

## **Leadership Narrative – Joan Polaschik**

The Department of State is pleased to nominate Joan Polaschik for the Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership. Ms. Polaschik demonstrated extraordinary leadership, management and courage while serving as the Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Libya during the 2011 Libyan civil war, and was instrumental in the reestablishment of the U.S. presence in Libya in September of that year.

Ms. Polaschik served as Deputy Chief of Mission, the number two embassy official after the Ambassador, of the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Libya from July 2009 through August 2012. After the departure of the Ambassador in December 2010, Ms. Polaschik assumed responsibility for the U.S. mission as Chargé d’Affaires , a.i. just as the revolutionary turmoil of the “Arab Spring” was beginning in neighboring Tunisia.

As Libya descended into civil war in February 2011, Ms. Polaschik demonstrated the coolness under pressure we expect from our leaders as she managed the suspension of embassy operations and the evacuation of American citizens from the country. Operating in a rapidly deteriorating environment of unfolding chaos, enormous diplomatic pressure and physical danger, Ms. Polaschik directed the scouring of Libya’s American citizen community to find those who wished to be included in the evacuation, and exuded a calm, supportive, and decisive leadership style that inspired Mission personnel to work together in a constructive manner under difficult circumstances.

To our Libyan colleagues working in the U.S. mission, some of whom faced life or death decisions in trying to continue their work with the embassy during the violent upheaval of the revolution, Ms. Polaschik provided reassurance and confidence that allowed them to function through the crisis.

Ms. Polaschik’s strong team-building skills kept the Embassy staff cohesive and committed through this six-month ordeal. She inspired a high-level of performance, empowering our mid- and entry-level officers to speak and act authoritatively in a massive interagency policy planning process. Her management ensured that a much-needed dose of reality was included in every one of the five inter-agency working groups and resulted in a policy product that made imminent sense. When needed, she deployed her thorough understanding of Washington’s bureaucratic realities to help more junior staff work through difficult issues,

stepping in for example to help fend off additional taskings that the Mission staff could not support.

Ms. Polaschik takes her mentoring responsibilities seriously and helped the Mission's entry-level Foreign Service officers develop strong reporting and analytical skills. The level of productivity and effectiveness on the part of these newer diplomats was reflected in the highly-regarded daily situation reports from Embassy Tripoli, which were produced under extremely difficult conditions. Morale at the Mission was very high, a fact that is directly attributable to Ms. Polaschik's never-ending efforts to ensure that all staff, regardless of rank, contributed to the diplomatic product of the Mission and shared in a common sense of purpose, esprit, and responsibility. Taking pains to assure that colleagues who had performed with distinction throughout the evacuation were recognized for their efforts, Ms. Polaschik encouraged supervisors to write award nominations and organized an awards ceremony that helped our American and Libyan colleagues celebrate their prodigious diplomatic efforts even as they mourned the imminent shuttering of the embassy and fought deep anxiety for those among them who would remain behind in Libya.

Even before the painful events of 2011, Ms. Polaschik proved herself to be a highly capable leader and manager, serving effectively as Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., in the absence of the Ambassador, including during the period when convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset al-Megrahi returned to a hero's welcome in Tripoli, setting off a firestorm of anger in the United States and setting back diplomatic relations. Under immense pressure, Ms. Polaschik made sure the right messages were delivered to the Qadhafi government while representing the U.S. at the concurrent festivities commemorating Qadhafi's forty years in power. Ms. Polaschik acquitted herself admirably in dealing with these difficult diplomatic challenges.

Joan Polaschik has demonstrated extraordinary leadership under extremely adverse conditions, achieving key U.S. foreign policy objectives while paying equal attention to the personal well-being and professional development of those she leads. She exemplifies the best traditions of the U.S. State Department and American public service.