

Ambassador Michael C. Polt's Testimony
**"Streamlined and Rightsized: Consolidating State Department
Administrative Services"**
House Foreign Affairs Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee
March 25, 2025

Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Chertoff-McCormick, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am pleased to testify before you today regarding updating and strengthening America's diplomatic capabilities. I speak to you now as a private citizen, but one who has had the great privilege of serving our great country and the American people for 35 years in our diplomatic service. I have served six Presidents and eleven Secretaries of State, both Republican and Democrat, over the course of those 35 years. I offer to you a set of American diplomacy modernization ideas that a group of former colleagues and I published in September 2022. Entitled "*Blueprints Toward a More Modern American Diplomacy*", our proposals were supported by Arizona State University's Leadership, Diplomacy and National Security Lab, with the participation of the Una Chapman Cox Foundation and the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Our efforts were guided by four firm commitments. First, to work in full transparency with the State Department, Congress, and the many communities interested in these issues. Second, strict bipartisanship. Third, we remain convinced that because the United States should have the world's most modern and able diplomatic service, the State Department must change to earn its place at the center of U.S. foreign policymaking and execution. And finally, we offered our Blueprints to those currently serving our country's diplomacy at home and abroad.

We addressed what we consider to be four important sectors of our nation's diplomacy. Our 00recommendations are mainly Foreign Service specific. They do not claim to deal with the full complexity of State Department operations or every element of potential State Department reorganization. What we have done is submit for consideration detailed descriptions of how to implement our four proposals, including specific legislative and regulatory language. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time this has ever been done at this scale."

Our four Blueprints address:

First, Mission and Mandate of the Foreign Service:

- Seeking enhanced authority, responsibility, and accountability for U.S. Ambassadors worldwide
- Holding U.S diplomatic leadership, career or appointed from outside the Foreign Service, to the highest standard of foreign policy and international leadership expertise
- Empowering the State Department and the Foreign Service to play a more substantive role in the creation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy
- And fostering a stronger relationship between America's diplomats and the American public

Second, Professional Education and Training:

- Defining, implementing and sustaining an education and training complement for the Foreign Service that is 8% of the total workforce.
- Investing in robust diplomatic education and training to secure a dedicated career workforce with critical professional knowledge, including broad leadership and language skills
- Creating broad institutional experience within the Foreign Service both at home and through rotational opportunities abroad to draw on whole of government and private sector capacity
- Finally, prioritizing both mid-career continuing education and extended training for higher-level positions to expand the pipeline of qualified leadership professionals

Third, A Modern and Strategically Focused Personnel System:

- Creating and staffing nimble, multi-functional teams and individuals positioned where needed—placing the right people/right places/right numbers/right skills
- Developing a recruitment strategy directly targeting a young, multi-skilled workforce best prepared to address rapidly progressing international challenges
- And growing greater professional opportunities for family members accompanying Foreign Service Officers abroad as a ready additional asset pool for advancing U.S. interests

And finally, Creation of a Diplomatic Reserve Corps:

- We seek to remedy the fact that the Department of State, in many ways America's first line of defense, has no ready, trained, and dedicated pool of reserves akin to the U.S. Armed Forces
- We propose the development of a 1,000-person strong reserve corps made up of retired State Department professionals and other subject matter experts from outside of government ready and able to move quickly in the event of natural disasters, political turmoil, or any emergency need.

We offer these blueprints in support of an American diplomacy that is nimble; does not see creativity encumbered by perfunctory tradition; and that is deeply connected to the needs of the people it serves.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.