



Testimony of Susan Rockwell Johnson
President, American Foreign Service Association

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia
Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)

Hearing on:
*State Department Training: Investing in the Workforce to Address 21st Century
Challenges*
March 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Senator Johnson, and distinguished subcommittee members, the American Foreign Service Association welcomes the opportunity to speak before this subcommittee on the subject of State Department training and, more generally -- as the just-released American Academy of Diplomacy study has called for -- on professional education and formation. Substantial political, economic, strategic and cultural challenges confront the entire Foreign Service that AFSA is proud to represent, which encompasses employees not only of the State Department, but also of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Foreign Commercial Service, the Foreign Agricultural Service and the International Broadcasting Bureau. We are grateful to you for again convening a hearing on this important issue.

The question of professional education and training for 21st-century diplomacy and development goes to the heart of our national security readiness and competitiveness. Building a strong, professional diplomatic service is our first line of defense in an increasingly complex, unpredictable and dangerous world. In this regard, diplomacy and development are key instruments of our national power and

should be our primary tools for advancing U.S. interests in the context of understanding, anticipating, containing and addressing tension, instability and conflict. Diplomacy may not always be sufficient, and it always benefits from being backed up by military power. However, experience shows alternatives to diplomacy, including military intervention, are considerably more costly and complicated to implement. They are also less likely to succeed, especially as the competitive forces in the world become ever more capable.

Recent events in North Africa and the Middle East demonstrate how precarious the task of interpreting the meaning of trends and developments for our national interest can be without deep understanding of the subtle forces behind the headlines. More than ever, we need a strong diplomatic service of highly trained professionals with a range of knowledge, skills and abilities founded on a strong grasp of American history, culture and governmental processes. To this must be added foreign language proficiency, advanced area knowledge of the history, culture, politics and economics of other nations, as well as interagency leadership, management, negotiating, public diplomacy, and job-specific functional expertise. This is the minimum all officers must embody in order to provide the best possible timely advice to the president, Secretary of State and our political leadership.

For this reason, since becoming AFSA president nearly two years ago, one of my priorities has been to strengthen AFSA as a professional organization and to focus attention on how much has changed in the Foreign Service and the world since the last Foreign Service Act was passed in 1980. I am trying to engage everyone in the process of addressing how the Department of State and the Foreign Service as institutions need to respond to these changes.

In addition, AFSA's more than 11,000 active-duty members represent a much broader and more diverse range of concerns and aspirations than when I entered the Service in 1980. One of my goals is to help ensure that the institutional environment in which our next generation of diplomats works stays attuned and responsive to both the enduring and the new demands of their chosen profession. Of foremost importance are the issues of professional education and short-term training.

We therefore welcome this timely hearing on this important issue for our nation's diplomatic service and look forward to a similar focus on our development service, USAID. We agree with the recommendations of the January 2011 Government Accountability Office report on training for State Department personnel and stand ready to support the efforts of State Department management to implement them.

AFSA also warmly welcomes the Academy of American Diplomacy's comprehensive study on "Forging a 21st-Century Diplomatic Service for the United States through Professional Education and Training." As General Brent Scowcroft writes in the foreword to the report, it "puts into stark relief the urgent need to prepare and sustain a corps of American diplomatic professionals that is intellectually and operationally ready to lead in the new environment."

The study draws welcome attention to the importance of professional education and formation and shorter-term training. It signals the need to respond to the changing requirements of the U.S. government in the conduct of its foreign and national security policies, including in the area of ensuring cohesion in today's highly diverse Foreign Service through a common, well-defined understanding of and ability to meet the demands of a whole-of-government approach to 21st-century diplomacy and development.

That said, the report could not address all the issues of concern or interest to AFSA, three of which I would note here:

- The need for a clearer articulation of the knowledge and skills required of all our diplomats today, irrespective of cone or functional specialty;
- The quantity, quality and content of current training being offered and, in particular, the role of contractors with little firsthand experience in the practice of diplomacy as primary instructors; and
- The perverse incentives operating within the current corporate culture that discourage Foreign Service personnel from taking advantage of available training opportunities.

As Ambassador Ronald Neumann notes in his excellent testimony, the first three AAD recommendations focus on the urgent need to redress our chronic underinvestment in diplomacy and development by fully funding Diplomacy 3.0 hiring and by providing a 15-percent training reserve or "float," and by making a long-term commitment to investment in professional formation and training. If the current budget climate is such that the resources for developing a training reserve are not forthcoming, as he points out, other recommendations about improving the formation and professional development of members of the Foreign Service become meaningless. AFSA wholeheartedly concurs with this assessment.

Much has changed since adoption of the 1980 Foreign Service Act. Three decades ago, there was no internet, no digital world, no cyberspace, no Facebook or Twitter. Our diplomatic and development services were overwhelmingly male and white. Today they reflect America in its rich diversity, including geographic origin, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and age.

