

Testimony of
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before the
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management,
International Operations and Bilateral International Development
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Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Hagerty, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am pleased and honored to be able to be able to talk to you about “Modernizing the State Department for the 21st century.”

Let us begin by looking forward. Imagine how America *could* be in the world. Imagine a corps of official representatives, trained and sworn to advance U.S. interests around the globe, staffing embassies, missions, trade and cultural offices of all kinds, who reflect the world and speak the world’s languages fluently. Imagine Africans seeing African-Americans, Asians seeing Asian-Americans, Latin Americans seeing Latinx Americans, just as Europeans have long seen European Americans and Anglo-Saxon countries have seen Anglo-Saxon Americans: as people who look and often sound like themselves but who are unmistakably American.

Can we really doubt that the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain is based in part on our close genetic, linguistic, and cultural kinship? Is it an accident that the “Five Eyes,” the three countries in addition to Britain that we are most willing to share intelligence with, are Canada, Australia, and New Zealand? All branches from the same mother tree?

Equally important, however, is to demonstrate that identity is not destiny. We need far more African-Americans speaking fluent Mandarin posted all over China; Arab-Americans speaking Russian posted from Moscow to Vladivostok; Hispanic Americans speaking Swahili or Swedish posted in Africa and Europe. We are becoming a plurality country that will reflect and can connect the world.

The identity of our official representatives abroad is no small thing. It is not a matter of wanting diversity and inclusion because those are good things to have and the *zeitgeist* demands it. The United States could do few things more important for its future security and prosperity (another is to fund universal early education) than ensure that the people who represent America in the world actually look like America. Genetic, linguistic, and cultural kinship is obviously not all it takes to create enduring bonds between nations. Political systems, geography, natural resources, and national values all play key roles. Moreover, even countries that appear very similar on the surface, such as the U.S. and Canada or Australia, still have plenty of cultural, ethical, and political differences. Still, if U.S. representatives abroad truly reflected the demography of the United States, we would have far greater cultural, linguistic, and historic channels of connection with the peoples of other nations

Note that I keep referring to representatives rather than diplomats. I have great respect for diplomats both personally and professionally: their trade is to avert, smooth over, and sometimes even to resolve arguments, to advance difficult negotiations, and to steer without being seen to steer. We need only to look to CIA Director William Burns to see a master of the trade and to appreciate the value of a diplomatic corps to the country

in many situations. Still, diplomatic abilities are only one part of the skillset that the nation needs in our relations with other nations in the decades to come.

A Foreign Service for the 21st Century

The current Foreign Service was created in 1925, through a merger of the Consular Service and the Diplomatic Service, and reformed several times during the 20th century, although its form and the basic assumption that diplomacy is a 30-year career with a carefully prescribed progression from bottom to top were never changed.¹ The world has moved on, however; young people today typically think about their careers in five to ten year chunks. Moreover, it is possible to have a global career, in the sense of traveling and living abroad, in many different sectors. And the number of Americans who grow up speaking their parents' natal language as well as English has steadily increased over the last century, changing the recruiting pool for Americans who can represent the government abroad.

A Congressionally mandated overhaul of the Foreign Service could create a new Global Service open to anyone interested in serving the country as an official representative abroad who is willing to sign up for a seven to ten year tour, or perhaps a five year renewable tour, at any stage in their career. Early, mid, or later career individuals could bring a tremendous range of skills to the job, as well as languages, cultural expertise, and contacts that they developed in other jobs. Members of the

¹ For an account of the origins of the current Foreign Service, see "The Rogers Act - Short History - Department History - Office of the Historian," accessed May 12, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/rogers>.

Global Service could have backgrounds in business, technology, civic organizations, education, science, sports, arts, and religion.²

Such a service would be far more likely actually to represent the actual population of the United States than the Foreign Service. It would be possible to recruit people from many different careers at different stages in their careers, without requiring them to make a thirty-year commitment to a life of three-year tours hopscotching between foreign countries and Washington. To take only one example, individuals working in state or municipal governments in large, medium, and even smaller cities could be eligible, particularly those who handling trade, climate, security, and other matters that require regional and global contacts.

We would still need rigorous selection criteria, of course, but the Foreign Service examination could certainly be overhauled, as could training for postings abroad. It might well be that the U.S. approach to diplomacy could reduce the endless details of diplomatic protocol over time, but we would likely find other countries quickly following suit. Much of that protocol is better suited to the 18th century than the 21st.

A great advantage of such a Global Service would be the ability to mobilize different kinds of public-private-civic-philanthropic partnerships that are now and will increasingly be necessary to tackle global problems. These partnerships can also advantage the U.S. in great power competition or other foreign policy initiatives. To take only one example, when President Obama announced a “new beginning with the Muslim world” in 2009, he could not offer a governmental Marshall Plan. He could,

² For a more detailed explication of this proposal, see Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Reinventing the State Department,” *Democracy Journal*, <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/reinventing-the-state-department/>.

however, have mobilized tremendous resources with the systematic ability to work across sectors in at home and in every Muslim-majority country.

Getting It Done

These are grand schemes, perhaps more appropriate for a university seminar than a Congressional hearing. Yet they are no grander than the reorganization of the U.S. Department of Defense in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, strengthening civilian control over the military and substantially reducing inter-service rivalry. It took a number of years, but it got done.

The playbook for making major change in Washington is well-established: appoint a commission. In 1985 the Reagan Administration appointed a Blue Ribbon Commission led by former Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard to investigate Department of Defense procurement and other managerial practices. Years earlier, however, members of Congress serving on both the House and the Senate Armed Services Committees also sought to investigate a series of botched or mismanaged military operations and responses. Both committees launched multi-year reviews, supported by work that Senator Sam Nunn commissioned from the Center for Strategic and International Studies. These processes ultimately converged in the set of reforms that were passed in the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Congress could come together now and appoint a Commission to investigate how best to equip the United States for the multi-stakeholder diplomacy and development needs of the 21st century, requiring a report with proposed legislation by the end of 2021. Congress could then act on that report in the first half of 2022.

Why Now?

Congressional action is needed *urgently*. In 2009 the Obama Administration had a chance to work with Congress to overhaul the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to make a host of structural and other changes. Senator Levin's office was ready and willing to work with the executive branch to get it done. Internal frictions and lack of leadership meant that we missed what turned out to be only a two-year window before the midterm elections of 2010. This Congress and this Administration should not make that mistake again.

The Administration's foreign policy team has a host of immediate and medium-term challenges. Yet the single most important thing the United States can do for decades to come is to ensure that we attract the very best talent from across every part of the American population to represent us in the world, with the skills and connections necessary to engage in new approaches to global problem-solving. As every business knows, in times of continual change, plans and policies are far less important than people. The workforce in every sector must be composed of people who can adapt and respond to new circumstances quickly, effectively, and continually.

The current Foreign Service was created nearly a *century* ago. It is time to take bold action to create a Global Service that will meet U.S. needs for the next century, and to create the capabilities that will truly give us equal strength and depth in diplomacy, defense, and development. The diversity and innovative capacity of the American people, reflecting immigration over centuries from the entire world, is our greatest strength. It is time we applied that strength to managing U.S. relationships with other countries and tackling the problems that endanger us all without regard for borders.

Thank you for your time.