

ISD REPORT

THE FOREIGN SERVICE IN 2001

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INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF DIPLOMACY
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PREFACE

Perhaps once in a generation are we given the opportunity to reinvent ourselves and the world we live in. Rarely does such an opportunity arise from a situation as propitious as today's. The end of the Cold War restores to us a security we have not known since before the onset of fascist aggression in the 1930s. Moreover, despite some historically uninformed calls for a return to isolationism, as a nation and as a world community we are disinclined to repeat the mistakes of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s that led to the grim next sixty years.

This report seeks to contribute to one feature in the process of re-invention, that of the U.S. Foreign Service—the instrument by which the United States seeks to understand and influence the world community we inhabit.

This report grew out of a December 17, 1991, conference on "The Foreign Service in 2001" at the Department of State, hosted by Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD). Speakers at that conference included Director General Edward J. Perkins, Congressman Lee H. Hamilton, and former Directors General George S. Vest and Alfred L. Atherton, Jr. (see Annex I.A) Afterward, a working group that included Ambassadors Vest and Atherton, Dean Maurice East of George Washington University's Elliott School, and ISD Director Hans Binnendijk and chaired by John McNamara worked to refine the recommendations of the conference into the present report. (See Annex I.B for a list of working group participants.) The Institute thanks all those who have worked with us on the report. The conclusions contained herein, however, are solely those of the Institute and do not necessarily reflect those of individual contributors or the U.S. Government.

This report has four sections. First, we offer our assumptions about the kind of world in which the Foreign Service will now operate. Next, we consider the implications of that world for U.S. policy and for the service. Third, we seek to describe the core functions of the service in that environment and a strategic vision for the organizations served by the Foreign Service.

Finally, based on that analysis, we suggest some approaches which we believe would help the service better respond to this reinvented world. We offer these suggestions not as criticism but as encouragement—as in the words of Representative John Jacob Rogers, the author of the 1924 Act that first professionalized it—so that "the American Foreign Service will in the future be unexcelled."

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SUMMARY

The end of the Cold War has dramatically improved the context of international relations, but it has by no means simplified it. The post-Cold War scene will be witness to stiff economic competition, violent nation building, widely diffused power, and continued poverty. The good news is that this is an improvement on the Cold War we have left behind. America should not only survive, but flourish in the years ahead, assuming its institutions are equal to the challenges of the difficult, but rewarding, emerging global system often referred to as the "New World Order." As one of our contributors noted, the new situation recalls Pogo's comment: "We are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities."

Despite the proliferation of players in the international game, the work of diplomats will increase in importance. The U.S. Foreign Service has a greater role than ever to play as the United States adapts to this complex but rewarding global scene. The opening of about twenty new U.S. embassies in two years is the most visible token of the much wider demand for the classic diplomatic tools of representation, negotiation, analysis and communication. The newly invigorated United Nations and other regional and technical forums have also placed tremendous demands on those whose job it is to advance U.S. interests through persuasion and compromise rather than intimidation or supremacy.

The Foreign Service, however, will not be able to exploit the opportunities of this new world by conducting business as usual. Overall, the state of the service today is less a crisis than a disappointment. Both intensified competition abroad and straitened government resources at home require the service to adopt the same "lean and mean" management techniques now used by the more successful private sector firms. Different agencies with a foreign service component have succeeded to differing degrees in adopting these practices. Some programmatic agencies, such as USIA, are further along than the largest, and only exclusively policy, agency, the State Department.

Recommendations. Rather than adopt yet another monolithic set of structural changes, the service should rethink how it adapts to change generally. Currently, it does so fitfully, wrenchingly, and very reluctantly. Instead,

- if managers were encouraged to try new approaches in small organizational units at the local level before, or instead of, applying them universally (experimentation);

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- if its intelligent and knowledgeable officers were empowered to decide matters within their competence (empowerment);
- if the ranks of the service were opened to qualified individuals at all levels who could enter and leave more freely (flexibility);
- if the intellectual capital of the service was regularly renewed through increased training and retraining (enrichment); and,
- if some of the bureaucratic accretions were stripped away (streamlining),

then the Foreign Service could become an elite center of government excellence, uniquely suited for the world-class competition it faces.