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Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
The Budget, Diplomacy and Development

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, members of the committee, thank you for this invitation to testify today on the future of American diplomacy, our development efforts and the 2018 budget. It is an honor to do so in my capacity as a retired member of the United States Foreign Service.

Since the close of the Second World War, the United States has been the strongest global power through its military, economic and diplomatic influence and its vital alliances and partnerships across the world. Our highest strategic ambition should be to sustain that position of power in the decades ahead to ensure a world where democracy, human freedom and free markets are in the ascendancy. To do so, we must remain strong in the three principal pillars of our power—Defense, Diplomacy and Development.

The Trump Administration’s fiscal year 2018 budget will put this at risk. The proposed 31 percent reduction in funding for the State Department and USAID will cripple our diplomats in the Foreign and Civil Service and undermine USAID officials who manage our global development programs.

These proposed reductions are unwise, unnecessary and are a danger to our overall national security. I urge members of both parties and both houses of Congress to work with the new Administration to develop a more serious and sensible proposal. Reform is needed and areas of duplication and waste should be addressed. This budget, however, betrays a lack of understanding of the vital importance of Diplomacy and Development in our overall foreign policy.

I fear for the future of the American Foreign and Civil Service if these budget reductions are put into place. In this radical proposal to the Congress, the Trump Administration has sent a signal to career officials of disinterest and disregard for their work as diplomats and development experts. Combined with the unwise, unprecedented and unwarranted forced resignations of several of our most senior career diplomats by the Trump Administration, this budget proposal has brought morale at the State Department to its lowest level in memory.

Our diplomatic corps is the finest in the world. The expertise, high standards and impressive performance of our diplomats overseas and in Washington have been a source of strength for the U.S. in the seven decades of the post-World War Two era. All of it will be at risk—our ability to recruit and retain the best young men and women in America to join a proud and accomplished career service—if we do not give them the respect and resources they deserve.

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In addition, the idea that the U. S. can now plan for major cuts in diplomacy and development because we are approaching an era of no foreign wars is illusory and ahistorical. I wish that we lived in such a world. But, the short and mid-term trend lines in the Middle East, Afghanistan, East Asia and elsewhere bely such a hope. Instead, we must be realistic about the outright aggression from our adversaries Russia, China, Iran and others that continue to threaten our vital national interests in these regions. Even if we eventually wind down some commitments in the most dangerous war zones, the State Department will be critical in managing that successfully and other challenges will inevitably arise to test our country. We will need a strong, fully-resourced State Department to combine forces with the Pentagon to protect our interests in such a world.

It would be equally mistaken to assume that reductions of this magnitude could be phased in over a three or four-year period. If that is the plan of the current State Department leadership, it would lead to the inexorable decline of a once great diplomatic corps. It would leave future Secretaries of State without the people and resources needed to achieve an effective American foreign policy.

In fact, the Trump Administration and the Congress must face in the immediate future an unprecedented number of threats to America's security. Our career diplomats will need the budgetary support to meet these challenges.

Our European allies in NATO are confronting a multiplicity of crises from Brexit, the rise of anti-democratic populist political parties, the refugee crisis and a tendentious, aggressive Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, challenging their borders and security.

Six years after the start of the Arab Revolutions, the Middle East continues to be afflicted by civil wars, violence, a Sunni-Shia schism and a dangerous Iranian government.

In Asia, the dictatorial North Korean regime threatens our allies South Korea and Japan and may develop the capacity in a few years to threaten the U.S. itself with a nuclear weapon. China is contesting, illegally and unwisely, the sovereignty of its neighbors in the South and East China Seas.

A host of transnational threats—terrorism, climate change, cyber aggression, pandemics and famine in South Sudan—all threaten America's interests and global stability. The world, led by its strongest and most capable leader, the United States, must also address the largest refugee crisis since the close of the Second World War in 1945.

The military will obviously be a critical part of the U.S. response to this agenda. But the State Department will likely take the lead on many of the most urgent challenges—diplomatic efforts to convince China to address the North Korea threat; continued efforts to sanction and contain Iranian power in the Middle East; organizing the international coalition against the Islamic State;

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maintaining economic sanctions on Putin for his invasion of Ukraine; strengthening the NATO consensus to rebuild its power in Eastern Europe.

