

Testimony of the Honorable Thomas D. Boyatt
President of the Foreign Affairs Council
Chairman, American Academy of Diplomacy Foreign Affairs Budget Project

*Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia*

Hearing:
A Review of Diplomatic Readiness: Addressing the Staffing and Foreign
Language Challenges Facing the Foreign Service
September 24, 2009

Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, Senators,

This is the third occasion I have had the honor to testify before this subcommittee on the general subject of diplomatic readiness and the efforts of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the American Academy of Diplomacy (the Academy) to clarify the dire shortages in human and financial resources recently faced by the Foreign Affairs agencies of the United States, and to recommend major remedial steps. Last year at your July hearings I reported on the general contents of the then unpublished Report of our Project, *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness*. In October we published *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future* (FAB Report) and distributed copies to all members of this subcommittee and the staff. My colleagues and I would like to thank you Senators Akaka and Voinovich for agreeing to be members of our Advisory Group and for your interest and support. We are likewise grateful to Joel Spangenberg and Jennifer Hemingway for advising us and joining in our working meetings along with other Senatorial colleagues.

As you know, the FAB Report drew on the vast Foreign Service experience of our Academy members and the budget expertise brought together by the Henry L. Stimson Foundation to produce a bottom-up analysis of the International Affairs Function 150 Account of the national budget designed to achieve all the missions under the Secretary of State's authority. Our major recommendations to fix glaring deficiencies are: to increase U.S. direct-hire

staffing in core diplomacy, public diplomacy, foreign assistance and stabilization and reconstruction by 4,735 officers over a five-year budget cycle – FY 2010 – 2014 (a 46 percent increase) to be accompanied by significant increases in training and local staff ; to establish funding for Ambassadors' emergency activities; to dramatically increase public diplomacy programs; and to return authority over several security assistance programs from the Secretary of Defense to the Secretary of State.

I am pleased to report that the FAB Report was well received by both Presidential candidates, by the State Department Transition Team, by Secretary Clinton, by appropriations and authorizations committees in both houses among Democrats and Republicans alike, and by the media and the public. In less than a year four funding bills have passed (or almost passed). The FY'08 supplemental, the FY '09 budget and the FY'09 supplemental are the law of the land and contain robust increases for the 150 account. The FY'10 budget has been authorized by both houses and appropriations approved in the House. Taken together funds for about 3,500 additional positions are contained in these bills. The reality is that we have made very substantial progress in alleviating personnel shortages in the foreign affairs agencies. Your support and that of this subcommittee have been critical to our success thus far, and will be vital in the months ahead as we seek to maintain momentum.

I would now like to turn to the four issues you asked me to elaborate on in my capacity as Chairman of the FAB.

The Academy report's findings and recommendations for increasing language positions and opportunities for FSO's.

As detailed on page 12 of the FAB Executive Summary our analysis indicates that there is a deficit of 334 staff years for needed language training. Secretary Rice's FY2009 budget request called for 300 new training positions for "critical need" languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi and Urdu in its total request for 1,000 above attrition positions. In the event, the Congress approved 500 new State positions in the '09 budget. The passage of the '09 budget occurred after Secretary Rice's departure. While we are sure that Secretary Clinton is very supportive of increased training in general, and more "hard-language" capability in particular, we do not know whether, or to what degree, recently added staff years/positions have been allocated to language training. Our colleagues testifying before you today for the State Department will be able to clarify this matter.

Periodic reports from the GAO in previous years have shown that language designated positions – primarily at our Embassies and Consulates

overseas – are only 70 percent filled by language capable personnel. This is clearly unacceptable and all concerned understand that. The challenge will be to remedy the situation. To some small extent the language gaps can be filled in the recruitment process. The problem here is that demand for critical language personnel far exceeds supply. The Foreign Service will almost always be outbid by the private sector in this competition. We will have to rely on our own language training programs. In the years since the end of the Cold War adequate language training has been defeated by severe personnel shortages in the 20-30 percent range. Consequently, the Foreign Service Director General and State's personnel managers have been faced with a terrible "Hobbesian choice": Do you increase the shortages in current operational personnel by taking some "out the line" to learn languages ; or do you sacrifice future capability (languages) to maintain already weakened current operations? For 20 years managers have not been able to have both. The FAB recommendations on training are designed to end this intolerable situation by providing a permanent training "float" of about 15 percent like that enjoyed by our military colleagues.

Ways to address staffing and experience gaps at hardship posts.

Currently, the State Department/Foreign Service is still severely understaffed globally. Staffing and experience gaps exist at hardship and non-hardship posts alike. As we argue in FAB – we hope convincingly – staffing and experience gaps across the board can only be dealt with in the context of a 46 percent increase in personnel in all of the entities under the Secretary of State's authority in the 150 account. As we detail in the next section significant progress is being made in increasing staff levels. Of the 4,735 above attrition positions we have called for, about 3,500 will have been funded with the approval of Senate appropriators of Secretary Clinton's FY2010 budget. It is our fervent hope that Secretary Clinton will request the remaining 1200 positions in the FY2011 budget now under consideration and that the Congress will support that.

