



Testimony of John K. Naland  
President, American Foreign Service Association

*House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs  
Chairman John F. Tierney*

Hearing on:  
“Fortress America Abroad:  
Effective Diplomacy and the Future of U.S. Embassies”  
January 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shays, and distinguished subcommittee members, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) welcomes this opportunity to speak on the subject of effective diplomacy and the future of U.S. embassies. AFSA is the professional association and labor union representing our nation’s career diplomats. We are grateful to you for convening this hearing. I will make an opening statement and then look forward to answering any questions.

American embassies and consulates are bricks-and-mortar platforms for projecting U.S. influence in foreign lands. As such, it goes without saying that their design, location, and accessibility matter. But, as the CSIS “Embassy of the Future” report stresses, diplomacy is foremost about people: our diplomats and their capacity to carry out their missions. Thus, I will focus my remarks on the human element of the embassy of the future.

#### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

The Foreign Service exists to provide the President with a worldwide available corps of professionals with unique abilities that are essential to foreign policy development and implementation. Foreign Service members need to possess a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities including: foreign language fluency, advanced area knowledge (including history, culture, politics, and economics), leadership and management skills (including project management), public diplomacy skills, and job-specific functional expertise.

Unfortunately, due to chronic understaffing and chronic underinvestment in professional development, the Foreign Service at the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development has long been shortchanged on many of prerequisites for its own effectiveness. Let me give some examples:

- September 2007 data (cited in the CSIS “Embassy of the Future” report, page 10) show the State Department Foreign Service at below 85 percent of needed staffing -- short 1,015 positions for overseas and domestic assignments and short 1,079 positions for training,

transit, and temporary needs. This lack of bench strength was the proximate cause of the initial difficulty that State had last fall in filling upcoming vacancies in Iraq with volunteers.

- An August 2006 Government Accountability Office report entitled "Department of State: Staffing and Foreign Language Shortfalls Persist" 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."
- Many Foreign Service members -- including Ambassadors, Deputy Chiefs of Mission, and Principal Officers -- go to their new assignments without receiving up-to-date area studies training. They, therefore, face a much more daunting "learning curve" upon arrival at post.
- Foreign Service officers have far fewer opportunities for skills-broadening interagency details, university training, and war college attendance than do military officers.
- While one might expect that every U.S. diplomat would receive training in how to negotiate, only about 15 percent of current Foreign Service officers have taken a negotiating course. Imagine if only 15 percent of Army officers had been trained to fire a rifle.
- Despite increasing need for diplomats to run programs (for example, public diplomacy, security assistance, and development assistance), few Foreign Service members receive training on program management.

As a result of understaffing and under investment in training, today's Foreign Service does not have to a sufficient degree the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed for 21st Century diplomacy and foreign assistance. Absent a paradigm shift in the White House and on Capitol Hill to view the staffing of our embassies as being no less vital than the staffing of our military units, future U.S. diplomacy will suffer. Absent a paradigm shift to view the professional development of our diplomats as being no less vital than the professional development of our uniformed military, future U.S. diplomacy will suffer.

If calling for more resources for diplomacy and foreign assistance seems self-serving coming from the AFSA president, consider what one knowledgeable outsider said recently. In a November 26, 2007 speech, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for a "dramatic increase" in funding for diplomacy and foreign assistance. Secretary Gates said, in part:

"The Department of Defense has taken on many ... burdens that might have been assumed by civilian agencies in the past... [The military has] done an admirable job...but it is no replacement for the real thing - civilian involvement and expertise... Funding for non-military foreign-affairs programs...remains disproportionately small relative to what we spend on the military... Secretary Rice has asked for a budget increase for the State Department and an expansion of the Foreign Service. The need is real... What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security - diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development... We must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military... Indeed, having robust civilian capabilities

available could make it less likely that military force will have to be used in the first place, as local problems might be dealt with before they become crises." (<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1199>)

Those remarks clearly recognize the value of having a diplomatic corps that is sufficiently staffed and trained to enable the U.S. government to seek to achieve national goals without resorting to a military-led "kinetic" intervention. Thus, as we think about the embassy of the future, we must not lose sight of the human capital dimension. Today, our diplomats 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. The situation will only worsen in the coming years unless these human capital deficits are addressed.

