

Testimony of the Honorable Marc Grossman

Before the

Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

United States House of Representatives

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The Embassy of the Future

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today concerning a recent commission report focused on the Embassy of the Future. Thank you for your interest in this important subject.

The Embassy of the Future Commission was organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies here in Washington, D.C. I was privileged to be one of the co-chairs of the Commission. The other co-chairs were Ambassador George Argyros and Ambassador Felix Rohatyn. Because the other co-chairs do not live in the Washington area, I will do my best to represent them today. I also wish to recognize and thank again all of those who served as Commissioners.

Mr. Chairman, may I ask that you include the report of the Commission in the official transcript of this hearing.

Let me briefly explain the origins of the study in order to put in context the findings of our report. The study was conceived at the request of the State Department. Then Under Secretary for Management Henrietta Fore contacted CSIS to ask if CSIS would survey the State Department's program to modernize its embassy platforms, and make recommendations to improve the functioning of the embassies. The project was funded by the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to improving conditions for the Foreign Service and to make American diplomacy more effective. We reported the results of our study to the Department last fall in briefings to senior management, to include the Secretary of State, and released the report to the public in October, 2007.

Mr. Chairman, in the early stages of the planning for this commission, CSIS staff had envisioned it as a study that would examine the building program for new embassies. There has been debate, inside and outside the State Department, about the kind of facilities being built and where they are located in foreign capitals.

Our commissioners felt that agenda was too narrow. There is a much larger question to be asked: What must America do to have the most effective 21st century diplomacy? This is a question that is larger and more

fundamental than buildings and it was this issue that became the focus of our work.

As the report says, what we think of as traditional diplomacy – where government and social elites interact in highly formal channels – is being transformed. Today’s diplomats will continue to conduct traditional business, and it is important, but they must also adapt their skills to nontraditional settings.

America’s diplomats are already doing business in new ways. They work to bring development to mountain villages in Nepal and Peru, travel to remote jungles to support drug eradication missions in Colombia, and deliver food and water in the wake of catastrophes such as the tsunami. They deploy with US military forces in provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan and Iraq and operate from one-officer posts to promote American business in commercial centers in France.

In our interviews with serving diplomats around the world, we heard that they are struggling to break free from the bureaucratic practices that keep them inside US embassy buildings and that emphasize the processing of information over the personal, active, direct engagement that wins friends and supporters for America – the kind of diplomacy that inspired them to serve their country in the first place.

Today’s diplomatic challenges – such as highlighting and demonstrating American values; strengthening the growth of civil institutions and the rule of law; promoting democracy; serving and protecting the millions of American citizens who live and travel abroad; promoting trade and investment; fighting drug trafficking; stopping the trafficking in persons; supporting sustainable development to combat poverty; preventing genocide; strengthening foreign cooperation and capacity to address global security challenges such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, international crime, disease and humanitarian disasters – cannot be accomplished from Washington. These objectives require frontline activity by skilled diplomatic professionals operating in – and increasingly out of – embassies of the future; dynamic and effective platforms for American power and influence around the world.

The State Department has taken initiatives to change the way American diplomacy is done. Secretary Albright began the effort to revamp the Department's personnel system. Secretary Powell made significant contributions, the most important of which was the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, the program that hired just over 1,100 Foreign Service officers in three years. Secretary Rice has emphasized "transformational diplomacy" and acted to redistribute positions to new priorities.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission devoted a good deal of time to thinking about the requirements for effective diplomats and effective diplomacy in the future. Let me summarize the highlights of this report, and then I would look forward to answering any questions you have.

First, the Commission concluded that we need to resource the State Department properly. The Commission concluded that we need to increase the number of Foreign Service Officers to correct long-standing shortfalls in personnel. Our report calls for the budget to increase so that 1,015 are hired as soon as possible. I can't overstate the importance of this. The price for fixing this shortfall in staffing of the State Department would cost less than just one C-17 transport aircraft. I think we need to buy transport aircraft. But I use this example to show that the price of correcting this shortfall is easily within our reach as a nation. We must act on this or the rest of our proposals will have little real effect.

Second, the State Department must exploit new technologies for a new diplomacy. With advances in technology such as Blackberries, videoconferencing and online networking, diplomats can extend their reach and widen their networks. State also needs to use technology to make it easier for our diplomats to report from the field, and to share knowledge with colleagues in the embassy and the State Department, and with other agencies.

Third, diplomacy in the future will be most successful if it is practiced from dispersed, distributed platforms, away from main embassy compounds, operating closer to target audiences. We must have diplomats with stronger language and other skills, with more flexible technology and trained for a broader range of activities. The American embassy in a foreign country is one of the platforms for the operations of American representatives. But it is

also a physical representation of America. We should be showing a confident and proud face to the world, not a worried and frightened image.

Fourth, we need to strengthen the role of the Ambassadors to enable them to forge the country team into one unit, insuring that all the agencies represented are working coherently. As our platforms become more diverse and technology allows people to be out more on their own, the Ambassador's integrating function becomes more important, not less.

Fifth, we need to think about how we manage risk. We must protect the women and men who work in the mission. But there needs to be an effective balance between accomplishing the mission and protecting the people. This doesn't mean less security. It means smarter security. We need to give our security experts and our Ambassadors better tools, and State Department employees better training, so that they can reach a reasoned plan for security and mission effectiveness.

As the Commission concluded, supporting diplomacy of the future will require changes in how Americans perceive diplomacy. Some Americans mistake diplomacy as a tool for the weak, always about making concessions or appeasing our foes. Diplomacy is a vital tool of national security. The men and women who pursue America's diplomatic objectives abroad are as honorable and dedicated in their promotion of defense of America's interests as are our men and women in uniform.

The United States faces unprecedented opportunities and challenges around the world. We will not meet these challenges, or grasp the opportunities available to us, without a successful American diplomacy.

Thank you. I am delighted to answer any questions you might have for me concerning the Commission report.