



PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

The Cinderella Service

BY JOHN K. NALAND

History never repeats itself exactly, but sometimes the story line is ominously familiar. Over the past decade, the State Department has come almost full circle. Between 1998 and early 2001, seven blue-ribbon panels detailed a hollowed-out State Department nearing a state of crisis due to underfunding and inadequate staffing. Armed with those reports, Secretary of State Colin Powell took charge and made extraordinary progress in convincing the White House and Congress to provide an infusion of resources to restore America's diplomatic readiness.



Unfortunately, the last three years have witnessed serious backsliding as new Foreign Service staffing demands in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere have far outpaced funds for personnel. Today, as in the late 1990s, there is a growing deficit between the State Department's mission and the resources available to carry out that mission. The same is true for the U.S. Agency for International Development, where hiring lags behind attrition and operating budgets are on a downward trend.

A task force report issued by the nonpartisan Foreign Affairs Council last June highlighted the fact that the State Department currently has over 200 unfilled Foreign Service positions. More importantly for the long-term success of U.S. diplomacy, the report

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found that State is 900 positions short of what it needs to create the "training float" needed to give Foreign Service members the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential to foreign policy development and implementation. The report noted that budget requests in Fiscal Year 2006 and 2007 to narrow the staffing gap were not funded by Congress. While the State Department has requested 254 additional positions in its pending FY-08 budget submission, the prospects for full funding are in doubt.

AFSA is working hard to build and sustain a national consensus for strengthening the diplomatic element of national power.

This poor outlook for funding for diplomacy stands in stark contrast to the situation at the Pentagon, which is proceeding to expand the armed forces' permanent rolls by 92,000 by 2011. Note that the 1,100 needed new Foreign Service positions amounts to just about 1 percent of the military expansion. That is barely a rounding error when compared to the additional resources being dedicated to the Department of Defense, which already has more musicians than the State Department has diplomats.

This imbalance between resources for the Pentagon and funding for diplomacy and foreign assistance is driving a growing militarization of policy, as highly trained and well-resourced members of the U.S. armed forces increasingly take on tasks once assigned to diplomats. That is not a criticism of America's can-do military, which is only stepping in to get the job done. However, if left unchecked, this trend could reduce America's options when responding to foreign challenges. As the saying goes, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail."

As was the case during the late 1990s, it falls to AFSA and like-minded organizations to make the case for expanded funding for the Foreign Service. Without begrudging the resources being given to our military "stepsisters," we must speak up for our Cinderella Service.

Toward that end, on p. 70 you will find an "AFSA Issue Brief" that makes the case for a robust training float. This would permit expanded Foreign Service education and training to meet the challenges of the 21st century facing U.S. diplomacy.

The goal of that essay, and of parallel efforts, is to build a consensus to prompt the executive branch and Congress to act decisively, as they did during the Powell years, to strengthen the diplomatic element of national power. You can expect to hear a lot more on this topic over the next few years, both within these pages and elsewhere. ■