### Taking Risk for America

No matter how well trained U.S. diplomats are, their effectiveness will be limited if they are unable or unwilling to get out beyond embassy walls to conduct face-to-face diplomacy. Fortunately, the Foreign Service has a proud tradition of working the alleys and offices of sometimes-dangerous foreign cities to promote vital U.S. interests. But, one only needs to read the newspaper to see the ever growing shadow of political violence. Just this month, a USAID officer was brutally assassinated in Khartoum, Sudan and a U.S. Embassy vehicle was bombed in Beirut, Lebanon. The AFSA Memorial Plaques at Main State currently list 225 U.S. diplomats who have died in the line of duty while serving America abroad. Sadly, two additional names will be added at our annual ceremony later this spring.

That said, speaking as someone who began his diplomatic career in Bogota, Colombia, I have full confidence that my colleagues will continue to volunteer for dangerous assignments and, while there, will continue to get out beyond embassy walls to interact with foreign publics.

To help ensure that this continues to be the case, I return to my remarks on the need for more training and full staffing. A Foreign Service member who lacks fluency in the local language may well be hesitant to make contact with wide segments of the host nation's society. A Foreign Service member with minimal media relations training may well be hesitant to appear on a host nation TV or radio program to explain U.S. policy. A Foreign Service member who received a fraction of the physical security training that is given to intelligence community officers may well feel ill-at-ease going out to meet with a local contact in some situations. An ambassador with an understaffed Diplomatic Security office may not be able to adequately protect the members of his or her mission. Before existing security procedures are revised in the name of "risk management," training and staffing gaps such as these must be closed.

### A Disincentive to Overseas Service

I would be remiss if I failed to mention an ever-growing financial disincentive to serve abroad that puts in jeopardy the long-term health of the Foreign Service and, with it, the future viability of U.S. diplomatic engagement. I refer to the exclusion of overseas Foreign Service members from receiving the "locality pay" salary adjustment that almost all other federal employees receive as compensation for the public-private sector pay gap. Other groups such as the uniformed military and the intelligence community receive the same base pay overseas that

they receive when stationed in the U.S. However, Foreign Service members currently take a 20.89 percent cut in base pay when they transfer abroad from Washington, D.C.

As a result, Foreign Service members take a pay cut to serve at 20 percent hardship differential posts such as Damascus, Tripoli, Sarajevo, Chisinau, Libreville, La Paz, and Ulaanbaatar. All told, Foreign Service members take a pay cut to serve at 183 of 268 overseas posts (68 percent). Within three years, another 42 posts -- those at the 25 percent hardship level without an additional danger pay supplement -- likely will be passed unless this overseas pay disparity is corrected by Congress. This ever-growing financial disincentive to serve abroad is simply not sustainable. The financial "reward" for five years spent abroad is the loss of the equivalent of one year's salary. That has serious long-term impacts on such things as savings for retirement and children's college funds -- especially for the many Foreign Service families who also suffer the loss of income from a spouse who cannot find employment overseas.

What AFSA seeks, and the Bush Administration fully supports, is a legislative correction of what is now a 13-year old unintended inequity in the worldwide Foreign Service pay schedule. Ending this pay disparity would help validate the 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 when they transfer abroad. If we don't act now, the pay gap will only widen.

While the foremost committee of jurisdiction on this matter is the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, an important role can be played by the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform as a result of its oversight on questions directly impacting the federal workforce. I would like to thank Rep. Chris Van Hollen of this subcommittee for his early support in trying to find a solution to this problem. I encourage others to follow suit. We are hopeful that Congress will solve this problem this year. If Congress fails to act on this significant problem, the negative morale impact on the Foreign Service will undermine the future efficiency of our embassies and missions abroad.

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