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GUEST ESSAY

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Resourcing & Shaping US Diplomacy for 21st Century Contingencies

Any discussion of the future of diplomacy requires consideration of both the most likely developments in the world and those scenarios, which, even if less likely, could affect our interests most powerfully. Resourcing and shaping our diplomacy to account for what's most likely and at the same time preparing for what could do us the most harm is the central dilemma for both planners and practitioners working today. Both considerations point to the need for an expeditionary spirit to our future diplomacy and the use of many of the lessons learned from the last several years of operating in combat zones and other areas from which historically we would have withdrawn to await a better security situation.

In the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, Secretary Clinton said that the QDDR is all about protecting US interests and projecting our leadership into this century. To justify our role as diplomats in advancing American national interests, we will have to adjust our practices, training and doctrine to match our assessment of the future and overcome the challenges it presents.

This reality-based approach will encounter opposition. A long retired diplomat, who had been called back into service to fill a sudden Chief of Mission vacancy, said in his valedictory cable that the State Department had to get back to its core competency of doing state to state relations, even though the government to which he was accredited barely controlled its own territory and certainly did not monopolize the use of force - the ability to do so being the PoliSci 101 definition of a state. Assuming that even in such messy situations, we will be asked to defend American national interests, we have to see that the world includes a broad range of governing arrangements on a spectrum from real nation-states like Germany all the way over to pieces of ground and societies that are barely different from a theoretical state of nature.

Having identified that reality, we then have to decide whether our national interests are sufficiently implicated in such situations to be worth putting diplomats, or any other USG personnel on the ground. This calculation should balance interests against resources and other regional priorities and should include an assessment as to whether a traditional country team approach makes sense, or whether our presence should be significantly weighted in favor of an agency or set of agencies to reflect our most critical interests. Achieving that match of resources to realities would require more authority for the Chief of Mission, whether called an Ambassador or something else to choose her own team and much greater flexibility from Washington-based agencies in their assignment systems. Diplomats and other civilians cost less to sustain abroad than soldiers, but are still expensive – whether in terms of monetary cost that run to at least hundreds of thousand dollars a year per person in difficult environments or in political costs if one of them gets killed. So with both those kinds of consequences to consider, not to mention the actual threat to human life, it makes no sense to drop a few

people into a building and leave them with no means of protecting themselves or interacting with the local government and population.

Unless we believe that the forces now affecting the world will soon produce a new stable order that will continue the recent dominance of nation states as the nodes of power, "What then must we do?" becomes a, if not ***the***, question we in the Foreign Service need to ask about the future of our institution in the service of our country.

The answer is that we have to prepare the Service to meet the needs it is likely to encounter for at least the next few decades. The consensus of big geo-strategy thinkers seems to be that the least likely shape of the world is the re-organization of fixed nation-state alliances moving against or with each other according to carefully calculated strategic and mercantilist interests, which are captured in one or more binding international agreements. Put another way, Westphalia may not be dead, but it is being pushed aside by other, more fluid arrangements. Another possibility is that a small group of nation-states or near empires will dominate their regions and compete for interests, markets and resources across the globe. While there are likely elements of both pictures awaiting us in the future, when it comes to actual operations, we have to consider that our actions and resourcing decisions will be affected by the actions of non-state actors, including groups of loosely organized young people, cyber activists and ideologues of various sorts, especially religious, who have something against a state-organized world and who have the knowledge to make that resentment relevant to policy makers and diplomatic and military operators.

By way of current example, small groups of terrorists and smugglers in Northern Mali, probably no more than several hundred young men, have caused the establishment of a new US military base on the continent and the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars to support international efforts to restore legitimate government in Mali. The UN has also acted and will somehow figure out how to pay for 12,000 troops to get control of the territory and return it to state sovereignty, while trying to address the near term threat the terrorists pose to the troops using bombs made of a few dollars' worth of materials. In the case of Northern Mali, which is very much not in our sphere of influence or at the heart of our strategic interests, we are unlikely to engage in expeditionary diplomacy and will continue to try to monitor events from the relative safety of Bamako and other regional locations. It is also possible that the terrorists will decide again to attack us and our allies either there or elsewhere in the region in an attempt to relieve pressure on their stronghold. If there are attacks or even threats in Bamako or elsewhere, we should expect to be ready to apply at least elements of an expeditionary approach to our state-centered diplomacy.

The January 16-19 terrorist attack at a gas plant near *In Amenas* in southeastern Algeria is a prime example of the sort of threat to our interests and our people we should expect to face. That attack killed three Americans and was planned and resourced by a splinter terrorist group headquartered in northern Mali, after the French had intervened to restore order. The attack also involved individuals from neighboring states and from Canada, who had launched their attack from across the border in Libya.

