

EMBASSY DESIGN: SECURITY VS. OPENNESS

T IS ARCHITECTURE IMPORTANT FOR DIPLOMACY? AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN DISCUSSES THE NEED TO BALANCE SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY.

BY JANE C. LOEFFLER, PH.D.

The fearful stance assumed by isolated, walled compounds that represent the United States abroad is cause for concern. At a time when administration officials including Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld are touting the urgent need for better public diplomacy, the State Department is building embassies that do not reflect that agenda. In fact, the inaccessibility of these buildings, coupled with the new standardized design, may be harming efforts to portray America as an open society.

This is regrettable, but not hard to explain. First, while no one argues with the need for increased security, few dare to question the no-risk security imperative that is responsible for the faceless architecture and the competitive craving, evident even among government agencies here in Washington, for bollards and barriers that mark one facility as more strategically important than another. Intentionally or not, the process of securing certain buildings has the effect of making others more vulnerable, both here and abroad. The interconnectedness of individual security decisions is something that has not been adequately assessed.

Late in 2003, for example, having determined that

they could not penetrate America's brand new 26-acre hilltop consular compound in Istanbul (designed by Zimmer Gunsul Frasca in 1999 and completed in 2003), terrorists blew up the more accessible British consulate and a neighboring bank instead. In the aftermath of that incident, which claimed dozens of lives, including that of the British consul general, State Department officials felt vindicated in their decision to abandon the former U.S. consulate located near the British facility and move to the new hilltop compound. Yet according to British press reports, there was no immediate call in the U.K. to abandon existing facilities. As *The Times* reported, "British diplomats would be loath to retreat behind the high walls and suburban locations of their American counterparts." Touring the wreckage in Istanbul, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw declared: "Everybody is now a target."

When viewed from that perspective, providing security is not a piece-by-piece process, but more of a sequential challenge. Once our offices are fortified, businesses and banks become targets, then hotels, or homes, or churches, or even schools. And if by circling our wagons we imperil our allies, then we are only relocating risk, and that is really no long-term solution to the threats we face.

The second reason why the State Department has been pushed into the corner it is now in is because the administration has assumed a unilateral stance and Congress has identified speed and cost as its top priorities. So State finds itself evaluating new embassy projects for their efficiency, not for what they may say about us as a country.

A Friendly and Forward-Looking Presence

It was not long ago that the U.S. foreign building program was celebrated as an apt expression of American democracy. This was especially evident, for example, at the end of World War II in Germany, where the United States embarked on a large-scale postwar building program that featured information centers, libraries and an array of consulates across the country to maximize outreach to the German public. Instead of a single imposing structure designed to proclaim U.S. dominance, there were numerous inviting buildings whose mission was to “sell” democracy and to make America available and attractive to skeptics and former enemies. The architecture was modern, to emphasize a break with the past and embody the transparency embedded in our constitu-

Jane C. Loeffler, Ph.D., is an architectural historian who has written extensively on issues related to the security and design of U.S. embassies. Her book, The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies (1998) is a history of the U.S. foreign building program. For the book and her contributions to international affairs, the U.S. Department of State awarded her its Distinguished Public Service Award in 1998.

Loeffler is a consultant to the Office of the Historian at the State Department and a visiting associate professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. A contributing author to Building Diplomacy (2004) and Embassy Residences in Washington, D.C. (2003), she writes articles on public buildings and public policy. She also serves on the Architect of the Capitol's expert advisory panel reviewing the new proposed master plan for the U.S. Capitol complex.

There were numerous inviting buildings whose mission was to “sell” democracy and to make America available and attractive to skeptics and former enemies.

tional system of government. Congress eagerly funded the program to counter the Soviet information program (described by us as “propaganda”) and to provide visible alternatives to the traditionally designed Soviet facilities known as “Houses of Culture.”

By all accounts the postwar U.S. German program succeeded in its goals. It was but a part of a larger program that built chanceries in key capitals and consulates in many other important cities around the world and created a

high-profile U.S. presence recognized at the time as friendly and forward-looking. In fact, architects who designed those buildings were specifically instructed by the State Department's Office of Foreign Buildings Operations to devise designs that showed mutual respect and created goodwill for the United States. Indian Prime Minister Nehru was one who complimented the new embassy in New Delhi (designed by Edward Durell Stone and completed in 1959) for those very achievements at a time when his praise had diplomatic significance.

