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Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)*

Hearing on:

“Building a Stronger American Diplomatic Presence to
Meet the Challenges of a Post-9-11 World”

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich, and distinguished subcommittee members, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) welcomes this opportunity to speak before this subcommittee on the subject of building a stronger American diplomatic presence to meet the challenges of a post-9-11 world. AFSA is the professional association and labor union representing our nation’s career diplomats. We are grateful to you for convening this hearing on this vital issue. I will make an opening statement and then look forward to answering any questions.

Over the past decade, the State Department has come almost full circle. Between 1998 and January 2001, seven blue-ribbon panels detailed a hollowed-out State Department nearing a state of crisis due to under funding and inadequate staffing. Then President Bush’s first Secretary of State, Colin Powell, took charge and made extraordinary progress in convincing the White House and the Congress to provide an infusion of resources to restore America’s diplomatic readiness. Unfortunately, the last three years have witnessed serious backsliding as new Foreign Service staffing demands in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere have far outpaced appropriations for personnel. Today, as was the case in the late 1990s, there is a growing deficit between the State Department’s mission and the resources available to carry out that mission.

The August 2006 Government Accountability Office report entitled “Department of State: Staffing and Foreign Language Shortfalls Persist Despite Initiatives to Address Gaps” identified serious staffing and training gaps in the Foreign Service. Regrettably, the situation has only worsened since the research for that report was concluded over one year ago as Iraq has absorbed ever increasing numbers of Foreign Service personnel. Over the past few years, some 2,000 Foreign Service members have voluntarily served in war zone Iraq or Afghanistan and well over one half of Foreign Service members have voluntarily served at some hardship post.

The June 2007 Foreign Affairs Council task force report “Managing Secretary Rice’s State Department: An Independent Assessment”, to which AFSA contributed, highlighted the fact that over 200 Foreign Service positions around the world are unfilled today. More importantly for the long-term success of U.S. diplomacy, the report found the State Department to be 900 positions short of what it needs to create a “training float” -- such as the U.S. military services have – equivalent to 10 to 15 percent above the employed staffing level. The report noted that State Department budget requests in FY-06 and FY-07 to narrow the staffing gap by 321 positions were not funded by Congress. The Department’s FY-08 request for 254 additional positions is now pending before the Congress. Unfortunately, the account under which that budget figure falls is moving through the appropriations process at a level below the President’s requested number.

As the President of AFSA, I represent our nation’s career diplomats. But, in addition to being a 21 year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, I also happen to be a former U.S. Army cavalry officer and a 2006 graduate of the U.S. Army War College which I attended via a rare State Department senior training detail. Having thus worn with pride both pin stripes and camouflage, I wish to highlight the impact that State Department staffing and training deficits are having on what many observers see as the growing militarization of diplomacy and foreign assistance.

The December 2006 report “*Embassies as Command Posts in the Anti-Terror Campaign*” by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee found that “the current 12:1 ratio of military spending to spending on the diplomatic and civilian foreign aid agencies risks the further encroachment of the military, by default, into areas where civilian leadership is more appropriate.” The report quoted one U.S. ambassador who noted that “the military has significantly more money and personnel and is so energetic in pursuing its newly created programs and in thinking up new ones, that maintaining a management hand on military activities is increasingly difficult.” The report went on to warn that “U.S. defense agencies are increasingly being granted authority and funding to fill perceived gaps [in diplomacy, international information programming, and foreign assistance]. Such bleeding of civilian responsibilities overseas from civilian to military agencies risks weakening the Secretary of State’s primacy in setting the agenda for U.S. relations with foreign countries.”

As the Senate report indicates, the result of skimping on diplomatic readiness while building up military muscle is that the highly-trained and well-resourced members of the U.S. military are increasingly taking on tasks once assigned to diplomats. That is not a criticism of America’s can-do military which is only stepping into a partial vacuum to get the job done. However, if left unchecked, this trend could further erode the State Department’s role as the lead foreign affairs agency and reduce America’s options when responding to foreign challenges. As the saying goes, “If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail.”

Even former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, a past strong critic of the State Department and current member of the Pentagon’s Defense

Policy Board, now argues that too many tasks have devolved to the military and that significant increase in the State Department budget is needed in order to reverse that trend. This past April, he had this to say:

“You have to have about a 50 percent bigger budget for the State Department.... The State Department is too small to have the training program and the secondment of personnel needed to grow a genuine professional institution. It is impossible for the current Foreign Service to get the level of education it needs. They recruit really smart people, [but] they grossly under-invest in training them. It’s a very significant problem... The reason I became a convert to the fundamental transformation of the State Department is you want to move things away from defense that it’s currently doing.... You do not want uniformed military having to do all sorts of things that you want to, frankly, give to other agencies if you could count on them doing it.”