Current assessments hold that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and affiliated groups lack both the capability and intent to attack the United States directly, but the recent failure of such assessments to predict coming threats as well as the reality that US interests and citizens are everywhere should cause us to consider how to integrate the tools at our disposal. We have to be brutally realistic about our own capabilities. When it comes to the Sahel and to a lesser extent the Maghreb, the state of US Government knowledge is slight. We do not have

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people who have lived in the area or know its languages, nor is there much English-language literature to consult. Any policy or actions, including military basing decisions, is based on guess work and hope, rather than fact-based knowledge and analysis.

The presence of the threat and the lack of diplomatic, intelligence and academic resources have pushed us into over reliance on military options. To cite the cliché, because we only have a hammer, we are pretending that the situation in the Sahel is a nail.

One lesson that we have learned during the past decade of ever increasing cooperation with the military is that they want civilians to do their work, so they do not have to. Army captains generally have no desire to run small towns, dig wells or build schools. What they want is for civilians to do that work, or even better get the local and national governments to do that work, so that the captain can get back to his core competency of finding, fixing and destroying the enemy, enabling an early return home. It is only when civilians, whether diplomats or development types, are not around that the captain shrugs his shoulders and does what he can do according to his best sense of governance and development and considering the resources – likely to be money rather than expertise - because that's what he can do, not because doing so is necessarily a good idea in terms of our interests, or even local needs.

Since the state of the world makes it likely that the US military will be deployed in smaller elements in more places over the years to come, we diplomats have to choose whether to be with them or to pretend that interacting with ineffective ministries in far off capitals is really the way to produce the effects we want in a country or region. In other words, we have to decide whether to be relevant, or not.

One reason that thoughtful military colleagues like to have us around is because they recognize the complementary nature of our roles and mindsets. The military is all about results. Assessments of success have included enemies killed or captured and ground taken. Diplomats are all about process and relationships, with any actual changes in behavior only likely to be produced over years or decades. When it comes to governance especially, but long term development as well, it is the steady accretion of processes and the building of useful political and governmental relations that produce results and stability, which is why military colleagues will acknowledge that carrying out a specific military operation to clear an area of the enemy is the easy part of a strategy. Installing a working government and building an economy is the product of building human relations based on shared interests and confidence in stability that takes time and daily, incremental effort, which is not the strength of the US military, which wants to land, shoot and leave.

Over the last several years, we have seen an increased civilian commitment to joint operations and even integration with the military. Policy and development advisers are now present at much lower levels of command than has been the case at least since Vietnam and military personnel in Embassies now go much beyond the traditional functions of the Defense Attaché.

With this increasing integration of diplomats and soldiers, which is likely to be further stimulated by the numbers of career switching military officers joining the Foreign Service, and which reflects the shift in power from pure nation-states to other forms of human organization, we need to change the ways we train to reflect the way we work.

Training on military functions and structure should start with the A-100 orientation class for incoming Foreign Service Officers and be carried through the full spectrum of Foreign Service career training. For example, A-100 should include exchanges with military training institutions and learning modules on ranks and command structures. Participation in field exercises with deploying units would also help build relations and give both diplomatic and military operators a better sense of each other's culture and capabilities.

The Foreign Service Institute should also make an effort to live up to the rest of its name and be the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. Any courses having to do with interactions with foreigners should always include military personnel, since increasingly such interactions will have to consider security and defense elements. Such training would also enable greater influence over military operations since those carrying out such operations would have had the opportunity to consider the capabilities of the diplomats and development experts that they would expect to carry out those tasks.

Beyond training, we have to normalize and value service in military operations and in unaccompanied assignments. Promotion precepts should include at every stage positive consideration for service in unaccompanied jobs and with military elements. With the expansion of compensation, training and assignment programs that began just for Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan and now to Yemen and Libya, the trend line is clear – service under the conditions in those countries is becoming a norm, not the anomaly for diplomats.

A new diplomat entering the Foreign Service and looking out over the possibility of a career lasting at least a couple of decades should consider that he or she will spend a lot of time trying to influence foreigners who work both inside and outside government. A new Officer should also expect a significant period of unaccompanied service in places that are sufficiently dangerous that military action is either occurring or is seriously considered and in which the Embassy itself is signed faces a serious threat of attack. To prepare a new officer, we must re-focus training efforts to account for the greater importance of non-governmental organizations and networks and the necessity of working as part of an interagency task force to address a situation or solve a problem. Most critical will be to give the resources, knowledge and mindset to work effectively with the US military and intelligence agencies, which will continue to have significant roles in determining and executing foreign policy, while of course enjoying much greater resources than State as the leading implementer of foreign policy.

The author of this guest essay has elected to remain anonymous.

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