



AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

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BIOGRAPHIES

In alphabetical order

Ambassador Erica J. Barks-Ruggles is a Department of State Visiting Faculty at the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at the College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University. She was the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Rwanda from January 2015-March 2018. She previously served for three years as U.S. Consul General in Cape Town, South Africa. From January 2009-July 2011, Ms. Barks-Ruggles served as the Deputy to the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations, leading the Washington office and serving on the Deputies Committee. She is a career Foreign Service Officer, serving since 1991. From 2004-2008 she was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, where she led U.S. support for Iraq's first democratic elections in 2005, and managed over \$210 million in human rights and democracy programming in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. From 1996-1999 she was a Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council at the White House, where she led the successful effort to pass the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. She has also been posted to India and Norway. She has served as a Visiting Fellow at The Brookings Institution and an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Ms. Barks-Ruggles speaks French and Norwegian.

Mr. Mikael Bittrick is currently the Deputy Director in the Office of Regional and Security Affairs in the State Department's Africa Bureau. His current work involves oversight and implementation of key activities including military professionalization and peacekeeping capacity enhancement programs, including the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program and the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). He has assisted with ongoing conflict resolution efforts in Sudan including Darfur, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, and Somalia and participated in peace negotiations for Nuba Mountains (Sudan), Liberia, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan, and Darfur.

His office plans and oversees \$200 million annual security assistance budget for Sub-Saharan Africa. Previous U.S. government positions include: Military Advisor, Africa Bureau, State Department (2000-2002); Defense Attaché at the U.S. Embassy, Luanda, Angola (1998-1999); Battalion Executive Officer and Brigade Operations Officer in 501st Military Intelligence Brigade in Seoul, Republic of Korea (1995-1997); Country Director for Central Africa and Somalia/Rwanda in the Pentagon's Office of the Secretary of Defense (1993-1995); and other staff and command assignments in various military organizations in the U.S., African and the Republic of Korea. Michael Bittrick has a B.S. in Engineering (Political Science Concentration) from the U.S.

Military Academy at West Point, NY, and an MS in Strategic Intelligence with an Africa Concentration from the Defense Intelligence College in Washington D.C. Mr. Bittrick retired after over 20 years of active military service in December 2002.

Mrs. Chidi Blyden-Rowe is a socio-cultural analyst on Africa's conflicts, security and development issues. She currently serves as a Professional Staff Member for the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Policy Team, advising on Africa and South America's defense equities for the 116th U.S. Congress. Prior to joining the HASC, she led the Africa Program at the Center for Civilians in Conflict and was responsible for implementing the Africa portfolio and developed a specialized training on civilian protection for the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Mrs. Blyden-Rowe served in the Obama Administration from 2013-2017 as the Special Assistant and Regional Director to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense for African Affairs in the Office of Secretary for Defense for Policy. In this capacity she worked on U.S.- Africa defense policy for East and Central Africa and as the Africa Peacekeeping Advisor to the office of Stability and Humanitarian Affairs. Prior to her appointment, she worked at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) from 2007-2012 as the Academic Operations Coordinator, advising in the business and administrative operations of the Academic Dean's Office, and as an Academic Associate focused on East and Southern Africa. At ACSS, she contributed to academic material and curriculum for over 30 programs on counter-terrorism, defense economics, conflict management, security studies and civil-military relations for Africa's security sector professionals. She is a Political Partner and Co-lead of the Africa Expert Group for the Truman National Security Project and is a member of the Leadership Council for Memunatu Magazine, a leadership magazine for young African girls. She is an alumnus of Texas A&M University (BS-Sociology), George Mason University (MS -Conflict Analysis and Resolution) and the Annie Walsh Secondary School for Girls (Freetown, Sierra Leone).

Ambassador Reuben E. Brigety II serves as Dean of the George Washington Elliott School of International Affairs. He most recently served as the appointed Representative of the United States of America to the African Union and Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN Economic Commission for Africa on September 3, 2013. Prior to this appointment, Ambassador Brigety served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of African Affairs from November 14, 2011 until September 3, 2013 with responsibility for Southern African and Regional Security Affairs.

