The conventional diplomat is fast becoming an endangered species, one that may be teetering on the brink of irrelevance. It has become almost trite to talk about the new technologies, new players, new issues and the increasingly blurred lines between foreign and domestic policies — or whether today’s foreign ministries and assistance agencies are relics of the past or the engines for a renaissance of diplomacy and development.

The forces for change are real; so is the need for radical reform of Foreign Service structures, culture, recruitment, training and professionalization. Yet while the debate over how best to reinvent the Foreign Service to meet the needs of the 21st century has generated a slew of articles, studies and books, today’s active-duty diplomats have been relegated to the margins of the discussion.

If foreign affairs professionals want to be part of the process of developing the right blueprint, we must engage in it seriously. We can start by answering the question: What are the new and emerging requirements for effective diplomacy and development? Only through an open, inclusive discussion of those requirements can we intelligently address the professional development and training requirements for diplomats and development officials.

Old-style diplomacy, with its venerable conventions and structural rigidities, continues to have some role in executing formal, state-to-state business, but its space is narrowing and its importance diminishing. To paraphrase a point Daryl Copeland makes eloquently in his book, Guerrilla Diplomacy, the new frontiers of diplomacy and development lie primarily in understanding and managing the effects of the colossal forces collectively known as globalization.

Yet paradoxically, all too often that phenomenon generates insecurity, splinters politics and deepens cultural divides. What was once fixed and predictable is becoming diffuse and dynamic. The business of diplomacy is done less and less in banquet halls, receptions and closed meeting rooms and more and more in barrios, villages, cafés and chatrooms.

Foreign Service recruitment is now finally on a fast upswing as we play catchup for years of below-attrition hiring. AFSA is proud to have actively supported the development of the “Foreign Affairs Budget of the Future,” a blue-ribbon panel report issued in October 2008 by the American Academy of Diplomacy. It documents the need for additional State and USAID positions, both to carry out core diplomatic functions and to provide a training float. Attention is now rightly turning to the equally important related issue in which we all have a stake: updated and expanded professional development and training for our Foreign Service across the board.

AFSA supports and will participate in a new AAD study titled “Foreign Affairs Leadership in the 21st Century: Recalibrating the Diplomatic Profession.” We plan to contribute to the development of this study in several ways: by acting as a conduit to our members to keep you informed about the issues that the study addresses; by seeking your input and perspectives on what sort of training and professional development you think is needed, and how and when it should be provided; and by working to see that the study considers what the new requirements are and what general training and professional development principles apply across the Foreign Service.

The world we knew is gone. The new world is increasingly complex and dynamic, and is coming at us fast. Is recalibrating the diplomatic profession enough, or do we need to be reinventing it?

If you would like to participate in the ongoing discussion of this issue and contribute to AFSA’s participation in the AAD study on foreign affairs leadership in the 21st century, please contact me at President@afsa.org. All comments and suggestions are welcome.