

Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources
Richard R. Verma's Testimony
"Assessing State Department Compliance with Oversight"
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight & Accountability
March 21, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Meeks, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to testify before you today regarding State Department compliance with congressional oversight.

I am joined by our Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, Naz Durakoglu, who many of you know well and who previously served as a staff member of this committee.

I am proud to say that both the Assistant Secretary and I have roots on Capitol Hill, where we served for many years advising Members in the House and Senate on matters of national security. In fact, I started working in this chamber when I was 18 years old for the then Chairman of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, Jack Murtha, and continued working for him through college and law school. There was no better training on the critical bipartisan role that Congress plays in the shaping and oversight of US national security and foreign policy.

I went on to serve in the Air Force and in the Senate as the National Security Advisor to the Senate Majority Leader for many years, and then as the Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs at the State Department during the Obama Administration.

Assistant Secretary Durakoglu and I have enormous respect and deep appreciation for the role that the House Foreign Affairs Committee plays in supporting the Department and our nearly 80,000 State Department personnel spread in every corner of the world, and every conflict zone. Our US direct hire workforce comes from every state in the country and nearly 20% are veterans.

My role as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, or “D-MR” as the position is known in Foggy Bottom, has been described as the chief operating officer for the State Department.

I have broad responsibilities for oversight and management of State Department operations, including the Department’s budget, foreign assistance programs, diplomatic missions, and our support to American citizens overseas. Next week will be one year on the job. It’s been an enormous honor to return to the Department after serving as the Assistant Secretary and as US Ambassador to India. In this first year, I’ve been to over 30 of our embassies and consulates around the world...from Kyiv to Baghdad, Jakarta, Sydney, Bogota, Jerusalem, the Western Indian Ocean islands, and so many places in between.

Ours is a Department facing an unprecedented set of strategic challenges from the war in Ukraine, to conflict in the Middle East, to the challenge posed by the People’s Republic of China, not to mention the transnational challenges brought on by climate change, health and food insecurity, democratic retrenchment, cyber risks, and of course, migration.

Our personnel are working in more places on a wider range of issues – issues of urgent importance to the American people – than ever before. This is the nature of the global picture we face. But what I’ve discovered in my travels and engagements with the workforce is a deeply committed and inspired team, putting mission above all else. I know many of you engage with them too on your travels, and I’m sure you’ve seen the same. We are so grateful for your support.

The global landscape puts into perspective the urgency of our jobs, the need to support our people in their missions, and the need to work closely with all of you on policy development, on oversight, and on appropriations.

I’m pleased to be able to say that under Secretary Blinken and with leadership from Assistant Secretary Durakoglu, the Department has reached record levels of engagement with Capitol Hill.

Since the beginning of the 118th Congress, Department officials have:

- Provided more than 3,500 briefings to Members of Congress and their staffs (of which, more than 1,700 for the House);

- Testified in more than 100 congressional hearings;
- Responded to more than 1,300 congressional letters; and,
- Facilitated more than 650 CODELs and STAFFDELs (of which, more than 280 were from the House).

While these numbers are impressive, our relationship with Congress is more than just hearings and briefings. We have particularly demonstrated that commitment in our response to congressional oversight. Over the past year, the Department has received and responded to an unprecedented number of oversight inquiries from Congress.

By our count, there are some 38 unique House of Representatives ongoing investigations of the State Department, 19 from this committee alone. This is on top of the many staff-level or more informal requests for information we receive on a daily basis.

In response, the Department has produced nearly 40,000 pages worth of documents to Congress since January 2023. Of that number, more than half has gone to you. The Department has also made 18 employees available for transcribed interviews with this committee's staff, with each interview lasting as long as eight or nine hours.

However, global threats and foreign policy challenges do not cease to exist when we are responding to congressional oversight. The officers who are subject matter experts making policy recommendations and engaging in diplomacy are the same individuals who must also review every single document that is produced to Congress. And they take that responsibility quite seriously, as do we.

Transcribed interviews, threats of subpoenas, and public disclosure of sensitive information all risk damaging morale among our nonpartisan career civil and foreign service officers. And in some cases, such disclosures can even risk the physical safety of our dedicated partners.

While we have increased our staffing to respond to congressional oversight, the Department's primary function must remain the conduct of American foreign policy. I'm grateful for the open channels of communication we've had with all of you, and I'm hoping we can find the right balance in the months ahead – a

balance that helps fulfil your duties to the House and to your constituents, and one that helps the Department continue to support, defend, and protect US interests and Americans around the world.

In closing, I did want to emphasize that it is one of my core duties as D-MR to ensure responsible management and spending of hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

Given that foreign aid only makes up one percent of the annual federal budget, we are particularly focused on stretching each dollar to its maximum effect.

As we announced earlier this month, the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request includes \$58.8 billion for the State Department and USAID. This is \$718 million (1%) above FY 2023.

Like any business, the Department relies on predictable funding streams for proper planning and operations, and we are grateful for Congress's partnership in resourcing the Department to meet the many challenges we face today. Congress's action in the coming days and weeks on our FY 2024 funding will be critical.

I'd also like to strongly reaffirm the importance of the House taking up the supplemental appropriations bill that passed the Senate with significant bipartisan support.

I know many Members of this Committee have spoken out in support of urgently needed funding for Ukraine, the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and global humanitarian crises. We deeply appreciate your leadership and support.

Thank you again for inviting us to testify, and we look forward to your questions.

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