With respect to staffing gaps, we would argue that State Department managers should make the elimination of staffing gaps and the filling of vacancies the first priority in using the increased personnel now being funded by the Congress. In addition, as detailed on page 12 of the FAB Executive Summary, we call for 199 staff positions to ensure overlap between departing and arriving personnel. We also call for 135 positions to provide sufficient personnel to address staffing gaps at posts that lose personnel to temporary reassignment to crisis hot spots around the world. Experience gaps are a more complicated problem. Virtually all increased personnel in the Foreign Service will come from the traditional exam based recruitment process. There will necessarily be a bulge in the lower ranks as new officers enter the service, receive language and basic training and accumulate experience in their initial

assignments. Many of these new officers will replace slightly more senior colleagues who will enter the training float that will significantly enhance the Foreign Service's language (and other) capabilities in the years ahead. Nevertheless, the positive impact of current and hoped for personnel increases is a matter of years, not months.

The State Department's current efforts to increase the number of FSO's and its progress in meeting the Report's recommendations.

As mentioned above Secretary Clinton has obtained funding for about 3,500 positions in the FY'08 supplemental, the FY'09 budget, the FY'09 supplemental and the FY'10 budget (with the Senate Appropriations Committee final approval). She and her team deserve great credit for their persistence in pursuing robust remedies for the problem of staff shortages. It is also fair to give credit to former Secretary Rice for her efforts just prior to her departure. Before analyzing the situation in the Foreign Service/State Department, about 1,200 positions must be deducted from the total as the Congress reserved funding for about 1,000 new personnel for AID and 200 for the Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction and the establishment of a Civilian Reserve. Regarding the 2,300 positions available for additional FSO's the processes of recruitment, training and assigning are underway. The fundamental issue is one of prioritization. The FAB Report is not explicit about which problems/functions should receive personnel allocations in what order. Implicit in the FAB Report and very explicitly as far as I personally am concerned, the priority should be: first, fill existing gaps and vacancies; second, move forward in a balanced way to establish training positions thus making the training float a reality, while simultaneously moving to stand-up the Reconstruction & Stabilization Bureau and the Civilian Reserve Corps; third, all other requirements. The Department needs to present a plan to make clear how the training and Reconstruction & Stabilization Bureau will complete their staffing with positions to be established in the next fiscal year.

The Academy is not clear about how the Department will proceed and what its priorities are. Perhaps all of these decisions have not yet been taken. Mr. Chairman, I hope that you and Senator Voinovich will ask the State Department representatives at this hearing how they intend to allocate the increased personnel now entering the system and in what order. For instance, the Academy's recommendations would not be met if a large percentage of the new positions goes to administrative support, e.g., security. We do not expect this to be the case and we understand that our recommendations have broad support. Be that as it may, it would be useful for the Department to clarify its views on the way ahead.

The importance of sufficient staffing and language training in meeting U.S. diplomatic objectives.

The importance of adequate staffing of the foreign affairs agencies is fundamental to the success of U.S. national security policy. Regrettably the administrations that followed the end of the Cold War neglected the diplomatic and development dimensions of national power. When President George W. Bush needed diplomatic and development capability in Iraq and Afghanistan, the human and financial resources were simply not there. Accordingly, the government turned to the military to perform such tasks given their abundance of people and money. The “militarization” of diplomacy was the result.

Today there is a broad consensus in Washington, including Secretary of Defense Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen, that an effective, professional and properly resourced diplomatic/development capability is indispensable to U.S. national security. Failure to strengthen smart power now while this consensus is in place will mean failure to achieve our diplomatic objectives in the future in a very dangerous and fast-changing world.

With respect to the importance of language training in meeting U.S. diplomatic objectives, I share the view of many colleagues that language ability is the basic skill for a diplomat comparable to weapons skills for the armed forces. Our government would not think of sending a soldier into combat without appropriate weapons training. The same imperative applies to diplomats and language. We all have war stories about the importance of language training in our real-world experiences. My best example involves my Greek language capability and my colleagues’ ability in Turkish when we were crossing lines in 1967 trying to arrange a Greek-Turkish ceasefire during a very savage incident on Cyprus. Without our language abilities U.S. policy objectives would not have been achieved and our personal objectives of staying alive would also have been in doubt. We now have, or soon will have, the capability to create and maintain a total training “float,” including language training, with the concomitant major increase in our diplomatic capacity. I hope the subcommittee will express its desire that the State Department ensure that this happens given the new resources being provided.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich, thank you both very much for the opportunity to record my views on the very critical matters you are discussing today. Your support over the last three years as the FAC and the Academy have worked to overcome the problems of an understaffed and dangerously weakened diplomatic capacity has been enormously appreciated and served this nation very well. I will be out of Washington on September 24th. I have asked my distinguished colleague and President of the American Academy of

Diplomacy, Ambassador Ron Neumann, to speak during my allotted five minutes and answer questions during the hearing.

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