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President
The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)
Testimony on the FY 2020 Budget Request
Prepared for
The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS)
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

From 2008-2016, U.S. spending on core diplomatic capability, i.e., the analysis, advocacy, and reporting our diplomats perform overseas, declined by nearly a quarter in real terms. The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) is extremely grateful that Congress voted to halt the decade-long decline in funding for United States core diplomatic capability and increased Fiscal Year 2019 funding for the account that deploys diplomats overseas. **In the FY2020 SFOPS bill, AFSA is seeking an incremental increase to the “Overseas Programs” line item under “Diplomatic Programs” for the Department of State, as well as report language that specifies that such increases are to be used to shift existing mid-level FSO positions from Washington to posts overseas:**

“Funds above the fiscal year 2019 level shall be for the purpose of creating and filling mid-level Foreign Service officer positions (grades FS-03, FS-02, and FS-01) at overseas posts.”

AFSA has made the case that maintaining robust diplomatic capability is vital to preserving America’s global leadership role. Polls consistently show that 9 in 10 Americans support strong U.S. global leadership. This leadership was built on a foundation of military might, economic primacy, good governance, tremendous cultural appeal – and the diplomatic prowess to channel all that power, hard and soft, into the global leadership that has kept us safe and prosperous at home.

We would like to partner with congressional supporters to ensure that today, and years from now, full teams of U.S. diplomats are on the field, deployed around the world protecting and promoting U.S. interests. For a tiny percentage of the overall budget, the Foreign Service builds the relationships that get America’s business done around the world and that keep threats at bay. Retreat by the United States leaves a vacuum that will be filled by others. In the face of rapidly rising great power competition, we erode our nation’s diplomatic capacity at our own grave peril.

State’s Overseas Staffing Board concluded in its most recent review that America has too few diplomats in the field. The Overseas Staffing Model showed a deficit of almost 200 overseas positions in “core diplomacy,” the term used for political, economic, and front office (ambassador and deputy chief of mission) positions. This is not a surprising finding given that U.S. spending on core diplomacy fell by a third between 2013 and 2018.

During that same time period, China increased its spending on diplomacy by 40 percent. AFSA regularly receives reports that American diplomats are outnumbered five to one by Chinese diplomats doing economic and commercial work in Africa and elsewhere. The documented

deficit in overseas core diplomacy positions needs to be addressed, and soon, if we are to avoid losing further commercial, economic, and even political ground to competitors.

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) clearly recognizes the challenge to our national security and prosperity from rising great power competition. It is also crystal clear on the vital role of diplomats: *“Our diplomats must be able to build and sustain relationships where U.S. interests are at stake. Relationships, developed over time, create trust and shared understanding that the United States calls upon when confronting security threats, responding to crises, and encouraging others to share the burden for tackling the world’s challenges.”* The NSS goes on to conclude that the United States *“must upgrade our diplomatic capabilities to compete in the current environment.”*

It is hard to square this recognition of the need for upgraded diplomatic capability with proposed cuts to the State Department and USAID of nearly 25 percent. Our nation needs a full team of diplomats and development professionals in the field keeping threats at bay and expanding our prosperity – combating the conditions that enable terrorism to take root, protecting against pandemics, and promoting the rule of law and open systems that allow American companies to compete and thrive.

We know Congress takes seriously the threat of rising competition – this is clear from wide margins in the vote to reject proposed cuts and again restore funding for the FY 2019 International Affairs Budget. AFSA is grateful for this support from members of Congress, and we urge both chambers to once again reject deep cuts, provide an increase for “Overseas Programs” funding, and, finally, direct the movement of FSOs into positions abroad so that America has a full Foreign Service team in the field. With all the threats facing our country, now is not the time to abandon the field and forfeit the game to our adversaries.

Thank you.