

***SFRC Democratic Staff Report Release***  
***“Diplomacy in Crisis:***  
***The Trump Administration’s Decimation of the State Department”***  
***Remarks by Ranking Member Menendez***  
***July 28, 2020***

Thank you, Margaret, for that introduction. It’s great to see you again, and thank you for moderating. Your word “gamble” had a big payoff. We had excellent service from you and the Committee is still thankful to you, as I am personally, and we thank you for your service at the State Department before you came over to join the Committee. Thank you again.

Let me thank our distinguished panelists you will hear from: Ambassador Tom Shannon, Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, and Elizabeth Shackelford — and to all those who are joining us online for the release of this report, *Diplomacy in Crisis: The Trump Administration’s Decimation of the State Department*.

Many Americans don’t get to see firsthand the work of our diplomatic corps, but they are made safer for it every day. The work of diplomats and the Department’s civil servants spans from processing visas to promoting U.S. businesses abroad, to welcoming heads of State, to promoting American values, to preventing conflict, to risking their lives on the front line of crises, and some 250 diplomats have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Regardless of who sits in the White House, they take an oath to uphold the constitution. They carry out their mission without regard to party, to president, or to politics. And in return, and so they can best serve the American people, they should be guaranteed a workplace free from discrimination, politicization, or retribution.

Yet, President Trump and members of the administration have belittled our diplomats and the State Department’s workforce. While in office, the President has personally falsely smeared them as “radical unelected bureaucrats” and “the Deep State.”

Political appointees have targeted professional public servants, castigated them as “disloyal” for merely doing their jobs. Many have been sidelined, denied promotions, and effectively pushed out of the Department.

Diplomats have described Trump’s political appointees’ “complete and utter disdain for [their] expertise.” Many have asked themselves “if their service is still valued.”

These unwarranted attacks on professional civil and foreign servants are corrosive for our diplomacy and damaging to our democracy.

And they ultimately leave America less safe.

As some of today's panelists can attest, these attacks have contributed to a worrisome exodus of expertise.

The State Department cannot afford these losses. Because of a failure to nominate people for key positions, the Department has long been struggling with persistent vacancies.

For example, the State Department's most senior policy position for Europe has not had a Senate-confirmed official or nominee since February of 2019.

The Assistant Secretary for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, who works to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction, has been vacant for more than a year, with no one nominated to fill it.

There is currently no Senate-confirmed ambassador or even a nominee for Afghanistan, where Americans are still fighting our longest war, or for Germany, Honduras, or Qatar.

For the entire Trump administration, there has been no Senate-confirmed official to lead the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, charged with managing relations with India and Pakistan and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

Indeed, today, three and a half years into the administration, 11 Assistant Secretary or Under Secretary posts — more than one-third — are vacant or filled by acting officials. Only 3 of those positions have nominees pending before the Senate.

And it's not just a failure to nominate.

This administration has repeatedly nominated candidates who lack the qualifications, the demeanor, and the temperament to serve in leadership positions and represent the American people abroad.

In my 27 years working on foreign policy in Congress, I have never seen anything like it.

President Trump has sent us nominees to represent the American people abroad who have misled Congress, who have made offensive and racist statements — whose resumes would not have even made it through a first round of vetting in any other administration.

Now, while some will want to cry foul about “congressional obstructionism,” the fact is, we have confirmed more than 160 nominees — and dozens have advanced quickly and without incidence.

But when a nominee has made vile comments against sitting Senators, or their families; or has engaged in racist schemes; or has #MeToo problems; or has withheld information and misled this body, they simply do not deserve the honor of representing the United States, and they should not be in senior positions of leadership at the Department. Period.

Yet some of those nominees have gone on to serve in this Department, further adding to the decline in morale.

Just think how it feels to be a career public servant, dedicating your life to your country, when your superior is someone who had made comments that are personally offensive to you or your family? Or who engaged in conduct, that if you had done so, you would have lost your security clearance?

The recent dismissal of the State Department's Inspector General at Secretary Pompeo's urging — as he was investigating the Secretary himself — only reinforced the sense among career employees that wrongdoing by political appointees gets a pass, but those who seek to reveal wrongdoing should watch their backs.

And that brings us to today's reality.

As this report notes, workplace survey responses of Department employees have shown steep increases in fears of reprisal for reporting suspected violations of law and declining confidence in senior Department leadership.

For example, there was a 22 point increase from 2016 to 2019 among employees in the legal bureau who reported that arbitrary acts, personal favoritism, and coercion for partisan political purposes was tolerated, rising from 1 percent in 2016 to 23 percent in 2019.

The percentage of respondents in the International Organizations Bureau who said that senior leaders did not maintain high standards of honesty and integrity nearly tripled from 12 percent in 2016 to 35 percent in 2019.

Sadly, given the rhetoric we have seen, these numbers aren't surprising. But they are troubling.

Nor do these problems seem to be fixed. Instead, it seems nearly every month there are new reports of conduct by senior political appointees that fall short of what we should be demanding of our senior diplomats.

Just this last week, we heard concerning reports that Ambassador Johnson in London may not only have engaged in a troubling act for the President, but has engaged in inappropriate conduct with his staff; and that Ambassador Gunter in Iceland has fostered a difficult work environment for employees, including rotating through multiple deputies.

The sobering reality is that President Trump and Secretary Pompeo have left the Department decimated and demoralized.

This is not a bureaucratic or "inside-the-beltway" issue; there are real consequences for the United States and our national security.

Our country is weaker when Ambassadors aren't present to lead our embassies, build our alliances, and fight for our businesses abroad.

With a decimated Department, we are forced to play catch up to the rest of the world to advocate for our values, or priorities like human rights, trade, climate change, and other policies.

How can we expect to be an example for the world's democracies if we give the stamp of approval to nominees who lack the integrity, honesty, and good judgment it takes represent our country abroad? We can't.

We need empowered diplomats with experience and expertise as China seeks to set the rules in international fora and fill the vacuum left behind by President Trump's abdication of leadership.

We need leaders who have the authority of Senate confirmation as they engage with foreign counterparts.

And we need a diverse, talent-filled diplomatic corps as we seek to secure our interests in the ever-growing list of complex global challenges.

Instead, through neglect and corrosive leadership, President Trump and his administration have decimated our nation's premier foreign policy agency dedicated to advancing American values.

Today, the Department is at a crossroads.

This report serves as a clarion call that dramatic action is required to restore the damage and to protect the integrity of U.S. diplomacy.

If we expect to have a State Department that can lead us through the global challenges of the next decade, Congress must take full stock of the work that lies ahead.

This report, I hope, is the beginning of that conversation. It outlines the steps and pillars for Congress, the Department, and the administration to rebuild the diplomatic corps, restore accountability, and reassert our values. They will require sustained effort and focus from current and future leadership.

I want to close with this: a sincere thank you to our diplomatic professionals and public servants, who work tirelessly day in and day out to deliver results for the American people.

I'm convinced — I've seen their service as I've traveled the globe. I've seen their service here in Washington. I know what they do for America.

The greatest thanks we can give you now is to take action now and get the State Department back on track. I intend to deliver on that.

Thank you very much and thank you to all of our panelists for what they are going to be sharing with each of you.