

AFSA Issue Brief

With this inaugural edition, we begin a new series of articles that will outline AFSA positions on critical issues. These "Issue Briefs" will run in AFSA News several times a year and will help keep the membership informed about current AFSA priorities.

Training America's Diplomats: Better than Ever, but Is It Enough?

HOW UNDERINVESTMENT IN FOREIGN SERVICE TRAINING IS HURTING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

BY JOHN K. NALAND, AFSA PRESIDENT

Never have Foreign Service members received as much training as they do today. Enrollment at the Foreign Service Institute—including classroom and distance learning—is up 62 percent since 2001. FSI course offerings have increased to over 500 per year. Mandatory leadership and management training has been fully phased in. FSI, a facility that seemed half-empty when it opened in 1993, is now so overcrowded that some foreign-language classes have been split into morning and afternoon shifts.

Thus, America's diplomats are receiving more training than ever before. But is it enough training of the right type in view of the needs of 21st-century U.S. diplomacy? And, given our nation's far greater investment in education and training for the uniformed military, is the relative underinvestment in Foreign Service education and training contributing to an erosion of the Department of State's role as the lead foreign affairs agency?

How the Other Half Trains

While some Foreign Service members may question being compared to the uniformed military, the fact is that the Foreign Service personnel system was purposefully modeled on that of the U.S. military. For example, the Foreign Service's "up-or-out" promotion system, implemented in 1946, was based on the U.S. Navy's personnel system. Because both the Foreign Service and the military work under difficult and often hazardous conditions throughout their careers, both are allowed to retire with a pension after 20



years of service.

As is the case in the military, Foreign Service assignments are heavily influenced by the needs of the Service. For that reason, Congress included only the Foreign Service and the uniformed military in a 2003 law providing a longer period to meet the occupancy requirements to qualify for exemption from the taxation of capital gains on the sale of a primary residence.

Unfortunately, the similarities between the two personnel systems do not carry over into the area of professional educa-

tion and training. Take, for example, the U.S. Army, which I know firsthand, having spent three years as an armored cavalry lieutenant 25 years ago and graduating from the U.S. Army War College via a State Department training detail in 2006. The accompanying chart depicts the U.S. Army officer education system.

As the chart shows, Army officers undergo extensive training even before they are commissioned. Upon entering active duty, they attend an Officer Basic Course lasting three to five months depending on career track (e.g., armor, infantry, etc.). At about year five of service, Army officers undergo six months of training at a Captain's Career Course, followed by the Combined Arms and Service Staff School. Between years 4 to 17 of service, some officers attend advanced civilian schooling to pursue a master's or Ph.D. degree. At about year 12 of service, they are assigned to year-long Intermediate-Level Education (formerly called the Command and General Staff Course). At about year 17

U.S. Army Officer Education System (major courses)

Pre-Commission	Company Grade (Yrs. 1 to 11)	Field Grade (Yrs. 12 to 29)	General Officer (Yrs. 30 +)
West Point, 4 yrs. or ROTC, 2-4 yrs. or Officer Candidate School, 14 wks.	Officer Basic Course, 12-20 wks. and Captain's Career Course, 6 mos.	Intermediate-Level Education, 12 mos. and Pre-Command Course, 2-11 wks. and Army War College, 9 mos.	Capstone 7 wks.

of service, the highest-rated 35 to 40 percent are assigned to the nine-month Army War College course (most via resident instruction, while some take the equivalent distance-education course).

While those courses include training on technical and tactical topics, they also educate officers on non-military-specific topics such as management, human resources, planning, organizational behavior, critical thinking and interagency coordination. All officers wishing to be promoted must complete these courses.

Given the Army's career-long commitment to classroom training and professional education, the only real point of similarity between Foreign Service and Army officer training is at swearing-in. New Army officers receive 12 to 20 weeks of orientation and functional training while new Foreign Service members typically receive 13 to 17 weeks (typically, the "A-100" course plus consular training). There the similarities between the Foreign Service and Army approach toward education and training end.

It is true that most Foreign Service members receive from 6 months to 3 years of assignment-specific foreign-language training during their careers — something that few Army officers receive. However, most Army officers spend a similar amount of time in on-the-job operational training, such as weapons practice and field maneuvers.

Trying to Close the Gap

No one has spoken more eloquently about the need for expanded training for Foreign Service members than did former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell. As a retired Army officer himself, Sec. Powell explained that "in my 35 years, almost 36 years of service, I was in school for close to six years — an enormous investment on the part of the Army in getting me ready for whatever came." He contrasted his military schooling to that of a typical Senior Foreign Service member, who might have received only a few months of non-language training during a 30-year career. During his tenure at State, Sec. Powell

launched several initiatives to begin to reduce that disparity.

For example, with AFSA's strong support, he established the requirement to complete leadership and management training to be eligible for promotion. That marked a culture change for Foreign Service members, who often avoided any training (except for foreign-language instruction) due to the perception that it would slow their promotions by taking them away from their day-to-day duties. The resulting four new FSI leadership courses are highly regarded. However, added together, they total just three weeks of instruction prior to promotion to the Senior Foreign Service — compared to 30 months of midcareer schooling that the average Army officer receives.

