

"The Foreign Service in 2001"

Testimony before the House Subcommittee
on International Operations

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Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to be here with you today to testify on the State Department personnel system. My testimony is based primarily on the report "The Foreign Service in 2001," which was released by the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy last August. The report was based on a conference held at the State Department and a subsequent series of working group meetings. My principal collaborator was John McNamara, a Foreign Service officer now serving in Morocco. I should note that I was part of the Transition Team effort to reorganize the State Department and that within a matter of days I will be joining the Department myself. I want to emphasize at the outset that I am here in my capacity as director of the Institute and not as a member of the State Department or of the Transition Team.

The Institute's report began with an analysis of the likely diplomatic environment a decade from now. Perhaps I could summarize our estimate of what this environment will be like with ten quick observations.

1. **Multilateral diplomacy will increasingly eclipse bilateral diplomacy.** Governments will remain the principal actors, but to achieve legitimacy and defray costs will channel their efforts to a larger degree through international institutions. This means more of our diplomats will need to have a good working knowledge of procedures and practices at the United Nations and similar bodies. They will need to learn the importance of consensus building, an art more prevalent on the Hill than in the executive branch.
2. **Conflict will continue, but will be more local and ethnic than global and ideological.** One useful international response would be preventive diplomacy. This will require our diplomats to have an even keener understanding of local history and languages, of US national interests in small conflicts, of conflict resolution techniques, and of the capabilities of peacekeeping forces.

3. **Diplomacy will focus more on global issues**, where the enemy is not another nation but a problem such as environmental degradation, massive flows of refugees, or illegal drugs. The State Department has recently created a new under secretary to deal with global issues, but the Foreign Service has yet to develop more than a handful of specialists to provide the technical expertise to be influential and persuasive on the international dimensions of these issues.

4. **Power will be more diffused and many of America's traditional diplomatic tools may be less effective.** Foreign aid will shrink under budget cuts. Our Cold War allies' reliance on American military leadership may eventually decline. America's interests in many areas of the world may wane. Our diplomats will have to become better salesmen to promote American policies.

5. **Diplomacy will increasingly be about economics and trade.** The Soviet experience has taught us that we cannot hope to exert international influence if our economy fails. And elimination of the global communist threat means that trade conflicts may no longer be constrained by traditional security considerations. To promote US economic interests and avoid trade wars, all of our diplomats will need a greater dose of high-level economic training, and many should have specialized training in specific sectors, such as telecommunications, transportation, and financial services.

6. **The number of foreign policy actors in the United States continues to multiply.** Most executive branch agencies now have an international component. Congress and state governments will probably both continue to expand their roles in international affairs. The latest phenomenon is the privatization of foreign policy. Such quasi-governmental institutions as the National Endowment for Democracy and the US Institute of Peace are gaining new roles. Journalists, businessmen and even some academics are principal actors. American lobbyists represent foreign countries and firms. The American diplomat must stay in touch with a much wider group of US actors and must understand and influence an increasingly complex web of relationships. Our diplomats will increasingly become managers of an ever more complex foreign policy process.

7. **The Department will operate more 'storefront' embassies** with skeleton staffs scrambling to cover economic, political, and social events in turbulent host country, probably in esoteric languages. This will result from both an increase in the number of countries in the world and a continuation of budget cutting. The Foreign Service will need resourceful generalists adept at foreign languages to cope.

8. **Information technology will revolutionize, but not replace, diplomacy.** We live with a phenomenon that James Reston has called megaphone diplomacy, where former President Bush and Saddam Hussein could insult one another directly live on CNN. Some have concluded that with instantaneous global communications, diplomacy will soon be run by remote control and that diplomats are no longer necessary in many places. The reverse is true. More than ever face-to-face contact is needed both for diplomatic communication and to interpret what is really happening in a foreign society.

9. **The stress of overseas life is increasingly taking its toll on the modern Foreign Service family.** Quality of life is increasingly becoming more important than career enhancement in American society. The most important element in maintaining the best and the brightest in the Foreign Service may be meaningful employment for spouses.

10. **American society will increasingly demand that its Foreign Service reflect our nation's diverse make-up.** In 1991, two-thirds of all Foreign Service generalists were white males. More aggressive recruitment efforts will be needed to attract qualified minorities and women.