The heyday of the building program coincided with the height of the Cold War, when the United States wanted to amplify its foreign presence to check Soviet expansion. The department's Office of Foreign Buildings Operations built dozens of new embassies with spaces and programs that reflected the idealistic mood of that era. Prominent and soon-to-be-prominent architects won prized commissions from FBO and created signature structures that won them professional acclaim. Although FBO managed a portfolio of remarkable landmark buildings of great historical significance, it was easy to overlook the architecture from here because the sites were so distant and unfamiliar, there was so little public awareness of the mission of the Foreign Service and so little understanding of diplomatic practice.

Funding for the program was unpredictable after postwar debts and counterpart funds that originally financed it disappeared. When Congress was asked in the early 1960s to pick up the whole tab for the program, members began to bicker over mundane matters and ignored pressing needs. Projects were suspended or

scrapped, funding levels fell and domestic political ambitions became co-mingled with long-term foreign needs to the detriment of the overall program.

Congressman Wayne Hays, D-Ohio, for one, had no confidence in the future of post-colonial Africa, and he translated his own doubts into funding stops that partially explain why Africa received so little attention during the many years in which he held sway over State Department authorizations. He also held up the Dublin chancery project (designed by John Johansen in 1957 but not completed until 1964), ostensibly over objections to the drum-like design that he compared to a “flying saucer.” Intended as a modern version of a Celtic tower, it featured large expanses of floor-to-ceiling glass (and a dry moat). When President Kennedy personally intervened, Hays quickly withdrew his objections and the project moved ahead — but five years behind schedule.

Toward A Profound Makeover

As U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, security became a greater concern at posts abroad, and designs had to meet revised specifications — eliminating, for example, popular features including stilts, glass walls and the sunscreens that had sometimes permitted intruders to scale building facades. The embassy in Nairobi (built in 1971) was one of the plain, unobtrusive and supposedly less vulnerable products of that era.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, when terrorist attacks on U.S. facilities proliferated, America’s foreign presence has been undergoing a profound makeover. The agenda for that makeover was initially outlined in the Inman Report (1985), compiled in the aftermath of suicide bombings of U.S. facilities in Beirut. That report called for a seven-year plan to replace 126 posts (out of 262) with walled compounds, and it proposed stringent new security standards, minimums for setbacks, maximums for windows and other rules that constrained architectural choice. The Crowe Report (1999) reiterated the largely unheeded Inman recommendations 14 years later, after even more devastating terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, neither of which

*Since the 1980s and 1990s,
when terrorist attacks on
U.S. facilities proliferated,
America’s foreign presence
has been undergoing a
profound makeover.*

met Inman standards.

The Crowe accountability reports stressed that safety had to outweigh considerations of convenience, history or symbolism. In a 1999 interview, Admiral William J. Crowe, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and also former U.S. ambassador in London, described how he supervised an emergency drill in which more than 700 embassy employees evacuated the London chancery and assembled quickly

in the middle of Grosvenor Square, only to realize “how stupid that was.” No building can be totally secure, he noted, certainly no building in the middle of London; but he urged the State Department to enact stringent new security rules and military-style drills to better protect its personnel.

Why didn’t the State Department implement more of the Inman recommendations during those 14 years? First, and foremost, because Beirut faded quickly from memory and Congress reneged on promised funds, even cutting State Department appropriations. In addition, even at the highest levels of the department, officials were ambivalent about applying universal standards to buildings everywhere, and reluctant to abandon landmark buildings and center-city locations. These officials recognized the added value that good design can bring to diplomacy.

Adding to the impact of the two critical accountability reports, the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel — established by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as part of the effort to re-examine the role of U.S. missions abroad in the aftermath of the Africa embassy bombings — issued a scathing overview of conditions at U.S. posts in 1999. OPAP panelists called for a reduced U.S. presence and questioned the State Department’s capacity to handle the enormous task of upgrading or replacing its embassies and managing its vast real estate holdings. Instead of calling on Congress to commit funds to needed programs, it recommended abolishing the FBO and urged the president to create a federally chartered government corporation to replace it. The State Department was not interested in that sort of makeover, however.