He also sought funding to create a "training float" — such as the U.S. military services have — equivalent to 10 to 15 percent of the staffing level required to fill existing overseas and domestic jobs. Only with such "bench strength" could the Department of State significantly expand long-term language and functional training without leaving hundreds of regular positions vacant worldwide. Unfortunately, while Secretary Powell did secure some funding for additional training positions, the creation of a large training float was abandoned once all available positions were shifted to Iraq.

The net result is that, despite important initiatives in the last decade that afforded America's diplomats more training than ever before, Foreign Service members still receive far less professional training than does the average U.S. Army officer.

Militarizing U.S. Foreign Policy

What is the impact on U.S. foreign policy of this relative underinvestment in Foreign Service training? This question is difficult to answer because several other factors are simultaneously at work, including shortfalls in Foreign Service staffing levels and underinvestment in foreign affairs agency program budgets.

Looking at the net impact of all of the shortchanging of diplomacy, the December

2006 report "Embassies as Command Posts in the Anti-Terror Campaign," issued by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee under then-Chairman Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., found that "the current 12:1 ratio of military spending to spending on the diplomatic and civilian foreign aid agencies risks the further encroachment of the military, by default, into areas where civilian leadership is more appropriate."

The report quoted one U.S. ambassador who noted that "the military has significantly more money and personnel and is so energetic in pursuing its newly created programs and in thinking up new ones, that maintaining a management hand on military activities is increasingly difficult." The report went on to warn that "U.S. defense agencies are increasingly being granted authority and funding to fill perceived gaps [in diplomacy, international information programming, and foreign assistance]. Such bleeding of civilian responsibilities overseas from civilian to military agencies risks weakening the Secretary of State's primacy in setting the agenda for U.S. relations with foreign countries."

As the Senate report indicates, the result of skimping on diplomatic readiness while building up military muscle is that the highly-trained and well-resourced members of the U.S. military are increasingly taking on tasks once rightfully assigned to diplomats. That is not a criticism of America's can-do military, which is only stepping into a partial vacuum to get the job done. However, if left unchecked, this trend could erode the Department of State's role as the lead foreign affairs agency and reduce our nation's options when responding to foreign challenges. As the old saying goes, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail."

Even former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, a past critic of the State Department and current member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, now argues that too many tasks have devolved to the military and that a significant increase in the State Department

budget is needed in order to reverse that trend. This past April, Gingrich had this to say:

“You have to have about a 50-percent bigger budget for the State Department. ... The State Department is too small to have the training program and the secondment of personnel needed to grow a genuine professional institution. It is impossible for the current Foreign Service to get the level of education it needs. They recruit really smart people, [but] they grossly underinvest in training them. It’s a very significant problem ... The reason I became a convert to the fundamental transformation of the State Department is you want to move things away from defense that it’s currently doing. ... You do not want [the] uniformed military having to do all sorts of things that you want to, frankly, give to other agencies if you could count on them doing it.”

Value Added

What, then, are the knowledge, skills and abilities that our 21st-century Foreign Service currently does not have to a sufficient degree, but could obtain with expanded education and training? To answer that question, it is necessary to first identify what diplomats uniquely should be able to bring to the table.

The Foreign Service exists to provide the president with a worldwide-available corps of professionals with unique abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation. Those abilities include: keen knowledge of the history, politics, economics, cultures and languages of other countries; skill at employing that body of knowledge to keep Washington informed of the realities on the ground in the host country; the ability to influence foreign governments and publics; skill at managing programs and projects assigned to foreign affairs agencies; mastery of the interagency process at home; and the ability to coordinate and integrate the efforts of other country-team members in the host country.

To live up to that definition, Foreign Service members must possess a range of

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knowledge, skills and abilities. Those include: foreign-language fluency, advanced area knowledge (including history, culture, politics and economics), leadership and management skills, negotiating skills, public diplomacy skills, project management skills and job-specific functional expertise. Unfortunately, the Foreign Service exhibits shortcomings in each of these areas. For example:

- An August 2006 Government Accountability Office report 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.”
- Most Foreign Service members — including ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers — who do not go to their new assignment via language training do not receive up-to-date area studies training.
- While one might expect that every U.S. diplomat would receive training in how to negotiate, only about 50 Foreign Service members take FSI’s introductory negotiating course each year. Given that rate of instruction, less than 15 percent of current U.S. diplomats have received even basic instruction in negotiating techniques.
- Despite the current “transformational diplomacy” focus on shaping outcomes and running programs, few Foreign Service members receive training in program management.

Squaring the Circle

Two major obstacles stand in the way of providing Foreign Service members with the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation: lack of time and understaffing/under-resourcing.

The first obstacle is time. Currently, the typical FSI course runs for one to five days. Few non-language courses last longer than three weeks. The reason for such short courses is that, after new-hire training, the only opportunities that most Foreign Service members have for non-foreign language classroom training are during a brief window of availability every few years while between assignments or while leaving their in-boxes untended during infrequent domestic tours. Even over a 30-year-long career, taking a few short courses every couple of years adds up to less than 10 months of non-language training during an entire career — one-third of what the typical U.S. Army officer receives.

