

From ADST Biweekly: Holidays in the Foreign Service, ADST, 19 Dec 2025

"For many Americans, holidays mean familiar rituals—family gatherings, well-worn traditions, and the comfort of home. For those who serve across the Foreign Service, the holiday season has often looked very different. Christmas doesn't pause for diplomacy, conflict, or crisis. Instead, it unfolds in embassies, war zones, and unfamiliar cultures—often revealing the deeply human side of American service abroad.

In some cases, Christmas became an unexpected diplomatic tool. **David Harden**, a USAID officer working for George Mitchell and then John Kerry in the Middle East, recalled hosting Christmas parties that brought together Israelis and Palestinians—guests who rarely shared the same room, let alone the same table. Under a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, with Israeli wine, Palestinian beer, and children's carols playing in the background, conversations flowed more easily. The setting was neutral, welcoming, and deliberately human—proof that sometimes diplomacy begins not with a briefing paper, but with hospitality. (Read more at David Harden's oral history [here](#).)"