This summary of what may be required from America's diplomats at the turn of the century indicates that real challenges lie ahead. How does the current Foreign Service stack up against those future challenges? To find out, the Institute conducted an unscientific poll of 61 current and retired Foreign Service officers. The results are instructive.

We asked the participants to rank the importance of different missions. The functions which are now part of the responsibilities of the new Under Secretary for Global Affairs all ranked in the bottom one-third of the list. The Foreign Service officers in our sampling did not yet believe that any of these issues should be given high priority.

We also asked participants to evaluate the performance of the Foreign Service in 19 specific missions. They gave reasonably good grades to the Service for such traditional functions as political reporting and providing citizen services. Economic reporting and promoting US commercial interests received low grades despite clear recognition that these issues are now of primary importance.

The overall evaluation of the Service's performance was a B-. Given the exceptionally high quality of Foreign Service recruits, the results suggest that the Department has not used its human resources to the fullest extent.

What should be the profile for the A+ Foreign service officer for the year 2001? He or she should be a three-dimensional generalist. First, the officer should specialize and serve in one geographic region for most of his or her career. The officer should have 4/4 capability in a major language of the region and a good grasp of the region's historical, political, and economic trends. No one should be promoted into the Senior Foreign Service without such language skills. Second, the officer should have strong functional capabilities in issues related to that region. For example, a Middle East area specialist might also follow energy policy or politico-military affairs. A Latin American specialist might also concentrate on narcotics control or the environment. A Japan specialist might concentrate on trade. An African specialist might concentrate on development assistance. Third, the officer should have management experience to be able to handle the array of issues that face the modern diplomat.

In addition, the Service will need more specialists who are recognized experts in such highly technical issues as the environment, science policy, or nuclear non-proliferation. The Civil Service can provide some of these skills for the Department of State in Washington and other agencies can provide them overseas. But unless the Service has its own cadre of highly trained specialists in these functional subjects, it will lose its edge as we approach the next century.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps I might now share with the Committee ten recommendations on how to improve the Foreign Service to meet three new challenges. Most of these flow from the Institute's report.

1. Our report concludes that the Foreign Service must be open to greater lateral entry. This authority would be exercised very selectively with a goal of adding highly qualified personnel with needed functional specialties. It is the fastest way to insert needed expertise into the Service at a relatively low cost. Lateral entrants might come from the Civil Service, academia, business, or congressional staffs. The bottom-entry system would continue to provide the majority of the generalists. Strict selection criteria, probation periods and tenuring procedures would need to be established for lateral entrants. This recommendation may be resisted by the career service, in part because some recent lateral entrants are considered by the Service to be underqualified. If new lateral entrants are more carefully chosen, however, this should not be the case. I would remind critics of this proposal that many of the Service's best officers -- for example Reginald Bartholomew, Michael Armacost, James Goodby and Ronald Spiers -- were lateral entrants.

2. **The Department should encourage greater cross-fertilization between the Foreign Service and the Civil Service, and among the various components of the Foreign Service.** In the post war period, policy on this issue has gone through three phases. In the decade after the war, the Foreign and Civil Services were totally separate, with the Foreign Service limited to overseas service. With the Wriston reforms and Herter Commission recommendations, the trend for the next two decades was toward greater integration of the two services into a single system. In 1975, the Murphy Commission recommended a return to the dual system, and a main thrust of the 1980 Act was to implement that concept. I would not urge a return to the Herter Commission recommendations of a singly foreign policy service, but steps are needed to remove some of the artificial barriers. For example, Foreign Service personnel should be rewarded for taking assignments at places like the Department of Energy. USIA officers should be able to compete for political counselor posts overseas. Civil servants should be able to bid on selected overseas posts. These things happen on occasion, but they should be the norm.

3. **Significantly more funding will be required to meet the responsibilities of the Department a decade from now.** This will not be easy given the budget deficit and the need to cut spending. Another trend, however, is that many of the resources that the intelligence community spent on Cold War-related issues can now be used for more traditional and open communication. We recommend shifting a limited number of positions and budget authority for economists, specialists in global affairs, and similar functions from the CIA to the State Department.

4. **To fill posts in new embassies and to deal with global issue, greater emphasis must be given to the needs of the Service in making personnel assignments.** Today, the so-called open assignments process gives most of the control to the individual officer and little to the Department. As a result, the Department has great difficulty in filling many critical posts. That system needs to be put back in balance. Foreign Service officers sign up to be available for world-wide service. In addition, longer assignments at overseas posts would provide greater continuity. Officers should be rewarded for taking difficult or longer assignments.