As previously mentioned, the Army avoids such time constraints by permanently reassigning officers to long-term training three times during their first 20 years of service for six to 12 months each time. By making training a permanent-change-of-station assignment, the Army takes officers fully offline for the academic year that is needed to master the course material.

To emulate the Army’s proven model, the State Department could implement at least one long-term professional training course to be taken by all Foreign Service members. One suggestion is to create a nine-month “career course” to be taken by newly tenured employees. That course could offer a common core curriculum comprised of existing FSI courses (for example, negotiations, public diplomacy basics, global issues, Washington tradecraft, congressional relations and various information technology, leadership and management courses) along with newly created segments (for example, national security strategy, instruments of national power, diplomatic history and first-responder training). Participants could

then separate into subgroups for advanced functional and area studies training, depending on their specific cone/specialty and anticipated primary regional focus. The course could also have a community-service component permitting students to do volunteer work, such as mentoring in local public schools.

In addition to creating a course for all employees at about year four or five of service, State should continue to expand language training — especially for hard languages in strategic regions, such as Arabic and Chinese. For example, to ensure uninterrupted language capabilities at one-year Arabic posts such as those in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, three officers are required: one at post, one in the first year of language training, and one in the second year of training.

State could also expand non-FSI long-term training opportunities for employees between about years 12 to 17 of service. Examples include the various U.S. military war colleges, university training and developmental details at nongovernmental organizations and within private industry. Currently, fewer than 75 Foreign Service members (mostly at the FS-2 and FS-1 grade levels) are given such opportunities each year — representing less than 3 percent of all mid-level employees.

However, before additional long-term training opportunities could be created, another obstacle would need to be overcome: understaffing. The State Department is simply not staffed to permit additional long-term professional training. The dilemma is summed up on the Web site of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas:

"We do not have interagency students in every classroom [because] ... U.S. governmental agencies do not have the same robust training and education personnel accounts that the military services have to support a continuous professional military education that includes institutional education and training throughout an officer's career ... U.S. governmental agencies would be hamstrung to let their 'front line' subordinates attend a yearlong curriculum

at CGSC. Unfortunately, these agencies tend to be 'one deep' in their manning."

Overcoming this "one deep" problem can only be achieved by creating a larger education and training float. For example, to permit all newly-tenured Foreign Service generalists and specialists to attend a nine-month "career course," approximately 600 student positions and 25 instructor positions would be required. Another 75 positions would be required in order to double the number of mid-level employees in long-term training and developmental assignments. Another 200 slots could be dedicated to expanded long-term language training. Creating those 900 new positions would represent a huge step toward implementing the robust training float that Sec. Powell and others identified as necessary.

Spare a DIME?

Obviously, creating a large training float would cost a lot of money. But without a fully staffed and well-trained Foreign Service, the future will likely see, as the recent Senate report warned, "further encroachment of the military, by default, into areas where civilian leadership is more appropriate." That is something that no one, including the overstretched U.S. military, should want.

In fact, U.S. military doctrine teaches that there are four elements of national power — diplomacy, intelligence, military and economics — with military force almost always being the last, not first, tool that should be employed to achieve national security goals. Thus, the military recognizes the value of a diplomatic corps that is sufficiently staffed and trained to enable it to, whenever possible, achieve national goals without necessitating military-led "kinetic" intervention.

All of this argues for a rebalancing in the current 12:1 ratio of military spending to spending on diplomacy and foreign assistance. However, as things stand now, that imbalance is set to worsen. Consider the suggestion that 900 Foreign Service training positions be created. The U.S. Marine Corps alone — the smallest of the

uniformed services — is slated to expand its active-duty ranks by 30 times as many (27,000) by 2011. The U.S. Army is slated to add 65,000 more soldiers to its permanent rolls. Thus, 900 new Foreign Service positions would amount to less than 1 percent of the planned military expansion — barely a rounding error when compared to additional resources being dedicated to the Department of Defense which, for example, already has more musicians than the State Department has diplomats.

But even if the administration and Congress were to fund a larger training float and a nine-month "career course," there would still be a need for additional training at regular intervals throughout the employee's career. One suggestion is to require supervisors at the beginning of each rated period to set a minimum number of days of training expected of each employee to strengthen currently needed skills or for general career development. This, of course, would be easier for D.C.-based employees to do than for overseas employees, but FSI could help by continuing to expand its online course offerings and its courses given at regional centers. The goal would be to make both managers and employees see education and training as an ongoing professional requirement that is a key to work force effectiveness.

In conclusion, while America's diplomats are receiving more training than ever before, it is not nearly enough in view of the needs of 21st-century U.S. diplomacy. This underinvestment in Foreign Service education and training is contributing to an erosion of the Department of State's role as the lead foreign affairs agency. To reverse this trend, State needs the resources to provide Foreign Service members the education and training necessary to equip them with the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential to successful foreign policy development and implementation in the coming decades. □

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