From December 2009 to November 2011, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. In this capacity, he supervised U.S. refugee programs in Africa, managed U.S. humanitarian diplomacy with major international partners, and oversaw the development of international migration policy.

A native of Jacksonville, Florida, Ambassador Brigety previously served as Director of the Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress from January 2008 to November 2009 and as a Special Assistant in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development from January 2007 to January 2008. From November 2008 to January 2009, he also served as a senior advisor for Development and Security to the U.S. Central Command Assessment Team in Washington and in Doha, Qatar.

Prior to his work in the policy arena, Ambassador Brigety served as an assistant professor of government and politics at George Mason University and at the School of International Service at American University between August 2003 and April 2009. In addition, Ambassador Brigety was a researcher with the Arms Division of Human Rights Watch (HRW) from August 2001- May 2003, where he conducted research missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Before joining HRW, Ambassador Brigety was an active duty U.S. naval officer and held several staff positions in the Pentagon and in fleet support units.

Ambassador Brigety is a 1995 distinguished midshipman graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, where he earned a B.S. in political science (with merit), served as the Brigade Commander and received the Thomas G. Pownall Scholarship. He also holds an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in international relations from the University of Cambridge, England. Ambassador Brigety is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a Life Member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a recipient of the Council's International Affairs Fellowship.

Mr. Scott Busby serves as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC, where he oversees the Bureau's work on Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Multilateral and Global Affairs, including U.S. engagement on human rights at the United Nations, disability rights, LGBTI rights, internet freedom, business and human rights, and International Labor Affairs. Previously, he served as Director for Human Rights on the National Security Council in the White House from 2009 to 2011 where he managed a wide range of human rights and refugee issues. From 2005 to 2009, he was Coordinator of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees in Geneva, Switzerland. Prior positions include Director of the Office of Policy and Resource Planning at the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration in the Department of State (2000-2005), Director for Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs at the National Security Council under President Clinton (1997-2000), counsel at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (1995-1997) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (1992-1995). He got his start in federal service as an Asylum Officer at INS. Scott holds advanced degrees in sociology and law from the University of California at Berkeley and received his B.A. from Amherst College.

Ms. Megan Doherty is Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at Mercy Corps, where she leads US policy influence for the global humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development organization. She previously served as the White House National Security Council Director for North Africa and at the Department of State where she was responsible for designing and implementing foreign assistance in the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms. Doherty has spent more than a decade designing and implementing conflict mitigation, governance, and civil society strengthening initiatives worldwide. She previously served with the National Democratic Institute in Libya, where she worked with nascent political parties and trained women candidates who later won seats in Libya's first elected parliament. She has also held positions with Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and is a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Ms. Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister Counselor, has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State since October 1, 2018. She was previously the Acting Deputy Spokesperson for the Department from March to August 2018. Prior assignments include Deputy Executive Secretary to Secretaries Kerry and Tillerson from May 2016 to October 2017, Senior Advisor at the Foreign Service Institute from October 2017 to March 2018, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs and the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from August 2015 until May 2016. She joined the Department in 1995, and at the time of her swearing in was the youngest member of the Foreign Service. She has served overseas in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Cambodia, India, and Bulgaria. Domestically, she has worked in the State Department Operations Center as a Senior Watch Officer, and as Deputy Director of the State Department's Executive Secretariat.

Elizabeth holds a BA from the University of Virginia in East Asian studies and a certificate from the International Division at Waseda University in Tokyo. She speaks French, Mandarin Chinese, and Bulgarian. In 2009, she was named a Fellow by the International Women's Forum, one of only 25 women in the world to be so honored.

Mr. Sam LaHood serves as Director for Government and External Affairs leading IRI's communications and outreach to the United States Congress and other governmental stakeholders to share knowledge and expertise on the value of democracy and governance to America's national interest and security.

