) On June 15, 2020, the Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations, requested that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) review Department of State (Department) plans and procedures for returning employees to offices during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In response, OIG initiated this review to describe (a) the Department's plans and procedures for returning personnel to offices during the COVID-19 pandemic and (b) the methods outlined in those plans and procedures to ensure suitable safety and welfare considerations and precautions have been undertaken on behalf of Department personnel.

(U) On May 1, 2020, the Department announced its "Diplomacy Strong" framework, which is a conditions-based, three-phased plan for returning personnel to the workplace based on authoritative Federal guidelines. To determine whether domestic or overseas Department facilities should move from one reopening phase to another, OIG found that Department officials considered data specific to local conditions, such as healthcare availability, COVID-19 case counts, testing data, and shelter-in-place orders. Specifically, the Department's Coronavirus Data Analytics Team (CDAT) collected data from internal and external sources, such as Johns Hopkins University, to inform reopening decisions. In addition to the framework, Department bureaus issued augmenting guidance that incorporated Executive Office of the President (White House), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) practices and recommendations.

(U) OIG also found that the Department executed the framework to implement suitable safety and welfare considerations and precautions for personnel. Specifically, the Department assessed need and obtained critical resources to protect medical personnel at Department health units worldwide to safeguard personnel returning to worksites. These resources included hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, face coverings, personal protective equipment (PPE), and medical equipment and supplies. Furthermore, the Bureau of Medical Services (MED), Administration, and Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) established protocols when personnel tested positive for COVID-19. These protocols included notifying the Department when an employee tested positive for COVID-19, isolating the infected employee, identifying and quarantining close contacts, and ensuring that facilities were properly disinfected.

(U) The Acting Under Secretary of State for Management's response to a draft of this report is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix E. The Acting Under Secretary noted the "extraordinary resilience" of the Department's workforce during the past year and provided

general comments related to the report findings. A summary of the general comments and OIG's reply is presented in Appendix F.