The U.S. Foreign Service: Our First Line of Defense
Public Outreach Talking Points

Note: *these materials are intended for use by AFSA members and others presenting to an audience not familiar with the work of the Foreign Service. These materials provide the building blocks for discussion; please adapt as appropriate.*

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

- A country's foreign policy is a set of general objectives that guide its activities and relationships with other governments.
- The purpose of foreign policy is to further a country's interests, particularly around safeguarding national independence, security, and prosperity.
- Foreign policy is set by political leaders, as advised by a number of government experts, including members of the Foreign Service.
- Diplomacy is one of the main instruments of foreign policy. Diplomacy entails influencing the decisions and conduct of foreign governments and officials through dialogue, negotiation, and other nonviolent means.
- As our world gets more globalized and interdependent with advances in travel, technology, and trade, diplomacy and international relations become all the more important.
- One of the key tenets of U.S. foreign policy, established by President Kennedy in the 1960s, has been to have a universal representation throughout the world, allowing the U.S. to become a global leader.
- American diplomacy has played and continues to play a critical part in building and sustaining an international order conducive to cooperation between countries while at the same time furthering and serving our own interests and values.

Foreign Service – who are we?

- Members of the Foreign Service represent our nation's government in other countries around the world. They are non-partisan public servants charged with carrying out as well as guiding the foreign policy of the United States.
- As career professionals, they are trained in foreign languages, international relations, and diplomacy.
- U.S. diplomats operate out of U.S. embassies and consulates at 276 posts around the world. The only countries in which the US **does not** have representation are North Korea, Bhutan, Iran, and Syria.

- In addition to diplomats at the State Department, who make up the majority of the Foreign Service, there are Foreign Service members in five other U.S. government agencies:
    - U.S. Agency for International Development,
    - Foreign Agricultural Service,
    - Foreign Commercial Service,
    - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and
    - U.S. Agency for Global Media.
- The U.S. global presence has increased throughout American history, experiencing significant growth in the 20th century as the U.S. assumed a greater leadership role in global affairs.
- Recently, our overseas presence has been shrinking somewhat in terms of the number of personnel.
- In parallel, China has expanded its presents in terms of number of posts, overtaking the U.S. as the biggest diplomatic presence in the world.
- As of 2020, there are about 16,000 members of the Foreign Service from across all these agencies working around the world on behalf of the U.S. government.

Where do we work?

- Diplomats work in U.S. Embassies when they are overseas.
- An ambassador (also known as the chief of mission) is the President's personal representative and the highest-ranking U.S. official in the country.
- The Ambassador is the head of the "country team", that is, all the U.S. diplomats and representatives of U.S. government agencies in that country. This includes USAID, Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign Agricultural Service, APHIS, Drug Enforcement Agency, Defense, FBI, and Justice, among others.
- The Ambassador's role is to marshal all the expertise of the country team to work with the host country on shared problems and issues.
- In addition to American members of the country team, embassies hire local staff who know the local culture, have essential skills or have significant contacts in the government and civil society in the host country.

What do we do?

- Posted in almost every country around the world, members of the Foreign Service are our eyes and ears on the ground charged with the mission to promote and protect American interests and values and keep Americans secure and prosperous at home.
- Over the course of their careers (on average, diplomats stay in service for 25 years), diplomats move from post to post, accumulating knowledge and experience that they then apply to new and unanticipated issues and problems that arise such as, repatriating thousands of Americans home during a global health crisis or managing a foreign terrorist fighter threat.
- Diplomats are experts in assessing how to work with foreign partners to achieve U.S. goals, using shared interests or values, persuasion, negotiation, or strategic coercion. Their jobs and roles are varied and include, among others:

    - Supporting Americans living or traveling internationally- everything from registering the birth of an American citizen child to assisting jailed Americans or helping to evacuate Americans in danger.
    - Alerting Washington to developments and events overseas that could threaten the United States or American citizens.
    - Ensuring a level playing field for American businesses overseas.
    - Supporting joint counter terrorism cooperation and criminal investigations.
    - Deciding who has a legitimate reason to travel to the United States and issuing visas accordingly.
    - Negotiating with other governments on shared challenges, like climate change and nuclear proliferation.
    - Fighting pandemics and delivering humanitarian and other assistance to those in need.
- As experts on their respective regions, members of the Foreign Service work on the long and delicate process of establishing and maintaining useful relationships with host countries.
- Foreign Service members leverage these relationships to advocate for U.S. interests, to work together on common causes, and to explain U.S. society and values.
- As the first line of defense when it comes to solving or buffering international misunderstandings and problems, diplomats play a major role in our national security.
- With the foreign assistance budget representing less than 1% of our federal budget, the investment in diplomacy represents a real value for our country, particularly when compared to the cost of military interventions.
- Having a cadre of experienced professionals that have made a career of dealing with issues and potential threats is an invaluable asset, especially when it comes to facing new unanticipated problems.