Today's entry-level officers represent an array of postgraduate degrees and experience. However, few of them have had exposure to the practice of diplomacy in the context of the Department of State, the U.S. government at the interagency level or the international diplomatic system. Nor are they well versed in the operations of the array of regional and international institutions so crucial to global problem-solving, or the equally vast universe of nongovernmental, private-sector and citizen-led organizations that also populate and contribute to almost every aspect of today's diplomatic arena.

In connection with AFSA's participation in and support for the AAD study on the training and education necessary for our diplomats to meet 21st-century challenges, AFSA invited a number of former U.S. diplomats now in academia to help define a core body of knowledge that should be common to all American diplomats. They noted the dramatic shifts in the geopolitical environment that foreshadow the rise of competing value systems and suggested that continued dominance of Western values should not be taken for granted. Hence, they emphasized that marginal changes to the status quo will not be sufficient to meet coming challenges. They also uniformly stressed the value of a well-defined, professional body of knowledge, introduced through a longer and more professionally oriented A-100 orientation course and deepened over time. A key aspect of successful training is the quality of instructors and an integrated curriculum drawing on a mix of methodologies used.

AFSA also undertook a quick "benchmarking the competition" study of what other diplomatic services are doing about professional development and training. Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Mexico and the United Kingdom all spend a great deal of time and resources on diplomatic education and professional formation. They clearly see their diplomatic services as a critical tool of national power and influence and invest accordingly. China, in particular, has moved from paying little real attention to professional formation and training to making it a priority. They have studied what other governments do and are working to exceed it. To have a first-class diplomatic service and maintain effective global leadership

through which to advance our national interests, we can no longer rely on being the world's only superpower. We must compete.

The huge advantage that the United States enjoys in the conduct of its international affairs by virtue of our unparalleled hard and soft power does not obviate the need to exercise astute professional diplomacy, to anticipate developments and to provide sound advice to policymakers on how best to promote our interests and avoid costly mistakes. Apart from general strengthening of our institutions of diplomacy and development, a well-designed system of diplomatic training and education is required in order to ensure professional excellence and a high-quality diplomatic service able to support and sustain our global leadership.

In a rapidly evolving international political and cultural environment, in which old verities are daily being transformed, continuing education, professional formation and training are key elements in diplomatic and national security readiness. A key element of such readiness is nimbleness in recognizing unfolding trends and responding effectively to the novel and shifting challenges confronting us.

Conclusion:

AFSA concurs with all the GAO recommendations and are pleased that the State Department does, as well. We would like to draw special attention to the critical importance of the first area of strategic weakness the GAO report identified:

“Without a systematic, comprehensive assessment of training needs, State cannot be assured training is connected to true needs and priorities.”

AFSA believes that in order to undertake an effective training needs assessment, the starting point must be a clear, plain English definition of what we are training for. The purpose cited in the GAO study quotes from the State Department's Annual Training Plan, which states that “The purpose of the department's training is to develop the men and women our nation requires to fulfill our leadership role in world affairs and to advance and defend U.S. interests.” AFSA would like to see this statement of purpose made more specific and translated into operational terms for the State Department. We would also like to see this purpose related to the central themes of the department's recently completed Quadrennial Diplomatic and Development Review.

Secondly, we would like to see greater recognition of the importance of a well-defined, common sense of professional identity, professional expectations, standards and ethics as directly relevant to, and part of, professional formation and

training. The very diversity that we have achieved suggests that we may need to do more to ensure that our diplomatic service today can operate from a well defined foundation of professional standards and ethics, education, skills and know-how that is shared in common, rather than distributed haphazardly across the Service. To give credit where it is due, our military colleagues have demonstrated the role and importance of professional education and training in creating services that are more than the sum of their individual parts.

Our AFSA surveys of entry- and mid-level officers indicate that individual career development and competition, and narrowly defined, cone-driven functional technical expertise remain the main emphases of current Foreign Service training, rather than any common sense of professional identity, expectations, standards or ethics, or a collective sense of public service. This status quo cries out to be challenged. Not to do so diminishes the collective potential of those entering the Foreign Service today.

Third, AFSA believes that in order to prepare the next generation of American diplomats, now in mid-career, to lead the institution, there must be a system that ensures their participation in defining the needs and priorities of American diplomacy in the 21st-century.

AFSA welcomes the growing recognition of the urgent need for increased investment in American diplomacy and in the Foreign Service as an institution. It is equally important that attention be paid to how this investment is used to build the high-quality, professional Foreign Service that our nation needs to maintain our leadership role in an increasingly complex, competitive, unpredictable and interdependent world.

The State Department and the Foreign Service are at an unprecedented crossroads. With new crises developing daily -- increasingly in places that hitherto may have been "off the radar" -- it is a vital national security interest to ensure that the Foreign Service has the right number of people with the right skills and experience, in the right locations to create "smart power" to meet the challenges of 21st-century diplomacy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. AFSA values your longstanding support of initiatives to enhance the diplomatic readiness of our civilian Foreign Service agencies. We particularly appreciate the leadership you have shown in convening this hearing, and we look forward to continuing to serve as a resource for you and your colleagues.