**The New OBO:
A Radical Shift**

Desperate to rebuild confidence in its operations, and stung by criticism from many directions, Secretary of State Colin Powell named a former military man, retired Major General Charles Williams, to head FBO in 2001. Powell also approved a change in the name of the office to Overseas Buildings Operations and elevated its status within the department, effectively abolishing the former office. It was a signal to Congress that an entirely new agenda and a new way of doing business had been adopted.

As part of his reorganization of the office, Williams adopted a business model, turned to design-build production, and created an Industry Advisory Panel that mostly represents the corporate side of the construction industry. In doing so, he marginalized the existing Architectural Advisory Board, created in 1954 to provide outside expert advice — in an era when modern architecture, not terrorism, was provoking concern. Also, with 89 percent of all primary facilities failing to meet the 100-foot setback requirement, only two of the 25 replacement projects funded after the 1998 bombings completed, a total of 160 replacement facilities to build, and an estimated budget requirement of \$16 billion, Williams turned to the URS Corporation for a standard embassy design. Based on the recent RTKL Associates' scheme for Kampala, the SED prototype comes in three sizes (small, medium and large), all consisting of two parallel building blocks separated by an atrium. With a core preapproved for security, new projects have a 24-month timetable, start to finish. (You can see photos and drawings of these projects at <http://www.state.gov/obo/>.)

This is a radical shift from the earlier production process in which individual architects submitted original designs for each locale, FBO reviewed them, granted approvals, sent jobs out to bid, hired contractors and built them. Every job was custom-tailored. World events and other factors combined to produce a process in which projects took from two to more than 10 years to complete.

Now architects and engineers join large international general contractors as part of design-build teams, and

***The Standard Embassy
Design prototype comes in
three sizes (S, M, L),
all consisting of two parallel
building blocks separated
by an atrium.***

work under such time pressure that contractors are often pouring foundations while architects are still completing working drawings. HOK Architects and J.A. Jones Construction are producing SEDs in Tashkent and Tbilisi, for example. And INTEGRUS Architecture and Caddell Construction have SEDs in production in Conakry, Bamako and Freetown — all varying in size, but based on the “medium” model. For these projects,

costs are fixed once a bid is accepted. The timetable is pre-set. If expenses rise during the construction phase, it is up to builders to find ways to reduce total costs.

This puts the squeeze on the architects, who can see their input compromised or eliminated in the process. It also means that features designed to improve the workplace environment are often eliminated. According to Jerry Winkler, designer for INTEGRUS, architects can still add distinction to such projects through site planning, landscape treatment, choice of cladding materials, and façade organization, including window spacing and size, but, he notes, “The people who are paying the bills are driving the process.” Winkler’s point is significant because it suggests rightfully that the client for embassy construction is not OBO, not even the State Department, but members of Congress who authorize and appropriate the money, and by extension those of us who elect them.

What Congress likes about Williams and his new program others find troubling. Some sort of standardization makes sense in a program devoted to a single building type, and it makes sense, too, to hire contractors with experience, but what many object to is the notion of “a cookie-cutter embassy” that is symbolized by a logo and sells sameness much like Marriott or McDonald’s. If, as one aide to the House International Relations Committee puts it, Congress’ only concern is “to keep embassies from being blown up,” it is unlikely that anyone will prod OBO to make “design excellence” a higher priority.

Why Is Design Important?

Why does design excellence matter? It matters because as the study of architectural history shows, our buildings say a lot about us, and in the arena of international affairs, what we say about ourselves does matter. As

the *Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World* (2003) notes, “public diplomacy helped win the Cold War, and it has the potential to help win the war on terror.” The advisory group, chaired by former U.S. ambassador and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward P. Djerejian, strongly recommends “a new balance between security and engagement, one that prevents U.S. embassies and other facilities from appearing to be ‘crusader castles,’ distant from the local population.” On the same theme, in *Call for Action on Public Diplomacy* (2005), the nonpartisan Public Diplomacy Council outlined a broad program of exchange programs, language training programs and cultural and media programs as essential to the “security and well-being” of the United States. Even the Defense Department has recognized the urgency of the situation with its recent announcement of a \$300-million information program.