The State Department also leads U.S. efforts at the United Nations, our relations with nearly every major international and regional organization from the European Union to ASEAN, the African Union and the Organization of American States. We cannot strip State of funding and expect it to be able to be the front-line protector of our national security with these important international institutions.

Similarly, USAID is critical to our ability to respond to natural disasters such as the Haiti earthquake, to pandemics such as Zika, Ebola and SARs and to implement our successful global health diplomacy.

With this in mind, the projected reductions by the Trump Administration of U.S. contributions to the United Nations are misguided and destructive of our leadership of this important multilateral institution. Despite the limitations and weaknesses of the UN system, it provides essential support to important American objectives through its development and public health programs, its provision of food aid to countries at risk of famine, its support for refugees and poor children and its stewardship of international efforts to limit the risk of nuclear proliferation. All will remain important to our country and worthy of our continued support.

To state, as OMB Director Mulvaney did, that the Trump Administration has presented to Congress “a hard power budget, not a soft power budget”, betrays a deep misunderstanding of the essential value of diplomacy and development to our security and of our ability to be successful in the world. More than 120 retired senior U.S. Military leaders affirmed their unequivocal support to the State Department and USAID in their recent, open letter to the Congress. Secretary Mattis, Chairman Dunford and many other active duty military leaders have said the same publicly since the alarming State/AID budget cuts were announced.

For decades now, it has been accepted by Presidents of both parties that the U.S. is most successful when we integrate the efforts of the State and Defense Departments in pursuit of our most important goals. I certainly found in my own career that we at the State Department could not often succeed without coordination with the Pentagon. The Congress needs to find the right balance of integrated funding that will allow each to succeed together. To be effective in our foreign policy, we need to continue to achieve close coordination between our Ambassadors and our Generals and Admirals overseas. As President Kennedy said more than a half century ago, “Diplomacy and Defense are not substitutes for one another. Either alone would fail.” The Trump Administration’s budget fails to make this link between these two essential tools in our national security arsenal.

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Americans rightly revere the military and its contributions to the security of every citizen. But, the mission of the State Department and USAID is not well understood either in Washington or throughout the country. Both are relatively smaller U.S. government agencies whose work overseas is often invisible to those of us at home. If they are saddled by these budget reductions, it is inevitable that the leadership of both will have to make deep cuts in personnel as they have no large weapons systems or other major expenditures to delay or put into mothballs in order to satisfy budget austerity.

I started my Foreign Service career as a Consular Officer in Cairo. In the following decades, I witnessed up close the vital work of our Consular Officers who are on the front lines in nearly every country of the world interviewing all potential immigrant and non-immigrant visa applicants and refugees. These young men and women also assist thousands of American citizens who need their help overseas—with birth certificates, emergency medical assistance, legal challenges and other problems.

Our Political Officers deploy with our troops as advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are our eyes and ears on point in the most difficult countries such as Pakistan, China, Russia and Cuba. In just the last year, they have helped to negotiate an end to the Civil War in Colombia. They are leading our effort to respond to the North Korean nuclear challenge. They are ensuring Iran is meeting its commitments under the nuclear deal. They will be essential in a future negotiation to end the brutal civil war in Syria.

Our Economic and Commercial Officers help American businesses to identify foreign markets for their goods and services and to compete in a competitive global marketplace. They help to negotiate the trade agreements, bilateral and multilateral, that are critical to our economic health at home.

Our USAID professionals operate our highly successful polio, malaria and HIV/AIDs programs. They take the lead in responding to natural disasters and to head off the threat of pandemics. They help to respond to famine and regional and world food shortages as well as deal with the threat of climate change. They contribute to long-term development projects to help stabilize countries at risk.

The Foreign and Civil Service, along with the U.S. Commercial Service and USAID, in fact, represents the deepest reservoir of area and linguistic expertise in the U. S. government on China, Russia, the Islamic World, Africa, Latin America, Europe and other areas.. They are a national treasure. We must not permit radical and ill-advised budget cuts to weaken this current generation of officers and to deprive them of the training and resources they need to succeed.

