

US DIPLOMATIC STUDIES FOUNDATION

**Statement of Ambassador David Miller
President, Diplomatic Studies Foundation
“Training the Department of State’s Workforce for 21st Century Diplomacy”
Before the Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 2, 2021**

Good afternoon Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Committee members.

My colleagues and I at the Diplomatic Studies Foundation are very encouraged that you are focusing on a subject that gets little attention, but one which is of great importance to our country: the education and training of State Department personnel.

Why is this issue particularly important?

Today, we see the emergence of a serious global competitor. Countering the rise of China’s competing political and economic model will require diplomatic excellence. Frankly, our studies and research over nearly four years have made clear that our diplomats today don’t receive anywhere near the kind and level of education and training required to meet this challenge. State Department personnel will also have to assume new responsibilities as our military forces, particularly Special Forces, are redeployed to address new strategic priorities. Our diplomats and their civilian colleagues will be the new Tip of the Spear in many countries where the Department has benefited from a close working relationship with our military. These men and women deserve more training to help prepare for their new leadership role.

So how bad is the problem? I have never seen an institution work so hard to select people and do so little to train them once on board. I benefited from the support of State Department officers in leading as Ambassador two diplomatic overseas missions and during my two years at the National Security Council. They are smart and dedicated people who do critical work for our country. But, to quote General Mattis, bad process beats good people nine times out of ten. State Department officers need and deserve an institution that prioritizes investing in their professional education and training.

At the heart of the issue is changing the current State Department culture that does not incentivize or reward officers for spending time in training. In the past several decades it never has, whether in Republican or Democratic administrations. Other institutions, from the CIA to the FBI, to private sector companies like Goldman Sachs and GE, all recognize that without a clear and sustained message from leadership you cannot change an institution’s culture. We saw this lack of prioritization last week, when Secretary Blinken gave a speech presenting five pillars on modernizing the Department yet made scant mention of training. State Department leadership – even if so inclined – will not be able to make this cultural shift alone. Congress must join in demanding that the Department prioritize training and professional development. Historical evidence shows that large institutions, both public and private, develop bureaucratic inertia that is hard to overcome. Think back to the challenge of the very successful Goldwater Nichols reform of our military in the 1980s. The Defense Department needed a congressional push then; the State Department needs one today.

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Co-Chairman

Rand Beers,
Co-Chairman

Amb. (ret.)
David Miller,
President

Amb. (ret.)
Chester Crocker,
Vice President

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Advisory Board

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So, let me offer some recommendations that come from years of research on education and training in both the private sector and sister U.S. government departments and agencies, as well as working with the Foreign Service Institute and the State Department.

- Yes, Congress should increase the Foreign Service Institute's funding. FSI is severely under-resourced. It was encouraging to hear Deputy Secretary McKeon mention the current request for 500 new positions for a training float when he spoke before you last week. However, with any more resources *must* come fundamental, structural reform. I recommend establishing an empowered Board of Visitors, a Provost, and an office responsible for collecting and doing research and development on training innovation at FSI. Also, residential training for the A-100 course, fellowship opportunities at other departments and at private sector organizations in other regions of the country, and more frequent and extended leadership and management training for officers after they reach the middle level and then the senior executive thresholds. It also would help if there was not constant turnover in the director position at FSI.
- More rigorous training should be required as a necessary step for promotion at all levels. The CIA simply mandates this, while the FBI and DEA send clear signals to personnel that without attending leadership and management training you were unlikely to be promoted to senior positions. Private sector institutions of excellence focus resources on critical leadership as well. Yet the State Department by its conduct *discourages* professional development, as promotion panels often treat a period, including a year at a higher educational institution, as a lost year. The State Department needs to fundamentally reform its training and education incentive structure. We hope this will be part of the promotion precepts revision process Deputy Secretary McKeon mentioned the Department is currently undertaking.
- The State Department has long relied on "on the job training" (OJT), or experiential learning. While important, OJT is insufficient. Experience needs framing, otherwise known as education, to give focus and context to the experience. The Department needs to train its officers to discern how to best use their experiences in practice. This is not intuitive.
- Finally, the Department faces a diversity problem that increased training could help remedy. Although the Department recruits a diverse cadre of officers, a recent GAO report showed an exodus of minority officers beginning at the mid-ranks. If mid-level officers' professional development is left in the hands of informal mentorship, which is intrinsically unequal, then many minorities will continue to be underinvested in, underemployed, and underpromoted. If all officers at the mid-rank received more opportunities for training and professional development, if everyone was lifted together, advancement would no longer be random and unequal. This will by no means solve the Department's diversity problem, but it is an important step towards leveling the playing field for minority officers.

Thank you again for this opportunity. Our Foundation has been working to promote education and training for several years, and we hope this is the start of a serious reform effort – an effort that frankly this Committee must drive.

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