It certainly is not easy to operate effective cultural programs out of embassies that look like citadels. As Ambassador Djerejian points out in his report, given the current inaccessibility of embassies and consulates, it will only be possible to reach out to the public through newly established libraries, cultural “corners,” American Studies centers. He proposes the Palazzo Corpi, formerly the U.S. consulate in Istanbul and a building whose future has been the subject of intense debate within the department in recent years, as a prototype for such a center. Sharing that historic building with the Turkish people, he says, and allowing it to be used as a meeting place would be a good first step in building better U.S.-Muslim relations.

It was not long ago that we were dismantling the libraries in U.S. embassies and declaring them unnecessary in the age of the Internet. But while unimaginable amounts of information are now available to those who can access the Web, and the State Department can rely on its Web site to handle many questions and even conduct business that once required personal attention, it is still hard to imagine a world in which place has no meaning. So it seems that it is time to step back and take a long look at the importance of “being there.”

If he were here today, Daniel Patrick Moynihan would second that suggestion. Even before he served as U.S. ambassador to India in the early 1970s, Senator Moynihan, D-N.Y., was a staunch advocate of openness and quality architecture as symbols of America’s

democracy and its commitment to individuality. “Architecture is inescapably a political art, and it reports faithfully for ages to come what the political values of a particular age were,” he declared at a symposium sponsored by the State Department and the General Services Administration in 1999. “Surely ours must be openness and fearlessness in the face of those who hide in the darkness,” Moynihan said. “Precaution, yes. Sequester, no.” Risk was something Moynihan was willing to take on behalf of the ideals that he believed in.

Supreme Court Justice Stephen G. Breyer also spoke at that symposium. He was invited to speak because, as Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Boston, Breyer headed the effort to bring judges, architects, engineers, planners, politicians and members of the general public together as a team to insure best results for Boston’s new award-winning federal courthouse (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, 1998). From that effort, Breyer learned first-hand the importance (and difficulty) of striking a sensible balance between security and openness.

Balancing Security and Openness

In a recent interview, Justice Breyer elaborated on those earlier remarks. “People in any government agency who are in positions of authority,” he said, “have to understand that the issue of security and the issue of openness are both important and they sometimes argue in opposite directions.” It is simply too tempting, he continued, for officials to turn matters over to security experts. Those experts will always err on the side of security, he noted, because that is their job. It is those in authority who need to “understand the importance of openness, to understand that it makes an enormous difference both symbolically and practically if a public building is welcoming to the public or if it shuts itself off in a fortress.” For that reason, he emphasized, officials have to become informed enough to make intelligent decisions that require balance. They should argue in favor of security “only if they are convinced that the need for security is great enough to warrant a departure from openness.” If they err, he said, they should be prepared to err on the side of openness.

According to Breyer, decision-makers in a democracy need perspective and they need courage. “You have to be brave enough to turn them [the security experts] down,” he said, “and if we are not brave enough to say ‘no’ when

it really doesn't make much sense, then what we'll end up with is buildings that look like our embassy in Chile, which is my example of something that is just horrible." That structure, designed in 1987 to meet the Inman standards, features nearly windowless brick walls, and is surrounded by a nine-foot wall (and a moat). "It looks like a fortress," Justice Breyer says. "People in Santiago laugh at it."

Money won't solve the security problems either, Breyer cautions. The issues are larger than that and involve a different sort of cost/benefit analysis. "There's no magic formula," he says, but when you have a public building, particularly a building that serves a diplomatic purpose, it is crucial for decision-makers to recognize "that there are competing

"Architecture is inescapably a political art, and it reports faithfully for ages to come what the political values of a particular age were."

— Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 1999

values at stake" and take those values into account in making decisions about security and design. Some architects equate openness with literal transparency, and argue that dramatically modern glass and steel architecture is the only proper metaphor for democracy, but Breyer points out that openness need not rely on glass. The Supreme Court is open, he notes, with its public plaza, its accessible hallways and its open courtroom — a place Americans can and should visit to learn about

the legal system. Like other major public buildings, he says, the Supreme Court must remain open despite the challenges that may pose.