To counteract this growing militarization of diplomacy, the State Department needs additional resources for staffing and training. The Department of Defense has more musicians than the State Department has diplomats. U.S. Army officers receive three times more professional training than do Foreign Service officers.

The truth is that, as a result of under staffing and under training, today’s Foreign Service does not have to a sufficient degree the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed for 21st Century U.S. diplomacy. The August 2006 GAO report focuses on gaps in language training. But the Foreign Service training shortfall is actually much broader.

The Foreign Service exists to provide the President with a worldwide available corps of professionals with unique abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation. To live up to that definition, Foreign Service members should possess a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Those include: foreign language fluency, advanced area knowledge (including history, culture, politics, and economics), leadership and management skills, negotiating skills, public diplomacy skills, project management skills, and job-specific functional expertise. Unfortunately, today’s Foreign Service exhibits shortcomings in each of these areas. For example:

- The August 2006 GAO report found that 29 percent of overseas language-designated positions were not filled with language proficient staff. The report said that this situation “can adversely impact State’s ability to communicate with foreign audiences and execute critical tasks.”
- Most Foreign Service members – including Ambassadors, Deputy Chiefs of Mission, and Principal Officers -- who do not go to their new assignment via language training do not receive up-to-date area studies training. They, therefore, face a much more daunting “learning curve” upon arrival at post.
- While one might expect that every U.S. diplomat would receive training in how to negotiate, only about 50 Foreign Service members take introductory negotiating

course each year. That rate of instruction means that less than 15 percent of current U.S. diplomats have received even basic instruction in negotiating techniques.

- Although public diplomacy is undoubtedly critical to the success of U.S. foreign policy, the State Department offers just five courses - totaling less than a month of training in all - that delve at all into public diplomacy as an intellectual discipline; and none that focus on the well-established science of communication and persuasion.
- Despite the “Transformational Diplomacy” focus on shaping outcomes and running programs, few Foreign Service members receive training on program management.

Two major obstacles stand in the way of providing Foreign Service members with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation: lack of time and under-staffing.

The first obstacle is time. Currently, the typical Foreign Service Institute course runs for one to five days. Few non-language courses last longer than three weeks. The reason for such short courses is that, after new-hire training, the only opportunities that most Foreign Service members have for non-foreign language classroom training are during a brief window of availability every few years while between assignments and while leaving their inboxes untended during infrequent domestic tours. Even over a 30 year long career, taking a few short courses every couple of years adds up to less than 10 months of non-language training during an entire career – one third of what the typical U.S. Army officer receives.

In contrast, the Army avoids such time constraints by permanently reassigning officers to long-term training three times during their first 20 years of service for 6 to 12 months each time. By making training a change-of-station assignment, the Army takes officers fully off-line for the academic year that is needed to master the course material.

With adequate resources, the State Department could emulate the Army’s proven model by creating at least one long-term professional training course to be taken by all Foreign Service members. One suggestion is to create a nine month long “Career Course” to be taken by newly-tenured employees. That course could offer a common core curriculum covering subjects such as negotiation, public diplomacy, global issues, and national security strategy. Participants could then separate into sub-groups for advanced functional and area studies training depending on their specific specialty and anticipated primary regional focus.

With adequate resources, the State Department could sharply expand language training -- especially hard languages in strategic regions such as Arabic and Chinese. For example, to ensure uninterrupted language capabilities at one-year Arabic posts such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia, three officers are required: one at post, one in the first year of language training, and one year in the second year of training.

With adequate resources, the State Department could expand long-term training

opportunities for mid-level employees such as at U.S. military war colleges, university training, and developmental details at non-governmental organizations and with private industry. Currently, fewer than 75 Foreign Service members are given such opportunities each year – representing less than three percent of all mid-level diplomats.

However, before additional long-term training opportunities could be created, another obstacle would need to be overcome: under-staffing. The State Department is simply not staffed to permit additional long-term professional training. What is needed is a “training float” -- such as the U.S. military services have -- equivalent to 10 to 15 percent above the employed staffing level. Only with such “bench strength” could the State Department significantly expand long-term language and functional training. For example, to permit all Foreign Service members to attend a nine month long “Career Course,” approximately 600 student positions and 25 instructor positions would be required. Another 200 training positions could be dedicated to expanded long-term language training. Another 75 training positions would be required in order to double the number of mid-level employees in long-term training and developmental assignments.

