

The American Foreign Service Association Testimony
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The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
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Related to U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development Funding

If there is one thing that unites Americans, it is support for maintaining our country's global leadership role. In fact, polls consistently show that 9 in 10 Americans support strong U.S. global leadership. Such leadership is unthinkable without a strong professional Foreign Service deployed around the world protecting and defending America's people, interests, and values.

Each day, American leadership is being challenged anew by rivals who hope to out-compete us and adversaries who want to see us fail. We cannot let that happen. If the United States retreats, we leave a vacuum that will be filled by others who do not share our values or interests. Walking that back--reclaiming American global leadership, once lost--would be a daunting and uncertain task, in short, a grave risk we should not take.

The United States has enjoyed a position of unprecedented global leadership in our lifetimes. 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 global leadership that has kept us safe and prosperous at home. For a tiny percentage of the overall budget, the Foreign Service builds the relationships that get America's business in the world done and keeps threats at bay, whether forming alliances to combat terrorism, protect our borders, or open markets.

The President makes the case clearly in the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS): "*The United States faces an extraordinarily dangerous world, filled with a wide range of threats that have intensified in recent years.*" The NSS goes on to conclude that the United States "*must upgrade our diplomatic capabilities to compete in the current environment.*" Despite the acknowledgement of the heightened threats our country faces and the recognition of the need for upgraded diplomatic capability to prevail in this environment, the 2019 State/USAID budget request proposes cutting the State Department by 28 percent. Such a drastic cut would amount to a voluntary retreat from the world stage and a diminution of American global influence.

AFSA has consistently made the case that maintaining robust diplomatic capability is vital to preserving the global leadership role Americans overwhelmingly support. Congressional appropriators agreed and rejected plans to slash the 2018 State/USAID budget. AFSA is extremely grateful for this support from members of Congress and we are encouraged that both chambers' FY19 302(b) allocations also reject deep cuts and restore funding to previous year's levels. We would like to see these funding allocations upheld throughout the budget bill's markup and possible passage into law. With all the threats facing our country, now is not the time to abandon the field and forfeit the game to our adversaries.

Despite the rejection of deep cuts to the State Department's overall budget, State's Congressional Budget Justifications for the fiscal years 2008-2016/2017 show that spending on *core* diplomatic capability, i.e., the reporting, analysis, and advocacy our diplomats perform overseas, has

declined over the last decade. **If we compare FY2008, the last full year of the Bush 43 Administration, to FY2016 and FY2017, the decline in funding is significant—from one dollar in 2008 to just 77 cents in 2016 and 2017, in non-inflation adjusted terms. This erosion of America’s core diplomatic capability must be reversed to avoid ceding America’s global leadership role to rising powers, such as China (which increased spending on diplomacy by 40% over the past five years, while ours decreased by 33 percent, from \$7.4 billion in 2013 to \$4.9 in 2018.)**

Congress can begin to shore up underfunded core diplomatic capability by first looking at increasing the deployment of our diplomats abroad. The State Department has taken steps to free up talented mid-level officers who had been in Washington roles supporting the many special envoys that had proliferated in the Department in recent years. Now, it’s time to shift those officers and positions back out to the field where they can be most effective and where they can fulfill the Department’s mission. With just an additional \$100 million in the “overseas programs” line item of the Diplomatic & Consular Programs account, State could fully fund the overseas deployment costs of 300 existing mid-level Foreign Service officers.

The National Security Strategy 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. Face-to-face diplomacy cannot be replaced by technology. 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.”* Our nation’s diplomats and development professionals belong in the field promoting the rule of law and improving legal frameworks that would enable American companies to compete and thrive, defending against pandemics, and so much more of the high-value diplomacy that keeps the United States safe and prosperous.

We would like to partner with our congressional supporters to ensure that today, and 15 or 20 years from now, U.S. diplomats are still on the field, deployed around the world, protecting and promoting U.S. interests. Diplomatic presence is the outward manifestation of America’s intention to lead not just militarily, but economically, politically, and culturally as well. We erode our nation’s diplomatic power at our own grave peril. We should not, in a dangerous world, abandon the field to our adversaries.

Thank you.