When Sen. Moynihan addressed these issues in 1999, he called for an ongoing "conversation" on how

MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING

Former State Department Employee
Stationed Overseas Understands Unique
Financial Situation of Foreign Service

Services Include:

- Retirement Planning
- Tax Preparation and Strategies
- Analysis: Insurance and Investments
- Lump Sum Retirement Options

MARY CORNELIA GINN
4630 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 220
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
Phone: (301) 951-9160
Fax: (703) 938-2278
E-mail: mcgfin@erols.com

SECURITIES OFFERED THROUGH NATHAN & LEWIS SECURITIES, INC., MEMBER
NASD & SIPC. MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING AND NATHAN & LEWIS ARE NOT
AFFILIATED ENTITIES.

Visit
Staybridge Suites
Spend your time
the way you want.
Do the same with your
per diem.

- Free Breakfast Buffet
- Fitness Center
- Laundry
- Sundowner socials

Your per diem goes much farther.
So the next time you travel,
spend some time here at **Staybridge Suites.**
And Make It
Your Place.

Tysons-McLean
6845 Old Dominion Drive
McLean, VA 22101
Phone: 703.448.5400
Fax: 703.506.0001



MAKE IT YOUR PLACE.™

Owned by McLean Hotel LLC and Operated by Grand Duke Hotel, LLC

to balance security and openness at home and abroad. If that conversation has occurred at all, it has excluded many who can provide useful input. Nor has it yet addressed the big questions, such as how the makeover of the U.S. presence supports or undermines a long-term goal to expand public diplomacy — a key weapon in a war of ideas. At a time when too many are willing to cede decision-making to outside experts, when architects and landscape architects, who know how to design security that is less intrusive and possibly more effective, are being excluded from the planning process, it is increasingly important, as Justice Breyer says, to prevent the security mandate from turning our public buildings into bastions.

Cause for Concern

The obvious comparison between new U.S. embassy compounds and high-security prisons is cause for concern. If the State Department had implemented the Inman recommendations fully, it would have also aban-

doned landmarks such as the London embassy, which lacks the specified 100-foot setback. Fortunately, that has not occurred. Unfortunately, however, the militarization of the embassy perimeter is sadly compromising historic Grosvenor Square, the working home of America's diplomats in London since the late-18th century. This, too, is cause for concern.

It was once possible to dismiss embassy architecture as too far away to care about, but the world is smaller now — no place is far away with CNN — and history has shown that what happens to our foreign buildings also points to what happens to public buildings here at home. It is time to widen the openness/security conversation. Propaganda is a one-way conversation, but public diplomacy, American-style, has to be a *two-way* conversation.

If good architecture has the power to lift spirits and symbolize ideals, then it is time to recognize architecture once again as a tool of public diplomacy and make the most of it. As any politician can tell you, "being there" and "looking good" will always matter. ■



This is the only call you'll need to make!

THE CLEAR CHOICE FOR DEPARTMENT OF STATE EMPLOYEES!

Accommodations 4 U is a Free hotel reservation service company specializing in the Washington, DC Area. Allow our experts to do the leg work for you & find the perfect location for you. There is absolutely no cost to you & we will act as your "personal assistant" to find the best hotel or apartment for you.

Featured Properties in DC & VA Offer:

- Studio & One-Bedroom Units, All-Suites, fully equipped kitchens
- Federal Government Per-diem, Sliding Scale Per-diem (1st & 2nd tier), & PCS Per-diem accepted. Monthly rates available also.
- Shuttle to NFATC, close to Metro 
- High Speed Internet Access, Daily Breakfast, & Manager's Receptions
- Rent by Day, Week, or Month
- Pet Friendly locations

P.O. Box 319 ■ Conway, SC 29528
vicki@accommodations4u.net
www.accommodations4u.net



843-397-5714
Fax: 843-397-5725



D & M AUTO PARTS CORPORATION
145 WEST JOHN STREET • HICKSVILLE, NY 11801 USA

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE AMERICA
SINCE 1971

2005 represents our 35th year helping to maintain America's fleet of vehicles throughout the world. All of us at D & M consider it an honor to have worked with all of you through these years.

We are aware of the importance of your official and private vehicles, forklifts, generators, tools and equipment. We look forward to continuing this service in a professional manner.

We are here to help, just ask!
Gary Vlahov

www.dmauto.com
(516) 822-6662; FAX: (516) 822-5020; E-mail: info@dmauto.com



AUTO & TRUCK PARTS