Mr. LaHood joined IRI in August 2010 as the resident country director of the Institute's Egypt program. He was working in Cairo during the January 25, 2011 protests and remained throughout the revolution and resignation of Hosni Mubarak. Throughout 2011, LaHood helped build the Egypt program into one of the largest at IRI, mentoring newly formed political parties and candidates for office, conducting extensive voter education and managing three international election observation missions for the parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2012.

In March of 2012, LaHood transferred to Phnom Penh to direct the Institute's program in Cambodia, which focused on youth empowerment and public opinion research. In April of 2013, he returned to the Washington D.C. office and served as a Program Officer and then Deputy Regional Director for Asia. During his time with IRI, LaHood has frequently served as a trainer, often represents the Institute at donor and diplomatic events, has observed five elections in three countries and was trained to be an election judge in Maryland. He has testified before Congress and conducted numerous print, radio and television interviews.

Prior to IRI, LaHood spent most of 2008 as a full-time staff member on the McCain presidential campaign. In that role, he was a member of the traveling staff responsible for planning and organizing campaign events. LaHood was a political appointee for the administration of President George W. Bush and served at the U.S. Mission in Baghdad from September 2005 until November 2006 where he was awarded the Department's Meritorious Honor Award for his work on the crimes against humanity trial of Saddam Hussain. Before Baghdad, LaHood was an appointee in Washington, D.C. with the office of Strategic Communications and Planning at the U.S. State Department and with the U.S. Department of Energy.

Ms. Jenny Marron joined InterAction in September 2019. As InterAction's Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs, Jenny leads the team that shapes and coordinates coalition policy and advocacy efforts related to the U.S. government.

A seasoned expert on conflict and fragility with over a decade of experience in strategic thinking and problem-solving in foreign affairs, Marron previously served as the White House National Security Council's (NSC) Director for Syria in 2016 and most recently as the Deputy Office Director of Advanced Analytics in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at the U.S. Department of State. While with the NSC, she provided senior officials with analysis and policy recommendations on critical security developments affecting Syria and coordinated decision-making processes among federal agencies to reduce violence and support negotiations, humanitarian response, and stabilization. At the State Department, she managed multiple teams and oversaw the launch of a new instability monitoring and analysis platform to aid decision-making in complex environments. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Duke University and a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Mr. Ron Meyers is the Director for African Affairs in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for African Affairs. In this capacity, he leads the development of U.S. defense policy and strategy to the Africa. He was formerly the Sr. Afghanistan Country Director in DASD Afghanistan, Pakistan & Central Asia and managed the U.S. defense relationship with and international military support to Afghanistan, as provided by the Administration's 2017 South Asia Strategy – the genesis and outcome of which he played an outsized role on behalf of the Department of Defense (DoD). Mr. Meyers was also previously the Director for Partnership Policy & Strategy in DASD Security Cooperation. As part of the management team that stood-up this office in 2014, he set the course for and oversaw the development of reforms that have fundamentally reshaped how DoD engages with and empowers partner militaries.

Beforehand, he was a Strategist in DASD Partnership Strategy and Stability Operations, the office he joined Policy in 2010. Prior to joining Policy, Mr. Meyers was the Chief, Plans & Resources in the Armaments Cooperation Division of the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force (International Affairs). He oversaw the development of policy, negotiation of international agreements, and management of programs in the acquisition field – skills cultivated earlier at the Executive Office of the President, U.S. Department of State, and World Bank. In these positions, he also played critical roles in the U.S. response to the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis and 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Mr. Meyers entered public service in 2004.

While in the private sector, Mr. Meyers pursued government contracting opportunities. He was an analyst for TECHPLAN Corporation advising clients on foreign acquisition and aerospace engagement issues, and a Consultant at the World Bank working social development issues, among other areas of interest.

Mr. Meyers holds a Master of Business Administration from Georgetown University, a Master of Arts in Political Science from Northeastern University and received his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Dr. Joseph Siegle leads the Africa Center's research program, which produces the Center's Africa Security Briefs, Research Papers, Special Reports, Spotlights, and Infographics series with the aim of generating policy relevant analyses that contribute to addressing Africa's security challenges. Dr. Siegle's research interests include understanding the role of governance in advancing security and development; security trends in Africa; stabilization of fragile states; democratic transitions; and strengthening institutions of democratic accountability. He has written widely for leading policy journals and newspapers and is a regular media analyst.

