

Testimony of Thomas R Pickering

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be asked to join this distinguished panel to discuss with you the Embassy of the future and meeting the needs of modern American diplomacy against the challenges of the opening portion of the 21st Century. While it is now both a truism and somewhat trite, it is still correct that we have not faced as many different challenges today as we have at any time in the past. And the future is not going to get any simpler or more predictable.

As a basis for speaking with you about some ideas that I believe are important for us to consider and adopt, I want briefly to sketch in the outlines of some of these new and old problems with which we must contend.

To begin with, we should first note that each of the issues I will mention is in one way or another linked to the others. The world has become more complex, more interrelated and more interdependent all at the same time. This is what the French like to call a *problematique* – a problem of problems.

There is no easy place to begin. Globalization has made us more integrated both economically and politically while it has unfortunately increased the differences between the impoverished and most wealthy. New states are emerging to contest America's so far unrivaled leadership in the economic and military arena. And both new and old states are failing. China, India, Russia may become partners or protagonists in large part as a result of how our policies and diplomacy manage our relations with those states. We may, with the United Nations, have to continue to play a role of propping up and assisting weak states in Africa and elsewhere or we may see success as some of these states emerge able to govern and manage their economies on their own.

Terror will continue to be a tactic widely used against us and our friends and partners around the world. While now heavily focused on us by Islamic militants and extremists, they have had no monopoly in the past, now, or in the future on the use of this tactic and we must work hard to assure as the president has said that we do not turn the conflict with terrorists in to a war on Islam.

If that were not enough, and it is just the beginning, we must be mindful of the challenges we face elsewhere. Health issues from HIV/AIDS, to TB, to Malaria, to new pandemics

such as SARS, all must be issues for our diplomacy and action. So too must growing energy and environmental needs as closely linked, significant problems for the future. A few months ago we might have happily ignored the tight interconnectedness of all of our economies around the world, something the sub-prime crisis and its ramifications will not now let us forget.

Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction continue to be a serious preoccupation. How we deal with Iran, the DPRK, and India, Pakistan and Israel in this category as well as a growing number of countries who seem bent on creating independent enrichment capacity is most important.

This list just marks the surface only of what we face down the road. Much of the list - most of the issues - have been carefully documented in a series of studies which have recently appeared or I hope will shortly appear. I have had the pleasure to work on a number of them, including the Embassy of the Future report of the CSIS which gives rise, as I understand it, to this set of hearings and on which I want to draw heavily for my suggestions to follow. The CSIS also sponsored the "Soft Power Report" which provides a powerful new way of thinking about diplomacy and the exercise of American strength across the spectrum of activities closely linked into our diplomacy and national security policy for the future. So too has been the recent report prepared by a Commission led by Mary Bush studying the future of our assistance programs.

Others in the works and which I hope will appear soon are a report to Secretary of State Rice on Transformational Diplomacy and another being prepared by the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University on the challenges to be faced by the next American president and the options available to deal with those challenges.

There are a number of salient themes which run through most of these reports and which are worth recalling, even if only in summary form here.

First on our role in the world - we will remain for the foreseeable future the world's largest economy and the world's most powerful country militarily speaking. We may be challenged overtime by individual states or coalitions of them. Even while we occupy this significant position we are not in a unipolar sense omnipotent. Much of what will have to be done in the world must be accomplished by states and others acting together to make it happen. We are uniquely both equipped and endowed to be the leader of those actions and movements where we choose to be. In that sense, we are still widely accepted as the essential partner for success in most important endeavors requiring international cooperation around the world. Where we choose not to lead, but still support the endeavor, we will become the essential party. Where we choose to oppose action we have a strong capacity to block such activity. Although to the degree we oppose a broad international consensus we will increase the opposition and the cost to ourselves of such efforts. The end result is that there may have been a fleeting unipolar moment in the history of the last decade, but I will let writers and historians argue over that. What is true now is that cooperation and leadership are required and they are both made effective through diplomacy and our activities overseas.

The second major factor is that force will not solve all problems; indeed we see that force alone solves very few problems. The paradigm is complicated even more when we note that diplomacy not backed up by the potential to use force is weak and often ineffective. At the same time it is largely true that force is most effective in supporting diplomacy when and where it does not have to be called into use.

Similarly, while force alone does not easily solve problems, we know that the results of the use of force often compel additional uses of force, and they in turn often require a significant contribution of non-forceful efforts to pick up the pieces – to stabilize and reconstruct the damaged economies and polities left in the wake of the use of force. Force in self defense and force as a last resort when all else has been tried to meet the vital national interests of our country, will always be required for our security, but if anything, recent experience compels us to do better and more effectively all those other tasks that will make the deployment of force unnecessary. Wars of choice don't work very well for us or for others. And Democracies do not and should not go to war for any but the most exigent reasons

What makes for successful diplomacy is the careful integration of our people, our policies and our presence around the world. Without these three factors operating smoothly together the ability to deliver in the field will be less than ideal. Similarly, without adequate and prescient reporting and assessments from the field our policy will be less adequate to the task. Without the right people in the right spots diplomacy cannot work effectively.

