

To WRITTEN STATEMENT

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey

Retired Career Foreign Service Officer

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

The Need for an Authorized State Department, April 30 2025

I appreciate deeply the opportunity to address this committee on such an important issue. To save State, we must prioritize core national security activities, consolidate State operations, and empower regional bureaus to lead.

But, first, let me express my admiration for my former State Department colleagues, who serve our country with the same dedication I saw with my soldiers fifty years ago, especially those personnel, often with their families, pursuing our national interests in difficult and dangerous locations.

Unfortunately, success in that pursuit is hampered by structural problems in their parent organization, the State Department, which has drifted, over decades and multiple administrations, from its core mission: the relentless, rigorous advancement of national interests abroad through diplomatic activity and coordination of all elements of national power.

For example, Congress has formally tasked State and other agencies in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 to develop Strategic Plans, to be consistent with overall administration policy. Attached is the framework chart of State's latest plan, from 2022. At that point both the Biden and earlier Trump

administrations had made clear in their national security strategy documents that great power competition was our most important foreign policy objective. Yet in the State Plan, as seen in its framework chart, resolving conflict and promoting international security is only one of nineteen State objectives in five goal clusters, and listed only as the fourth of five under the global challenges goal. Obviously then Secretary Blinken like other secretaries devoted almost all of his time to that national security objective. But formal plans and policies have consequences, and this mishmash of objectives dulls State's focus on its core job.

Another example. The 2024 Report by the Commission on the National Defense Strategy, mandated by Congress and chaired by former Congresswoman Jane Harman and former senior State official Ambassador Eric Edelman, noted (page 17) that, compared to DoD and the intelligence community, "The U.S. government lacks a similar level of planning, joint operations, and shared undertaking of national security in other parts including the Department of State."

To rectify all this, recommend Congress encourage State to more closely align its strategic plan to the current national security strategy, to establish State formally as a national security agency, and to encourage the Department to develop formal planning institutions, doctrine, training and culture to mesh with other national security agencies. While absent from the Department as a whole, such an emergency operations and institutional planning culture is found in embassies and the State operations center, which thus could serve as models.

The next problem is the dispersion of diplomatic activities to other agencies, a long-term trend that must be reversed. That should begin with the planned incorporation of USAID into the Department. The Foreign Commercial Service should also be integrated into State, as well as the foreign military equipment programs created post-9/11 under the NDAA Section 1209 and currently administered by the Defense Department. Those activities, assistance, commercial support, and military equipment provision, involve high level diplomatic exchanges and thus core State Department responsibilities.

In contrast, the Department should transfer the visa function to the Department of Homeland Security, as that function implements DHS responsibilities, does not usually involve state-to-state diplomacy, and demands considerable resources.

State's geographic Bureaus are the main operational arms of the Secretary. These Bureaus however need major modifications if they are to serve that purpose.

Every Secretary from Christopher through Blinken, apart from Powell, when confronted with a burning foreign policy crisis, be it Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Islamic State, Venezuela, North Korea, or Iran, at some point assigned responsibility not to the appropriate geographic Bureau and its Senate confirmed Assistant Secretary, but to a senior, non-confirmed special envoy, reporting directly to the Secretary and exempt from most internal bureaucratic process.

I have been such an envoy three times, and I can attest that this is a bad solution, but it keeps being repeated as it is the least bad approach to get important jobs done, given the restraints currently inherent to the regional bureaus.

First, those bureaus and their leaders are pulled in too many directions, forced to balance management of their large organizations with their core diplomacy mission, with that mission itself often blurred between traditional state-to-state relations, and expectations for transformational nation building.

One example is the annual human rights report required by Congress. The one for Bulgaria, one of the less important countries in Europe, a stable democracy and EU member state, runs 53 pages. The European Assistant Secretary has to prepare annually over thirty of them, and every word is endlessly argued within the Department.

Second, the Bureaus are far too layered. There are eight layers between the Desk Officer for a given country, the starting point for most diplomatic engagement, and the Secretary. When I was in the National Security Council, there were only two layers between such desk officers and the National Security Advisor.

Third, the Bureaus need, in terms of the countries they are responsible for, to be aligned with DoD's combatant commands. That State-Defense operational relationship at the institutional and personal levels is crucial, but is undermined when Assistant Secretaries and Commanders have multiple counterparts. That would also require abolishing the South/Central Asia Bureau.

Finally, the handful of geographic bureaus are overwhelmed by, even after the new State organization announced April 22, ten global or special activities bureaus and five special offices overseen by three under secretaries and an new assistance czar, who outrank the geographic bureau assistant secretaries, and whose seemingly

unlimited priorities and interests often must be negotiated before the assistant secretaries take any diplomatic action. That whole huge amorphous element of the Department needs to be even further downsized; but more importantly, structural and administrative changes are required to ensure that its ability to challenge geographic bureau diplomatic engagement and its communications to Department leaders is curtailed.

I recognize that this hearing is focused on structural rather than specific personnel issues related to State. But personnel is often policy. Diplomacy isn't easy, it's often a contact sport. Thus the current muddling of the mission of foreign service officers, between diplomat, transformational aid deliverer, and manager, undercuts focus on the core diplomatic mission, and creates bloat, layering, and more costs by often measuring performance through people, programs and money administered.

Finally, any State Department reform by executive order can be easily reversed by the next president. Thus, whatever the value of my or other ideas today, or initiatives taken by the administration, they will be largely for naught if they are not endorsed by congress in legislation or other channels. To serve the nation, our foreign operations for obvious reasons must reflect not some, but all Americans' long term interests, predictable to both friends and foes. To that end I have attached suggestions based on this presentation for Congress's consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Congress revise the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act to more explicitly require agencies to fit their strategic plans with the current administration's National Security Strategy or other policy guidance
2. HFAC establish formal outside bipartisan reviews of the State Strategic Plans perhaps using the new Commission on Reform and Modernization of State
3. Congress formally update the national security agencies list to include State
4. HFAC encourage State to establish a "J-5" equivalent planning unit reporting to the Secretary, with formalized planning responsibilities patterned on embassy emergency action plans, and institutionalized coordination with DoD and other national security agencies.
5. Congress place USAID and the Foreign Commercial Service in the Department of State
6. Congress terminate DoD temporary NDAA 1209 authorities for military equipment, with those authorities to return to State
7. Congress move the visa function including overseas visa operations to the Department of Homeland Security
8. HFAC require additional detailed justification for Department special envoys for specific countries
9. HFAC review reporting and operational requirements placed on the Department such as the annual human rights report to allow streamlining of responses, less frequent implementation, and less detailed requirements
10. Congress encourage DoD and State to align the geographic spans of State's geographic bureaus and Defense's combatant commands
11. HFAC encourage State to review the organization of global and specialized Under Secretaries, bureaus and offices to cut positions and whole units, and simplify procedures to promote access to Department leaders
12. HFAC consider revisions to the Foreign Service Act to curb incentives to bureaucratic growth and managerial layering, and ensure a primary focus on diplomacy in recruitment, career development, and evaluation.