According to the Global Leadership Council, “The deep cuts to development and diplomacy programs proposed in the Administration’s budget would reduce spending on these programs as a

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percentage of GDP to its lowest level since World War II.” The Council also stated that the Trump budget proposal will lead to the “lowest level of funding for these programs since FY-02 in real inflation adjusted terms.”

Specific programs that are essential for our security would suffer radical reductions:

--The proposed cuts of 30 percent for our international narcotics programs would throw into jeopardy our long-standing efforts to protect Americans from the drug trade. It would curtail much of the progress made with countries at the epicenter of the narcotics crisis including Afghanistan, Mexico and others in Central and South America.

--The Trump Administration’s plans to radically reduce funding for the United Nations Peacekeeping would endanger the effectiveness of programs that are clearly in the U.S. interest and often obviate the need for the U.S. military to engage in a regional crisis.

--If the State Department is forced to reduce funding for programs that seek to undermine support for radical Moslem terrorist organizations, it will harm our overall effort to contain and then destroy the Islamic State.

--Reductions in assistance to the 65 million refugees worldwide is particularly unwise. We need to continue support for refugee programs in countries such as Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon, as well as others. In this sense, the Trump Administration’s decision to freeze refugee acceptances and to curtail acceptance of immigrants is particularly dangerous.

--Severe budget reductions could also limit our ability to help prevent famine during the next few years in South Sudan and other high-risk countries.

--Reductions of this magnitude will decimate funding for programs that are essential to support failed and fragile states where conflicts often originate—our economic development, democracy promotion and education programs.

Mr. Chairman, you requested ideas to reform the State Department and USAID in a constrained budget environment. In my view, Secretary Tillerson is right to take a new look at where additional reforms would make sense and where to cut programs that are duplicative and wasteful. No government agency should be immune from such an effort. Reform and renewal should be, in fact, an ongoing process within each agency of the Executive Branch.

Possible reforms that should be looked at closely include:

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--Elimination of the second Deputy Secretary of State position adopted by the Obama Administration. A better approach would be to invest overall authority for management and budget in a single Deputy Secretary and to make the Under Secretary for Management the effective chief operating officer of the State Department;

--Possible reduction of the number of Under Secretaries in order to push authority down to where it is often most efficiently shouldered—with the Assistant Secretaries of the regional and functional bureaus;

--End the proliferation of Special Envoys for single issues and restore authority where it is most effective—in the Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries who make up the leadership team for the Secretary of State;

--Fill the majority of senior Department positions with members of the career Foreign and Civil Service. While every President and Secretary of State have a right to select political appointees for senior positions, preference should be given to career officials. Both Secretaries Condoleezza Rice and John Kerry, for example, appointed career officers to the majority of the key regional Assistant Secretary positions, generally considered the most important line leaders in the Department.

Mr. Chairman, it will be essential for President Trump and Secretary Tillerson to move much more quickly to fill the leadership positions at State and USAID that have been vacant since January 20. This is the slowest transition in memory. It is deeply unfortunate that candidates for these leadership positions have not been publicly announced by the end of March, much less confirmed by the Senate.

Secretary Tillerson is not well served by being left without a leadership team. There are simply too many challenges the U.S. needs to face that cannot possibly be managed without a full complement of Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries. If one reason for this slow motion transition is an effort to dismantle “the administrative state”, as White House official Steve Bannon has warned publicly, that would reveal a deep misunderstanding of the critical role the executive branch plays in defense of the United States and the good that government can do with the right leadership and resources in place.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, President Trump needs to invest more in diplomacy and our diplomats in order to be successful in his foreign policy. Since taking office, he has said very little about the usefulness of diplomacy and diplomats. He has not engaged our most senior diplomats. In fact, our career officers seem disconnected from the White House and unappreciated by the President and his senior aides.

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Those of us who support a strong State Department and USAID have been encouraged by the reaction of senior members of the Congress in both parties to this rash and unwise proposed budget. I urge the Congress to restore funding for the men and women of the State Department and USAID who are experienced and patriotic and whose only desire is to serve our country on the front lines of America's national security.