Our Embassies and other missions overseas represent the spear point of our activities with other nations, organizations and peoples all around the world. It goes almost without saying that our objective should be the broadest possible representation with the world at large. All administrations since the 1950s have followed a general practice, with rare exceptions, of being represented in most if not all foreign capitals and in many of the larger cities of the world with embassies, consulates general, consulates and other special purpose missions.

But even more important than these posts themselves, the physical fabric which is emblematic of our country, are the people who serve us there. The two are inextricably intertwined and indeed it would be safe to conclude that good people in poor buildings are far and away better than the opposite. Not that any of us would recommend that we not provide the kind of excellent facilities and tools to do their job which make good people even more effective in our national interest.

The Embassy of the Future Report emphasizes several points which bear reiteration in this hearing. First, it concludes that diplomacy is our first line of defense and it cannot work only centered in Washington,. It must be in the field. Second, non-state actors and audiences are growing in number and importance – we need to be able to engage that new audience. Third, the threats against us and our diplomats have increased significantly.

Even more importantly, the report stresses several principles which need to be operational for the success of our future diplomacy. These include: the capacity for dispersed operations – getting out of the compound; diplomats need the tools to operate more independently; new training and skills and enhanced old ones are required to make this happen - better language capabilities for one; a more distributed presence is required to support our objectives – such as one-person posts in important cities outside capitals; back office support functions should be further standardized, regionalized or relocated to the US and made more efficient; technology should be further provided and improved to enable our diplomats to function more effectively – hand-held communications tools for all our representatives for full time, real time contacts; and enhanced sharing of knowledge in the field and in and with Washington should empower our people working out there for us.

Specific recommendations in all of these reports cover a wide area of activity and will provoke lively and predictably some controversial debate. Let me however cover just a few of those that I consider most important ones so you can sense the direction and flavor of the effort which attempts to take into account the analysis and conclusions which I have just presented.

In Washington, I believe there is much that can be done to fashion a new and effective diplomacy for the future. Some of the steps which need to be taken are fundamental. New ways need to be found to integrate the efforts of our departments and agencies to address national security and foreign policy challenges. The stovepiping of these efforts all the way up to the top was something the national security structure created in the 1947 Act was designed to overcome. The strength of the president in his lead of this effort and the role and functioning of the national security advisor and the staff of the NSC together with the cooperation of the cabinet secretaries and agency heads is vital, especially in the execution of these tasks. While differing policy and implementation ideas ought to be provided to the president on critical national security issues and foreign policy problems, once the decision has been made the country expects that the departments and agencies will be seamless in their integrated efforts to make the policy work

Even more, in the State Department there is now an unusual opportunity to build on the work of the last two administrations to bring our traditional diplomacy, our public diplomacy, our development diplomacy, and our efforts at stabilization and reconstruction under the broad umbrella of the Secretary's leadership. While advice differs on whether to create a new activity under the Secretary to carry out public diplomacy, increasingly our experience shows that special skills, special training and leadership are required and that those skills and leaders should be lodged together, perhaps as an agency of the department much the way USAID has now been configured.

Once that is done, many challenging and complex central tasks for all four activities could be performed inside the organization. There is in this regard a crying need for more integrated strategic planning and budgeting. A new activity to bring together for all portions of a new State Department these tasks would go far to assuring better planning and as a result more effective funding and execution of critical tasks.

If the State Department and diplomacy are to play a lead role in the future in war avoidance, in assuring cooperative relations with states, and economy and democracy building, adequate funding must be provided. Many estimate that the personnel requirements for State alone will double over the next decade and more rapidly for USAID which has become largely, in my view, a contract management organization rather than one directly representing the US in development. The funding to empower all these activities - traditional diplomacy which is largely people and facilities and development diplomacy, public diplomacy and reconstruction and stabilization which is for people, facilities, and programs, is vital to the success of the mission. Currently, all of this accounts for about 35b or less than one percent of our national budget. The President has now decided that this funding should be part of our national security budget. I would hope that he and the Office of Management and Budget as well as the Congress would, through a clear understanding of the importance of this aspect of the budget, support it fully, I also hope that they will evolve and develop ways to effect trade-offs among the many pressing functions of our national security in both the 50 and 150 accounts.

The Department of State itself could use a dose of streamlining. Too many people report directly to the Secretary of State, including almost 50 at the assistant secretary level alone. Many in Congress for whom a particular issue within the State Department's purview has become an important issue have tried to help the Department along by creating new Assistant Secretaryships and bureaus to cover that issue. We have arguably way too many bureaus and Assistant Secretaries as a result, some of them dealing with issues which could be combined into a more robust and effective bureau. The job can be done well by fewer assistant secretaries. There is now a real opportunity, as has been done in the past, to combine many functional bureaus together dealing with analogous issues. Similarly, The State Department is too highly layered and should revert to a simpler structure with no more than three or four layers between the bottom and the top. These changes will make Assistant Secretaries of State responsible for more significant areas of activity and as a result make them more effective and influential players in the interagency arena, Congressional and international scene. The reduction in layering and the consequent move of responsibility downward will help prepare officers for more responsibility in the field and should make the department more agile and effective.