Prior to joining the Africa Center, he was a Douglas Dillon Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies, and a senior advisor for democratic governance at DAI. For more than a decade, he served in various field capacities throughout Africa as well as in Asia and the Balkans with the international NGO, World Vision, and as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Dr. Siegle holds a doctorate in international security and economic policy from the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and a master's in agricultural economics, with an emphasis on African food security, from Michigan State University.

Dr. Shannon Smith serves as a professor of practice and director of engagement at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. In this capacity, she leads the Africa Center's efforts to develop its alumni network and to engage the broader policy community focused on African security issues. Her areas of expertise include U.S.-Africa policy, East Africa, global health and development policy, and the role of Congress in foreign relations. Prior to joining the Africa Center, Dr. Smith served as deputy assistant secretary of state for Africa, where she oversaw U.S.-East Africa policy (and previously Southern Africa) and spearheaded Africa Bureau efforts on Sudan and South Sudan, global health, and the environment. She led diplomatic missions, developed bilateral and multilateral policies, engaged with key interlocutors, and represented the State Department in a variety of national and international forums, including before Congress. Dr. Smith spent a number of years on Capitol Hill, where she was the senior policy adviser for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Africa for global health, peacekeeping, and conflict issues. She also served as the national security adviser for the assistant majority leader of the Senate. As a Senate staffer, she shepherded successful legislation on HIV/AIDS, war crimes, and global climate change, among other issues. She is a summa cum laude graduate of Texas A&M University and holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University where she was a Mellon Fellow in the

Ms. Karen O'Donnell VanderGoot is the Division Chief for the Conflict, Peacebuilding and Governance Division in the Bureau for Africa at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Karen's team works to promote state-of-the-art USAID programming in sub-Saharan Africa that addresses critical peace, security, democracy, human rights, and governance challenges. She previously served as a director for African affairs at the National Security Council and was a member of the U.S. Secretary of State's policy planning staff. She received a bachelor's degree in political science and French from Lehigh in 1999 and a master's degree in public policy from Duke University in 2002.

Mr. Michael Weber is an Analyst in Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division of the Congressional Research Service. Mr. Weber's work focuses human rights-related foreign policy

issues, including democracy and authoritarianism, corruption, human trafficking, and international religious freedom. He previously worked in the U.S State Department, where he was responsible for managing and overseeing a portfolio of human rights, rule of law and civil society foreign assistance programs. He has also worked on China policy issues within the Office of the Secretary of Defense and as a Chinese language analyst for an intelligence research firm. He holds an MPA in International Relations from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and a BA in History from the University of Idaho.

Ms. Desirée Suo Weymont joined the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2010. Since 2014, Ms. Weymont has served as a Deputy Senior Coordinator on the Reports and Political Affairs Team. In this role, Ms. Weymont leads the work of several analysts monitoring trafficking in persons trends in Africa, the Middle East, and South and Central Asia. In addition, she oversees the compilation of annual country assessments and, through travel to these regions, conducts diplomatic engagement surrounding the Department's annual Trafficking in Persons or TIP Report. Until September 2014, Ms. Weymont served as a Foreign Affairs Officer covering southern, central, and east Africa as an analyst in the Reports and Political Affairs section.

Prior to serving in J/TIP, Ms. Weymont worked as an Immigration Officer with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in the Department of Homeland Security as part of a Presidential Management Fellowship. Ms. Weymont graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in History and Italian Studies from NYU and received an M.A. in Politics from the Transatlantic Masters Program at UNC after completing coursework and research at the Università degli Studi di Siena in Italy. During her academic career, Ms. Weymont focused on international migration trends, citizenship and immigration law, and the interactions between different immigrant and racial groups within the United States and Europe. In 2018, Ms. Weymont received a certificate in Global Mental Health: Trauma and Recovery from the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (HPRT) and Harvard Medical School.