Obviously, creating a large training float would cost money. But without a fully-staffed and well-trained Foreign Service, the future will likely see, as the recent Senate report warned, “further encroachment of the military, by default, into areas where civilian leadership is more appropriate.” That is something that no one, including the overstretched U.S. military, should want. In fact, U.S. military doctrine teaches that there are four elements of national power -- diplomacy, intelligence, military, and economics (DIME) -- with military force almost always being the last, not first, tool that should be employed to achieve international security goals. Thus, the military recognizes the value of a diplomatic corps that is sufficiently staffed and trained to enable it to, whenever possible, achieve national goals without necessitating military-led “kinetic” intervention.

All of this argues for a re-balancing in the current 12:1 ratio of military spending to spending on diplomacy and foreign assistance. However, as things stand now, that imbalance is set to worsen. Consider the unmet need for 900 additional Foreign Service training positions. The U.S. Marine Corps alone – the smallest of the uniformed services – is slated to expand its active-duty ranks by 30 times as much (27,000) by 2011. The Army is slated to add 65,000 more soldiers to its permanent rolls. Thus, 900 new Foreign Service positions would total less than one percent of the planned military expansion – barely a rounding error when compared to additional resources being dedicated to the uniformed military. Please note that I am not saying that our military does not need to be larger. Rather I am saying that increasing Foreign Service staffing by the equivalent of the rounding error of the planned military expansion would pay dramatic dividends in terms of the ability of our diplomats to advance vital U.S. interests around the globe.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude I must touch on a growing problem that is hampering morale in the Foreign Service. The problem was cited in the August 2006 GAO report (and also in the 2002 report GAO-02-626) as an ever increasing deterrent to service at hardship posts. The problem is the unfair pay disparity that relates to Overseas Comparability Pay and Locality Pay. As you know, Locality Pay is a pay adjustment

intended to raise federal salaries to the level of salaries paid in the private sector for comparable work. It is not a cost-of living adjustment. Locality Pay for Foreign Service personnel serving in Washington, DC is currently 18.59% and increasing annually. Foreign Service members serving abroad do not receive this adjustment, so they effectively take an 18.59% pay cut when they transfer overseas. As a condition of employment, Foreign Service personnel must serve abroad, and on average employees spend two-thirds of their careers on overseas assignments. This ever-growing financial disincentive to serve abroad is undermining diplomatic readiness and morale.

Some say the Foreign Service already gets hardship pay and housing allowances so there is no need to fix this pay disparity. That position does not hold up to detailed scrutiny. Congress enacted the hardship and danger pay differentials long before locality pay ever existed in order to acknowledge the difficulties and dangers that Foreign Service members experience at our most difficult and dangerous posts. The pay disparity that has widened over the past 13 years because of locality pay subverts that congressional intent. Today, when a Foreign Service member serves at a 20 percent hardship post, that individual actually receives only a 1.4 percent increase instead of the intended 20 percent. Going to a 15 percent hardship post means that the member of the Foreign Service actually suffers a 3.6 percent cut in pay. Housing has been provided at overseas posts since 1926 because of the huge variations in local housing standards and values and to offset the dislocations that come with family transfers occurring every couple of years.

The U.S. Foreign Service must have all the tools it needs to implement our diplomatic and national security priorities around the globe. One vital tool that this Congress can provide the men and women of the Foreign Service and their families is to remove this financial disincentive to overseas service. Unfortunately, a legislative solution remains allusive. Disappointment and frustration in the ranks are deepening. While I do not doubt the fact that the Senate and this Congress are deeply grateful for the work and sacrifices of Foreign Service, I ask for that genuine support to be channeled into securing practical personnel policy initiatives such as brokering a solution to modernizing the pay system for the Foreign Service and putting to rest the pay disparity problem.

What AFSA seeks, and the Secretary of State fully supports, is a legislative correction of what is now a 13-year old unintended inequity in the worldwide Foreign Service pay schedule which widens every year. Ending this pay disparity would help validate the significant efforts and sacrifices made by the men and women of the Foreign Service and their families who serve our country abroad, instead of unintentionally penalizing them for that service by reducing their pay by 18.59% when they transfer abroad. If we don't act now, the pay gap will only widen. We are hopeful the 110th Congress will be the session which solves this problem.

In conclusion, America's diplomats today are hampered by a growing deficit between what they are being called upon to do and the resources available to carry out that mission. This under-investment in Foreign Service funding, staffing, and training is undermining U.S. diplomacy. To reverse this trend, the State Department needs the resources to provide the Foreign Service with the staffing and training essential to

successful foreign policy development and implementation. Therefore, AFSA respectfully asks this Congress to fully fund Secretary Rice's FY-08 budget request, to implement Overseas Comparability Pay, and to move forward in FY-09 with creating the robust training float that will provide our Foreign Service with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very timely hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions that you and your colleagues may have.