These steps too will mirror what has already been accomplished in the Embassies – the development of strong country teams bringing together under the Ambassador the work of all US Government departments and agencies in a particular country.

Let me turn now briefly to some of the key, and I believe, well inter-related recommendations of the Embassy of the Future report.

First, invest in people. This should begin with another 1000 diplomats to fill positions now empty at home and abroad and provide sufficient additional positions and people so that needed training and education take place without leaving vital jobs vacant.

Second, integrate technology and good business practices. Technology has a vital multiplier role to play and State has been slow to adopt it in part because of funding limitations. The Department needs to teach technology better. It should have its own Chief Technology officer as well as funds for technology innovation at its field posts.

Third, embrace new communications tools. Internet-based media for sharing information, video communications, richer web sites, internal blogs and assuring that every officer will have a hand-held, secure communications device in the future will go far toward improving effectiveness.

Fourth, operate beyond Embassy walls. Both security training and more effective communications devices and methods can enhance our ability to be present outside the Embassy where the contacts and action are located.

Fifth, strengthen platform and presence options. This means putting people where they can meet and work with all elements of a foreign society that are important to US interests. This needs to be tailored to local needs and should include arrangements for single-person posts in important locations outside the capitals, the use of technology to create virtual representation, circuit riders, and setting up American corners in local universities and American libraries and information centers where that works best.

Sixth, strengthen the Country Team. Clear authorities for the Ambassador should be set forth by Executive Order. Our buildings themselves should be organized to permit interaction and cooperation, and communication should be laterally as vigorous as it is to Washington for all element of the Mission.

Seventh, manage risk. Security practices should continue to transition from complete risk avoidance to risk management. All diplomats and others at our overseas missions need enhanced training in security skills based on the best practices throughout the US Government. Similarly, security professionals need more training in diplomatic practice and languages.

Eighth, promote secure borders, open doors. We need to have our consular practices reflect our traditional welcome for visitors while carefully screening those who are risks and to do so in a humane, welcoming fashion. Better facilities to welcome visa applicants and more distributed consular operations can assist this approach.

Ninth, streamline administrative functions. Standardizing process and centralizing regionally or in Washington should help improve in some areas where specific local applications are not major factors.

For all of the above adequate funding remains critical to success.

Some critical questions:

Does it make sense to construct Embassy compounds in fortress-like style

outside metropolitan areas?

Every Embassy represents an exercise in risk management. It is not easy to lose people especially if we determine they could have been saved by better physical protection measures. It is also important to understand that no facility is perfect and that physical protection needs to be supplemented by good personal security practices and good intelligence among others. This report suggests new ways of dealing with this issue constructively, from better risk management to more distributed operations obviously closely keyed to local circumstances. Where a building can be located downtown, such as in Ottawa, that should be a key part of the equation.

How can we best conduct diplomacy in this post 9/11, information-age world?

I would suggest that the best diplomacy is best conducted face-to-face wherever that is possible. Individuals still react more openly and sincerely to such encounters. Information is easier to come by as a result, and the interaction often has the capacity to produce new ideas and solutions. Effective relationships and friendships can be solidified over time through such meetings.

Is the shift from risk avoidance to risk management a wise idea?

Yes, an Embassy that cannot perform its function, but is completely walled off from its neighborhood, may be one way of assuring near perfect security. At the other end of the spectrum is a wide open situation where the neighborhood is dangerous. Neither does the complete job very well. Full risk avoidance often means that we have few or no contacts and influence. Too lax a security posture means we lose people and public property. Risk management does not mean we abandon risk avoidance, but it does mean incorporating smarter techniques and approaches to getting the job done. Intelligence is a key to much of this. We can also, under risk management, tighten or relax postures relatively in view of what our intelligence and other judgments are about the local situation at any particular time. We need to bring our public along with the central truth that there is no perfect security equation and not doing our job risks our national security.

Are Embassies useful in sending signals, are they symbols?

Like our flag, more broadly our Embassies and other overseas US Government structures do send those messages. Over time, excellence in architecture has stood for something in how foreign citizens and leaders react to our country and its position in the world. At the same time, in the trade offs that have to be made, architectural excellence also needs to be combined with good security. The task is harder now than it has ever been. The challenges to the designers and builders of our overseas buildings and the costs incurred in meeting them once again emphasize that we must be prepared to pay for the facilities necessary to do the excellent job in the right buildings in the correct location that our public expects.

Does heavy security screening block people from entering our facilities, especially our libraries and others which depend on public access? Are there other ways to engage in effective people-to-people diplomacy?

The answer to the former question is yes. Again trade offs have to be looked into. Often libraries can be located with other public facilities which reduces their potential to become targets – part of a university library. Donations of books can be made without setting up a facility. The internet is a new media form for virtual communications. Personal calls, and cultural or other events can bring people together for effective people-to-people public diplomacy. Exchange programs help in this regard and are old and tested methods of working.

Thank you for the chance to address these important issues for our country and its future. I look forward to your questions and the chance to interact with the panel you have assembled this morning.