

James O'Brien

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

OCTOBER 5, 2023 - PRESENT



James O'Brien assumed his role as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs on October 5, 2023. Ambassador O'Brien served as Sanctions Coordinator at the State Department beginning in April 2022. He is a former career employee of the State Department and recipient of numerous performance awards and served two previous U.S. administrations as a special Presidential envoy. As the first presidential envoy for Hostage Affairs between 2015 and 2017, he helped establish the office and worked for the safe return of one hundred American citizens. From 1989 to 2001, he served as Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Principal Deputy Director of Policy Planning, and presidential envoy for the Balkans.

Over the course of his career at the State Department, he has led a large and successful sanctions program and advised on a range of issues, including peace negotiations in Europe, scientific and environmental agreements, and initiatives to investigate and prosecute persons responsible for war crimes. O'Brien has also negotiated agreements protecting intellectual property rights for scientific cooperation with China, promoted environmentally sound international trade regulations for hazardous and recyclable materials, and worked to make public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility an important element in American foreign policy.

O'Brien was previously a founder and Vice Chair of Albright Stonebridge Group, an international advisory firm. He earned a J.D. from Yale Law School, an M.A. from the University of Pittsburgh, and a B.A. from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. A native of Nebraska, he is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.