5. **To retain the Service's very best officers, provide a more secure career for those in the middle, and weed out those who would be more effective elsewhere, several changes should be made in the personnel system.** The limited career extension, designed to keep the best officers in the Service has not been used creatively in recent years. After spending a fortune to develop experienced officers, the Department must often let them go in the prime of their professional career because they

have run out of time-in-class. This may make sense in the military where physical fitness is a major criterion, but it is too mechanistic for the Foreign Service. Good officers should not be let go simply because they have run out of time-in-class and are not promoted fast enough. This system also creates unnecessary animosity among Foreign Service colleagues. Much more aggressive use of limited career extensions should be encouraged. Other ways should also be found to maintain personnel assets. For example, officers who leave the Service in mid-career should have reentry rights similar to the competitive Civil Service. At the same time, mechanisms to weed out under-achievers should also be strengthened. Both the tenure process and the selection-out process are ineffective. If the Service is to keep its best longer, it must at the same time be able to discard those who do not fully contribute.

6. The existing personnel cone system should be modified to conform to the new State Department structure and needs. A new cone for global and multilateral affairs should be created to attract those who will work in these new high-priority areas. At the same time, the existing concept of a multifunctional officer with capabilities in more than one cone should be expanded, with greater rewards given to those who have multiple capabilities. The decision several years ago not to place officers in cones until they are tenured may have been a mistake. The first class to operate under these rules will be placed in cones this year. Disgruntlement and legal action by many young officers is expected.

7. The personnel system should accommodate and reward more training. Between 1980 and 1988, officer years spent in training declined by 23%. That negative trend has been reversed somewhat in the past four years, but FSI has done it without a real budget increase. The problem lies not with the Foreign Service Institute but with the assignment process and with the fact that many in the Foreign Service see most formal training as wasted time. There are few promotion incentives for training, and Department wide budget cuts mean that personnel are diverted from training assignments to take line positions. And yet more training is needed to get the Service ready for the next century. To create the right incentives, we recommend that a professional certification be established by the Foreign Service Institute. It would be based on practical training primarily at FSI, but also at other academic institutions. The time required to be certified might be about two to three years, spread out over the first 20 years of an individual's career. Certification might be made a requirement before an officer is eligible for the Senior Foreign Service.

8. After officers are recruited and trained they must be empowered. The sense of lack of purpose has created real

morale problems for the Service. Although former Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson once said that "morale in the Foreign Service is always at an all-time low;" during recent years morale really has been at an all-time low. During the past four years, Foreign Service officers have by and large been disconnected from the Department's decision making-process. The current State Department reorganization is designed in part to strengthen the bureaus and offices in which most Foreign Service officers work and to connect them directly to the Office of the Secretary of State. This should result in a major boost for Foreign Service morale. Other personnel measures might be considered to empower our diplomats. For example, individual opinions should be encouraged in memos and cables to avoid bland choices for decision makers. A drafting author's work should be clearly identified wherever possible. Senior officers should be rated on their ability to delegate. Empowerment is key to a contented and more productive Foreign Service.

9. An equally important consideration is using the talents available in Foreign Service families when they are posted overseas. This is both cost effective and critical to family cohesion. Several pilot programs have been considered in recent years, but no major effort has been made. The Foreign Service Associates Program would have created relatively senior jobs reserved for a limited number of spouses, with a bidding system and some guarantees for employment. The pilot program was abandoned for lack of funds. A more recent and less ambitious effort is the American Family Member Associates (AFMA) Program which provides security clearances and training for selected family members and expedites efforts to provide them with embassy jobs. Spouses have recently been used for visa adjudication in about 20 consular positions. Additional job vacancies need to be identified to use these valuable AFMA resources at our overseas posts.

10. To conclude, there is no need for omnibus legislation that fundamentally redirects the Service from the path taken by the 1980 legislation. But the recommendations of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy would require a few amendments (especially recommendation 3, 8, and possibly 9). Legislative report language to encourage the Department to take new initiatives is particularly important. In addition, the Institute feels that authority should be given to individual bureaus and embassies to experiment on a limited basis with different personnel arrangements. In particular, ambassadors should have greater authority within their embassies to reassign tasks to officers as new requirements arise.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that these suggestions prove useful to the committee as it considers this year's authorization legislation.