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## Home is Where the Heart Is: A State Department Focused on the Domestic Agenda

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he coming international order is one of multipolarity and rising collective challenges. American voters and elected officials alike realize that the next foreign policy agenda must center domestic matters, prudent prioritization, and careful diplomacy.

The State Department (State) can only support this agenda with proper organizational design. This means reforming existing structures to reduce gaps in cooperation and efficiency. It includes transforming relationships across the executive branch to put State in a leading role on foreign policy. Finally, this transition requires strategic insights to deliver long-term process and policy improvements.

State should implement three major reforms to achieve these goals. First, it should adopt a regionally autonomous organizational structure that gives each Under Secretary the ability to manage the full diplomatic tool kit for their region. Second, State needs a stronger line of communication to the White House and the authority to collaborate effectively on diplomatic activities where additional knowledge and expertise is needed. Third, State should redesign the Office of Policy Planning as an in-house strategic center to provide long-term insights and assessments on how policies can best benefit the American people. These reforms can ensure a domesticated foreign policy that prizes prudence and puts American interests first.

# The Right Department for the Right Time

What should the U.S. try to get out of other governments? The question cuts to what foreign policy is: a public means to secure the goods for the people. But what do the people want?

The current era is one of declining unipolarity and rising multipolarity where regional powers, such as China and Russia, have grown, European policies have become more transactional, and countries have begun asserting technological sovereignty. This means that exerting power and making maximal demands in areas such as trade, democracy promotion, and nuclear weapons no longer work. The way forward is to redefine diplomacy in practical terms and pursue a strategy that prioritizes the American people.<sup>1</sup>

A *domesticated foreign policy agenda*, enabled by diplomatic multilateralism and realist prioritization, would give State the authority, capacity, and insight to achieve core interests. However, any department's structure will be suited more to its historical role. This means that State's organizational architecture and capabilities are structured to support primacy and liberal hegemony grand strategies from the post-Cold War era.

In the private sector, organizational design is a matter of life and death. While the State Department is not a profit-seeking enterprise, it has goals to fulfill and resources to manage. Therefore, it is critical to implement the structural design needed to support the appropriate foreign policy agenda.

A domesticated foreign policy requires three new elements for foreign policy that were historically overlooked: 1) regional prioritization that acknowledges power politics and differentiated interests, 2) a foreign policy approach that puts cooperation, not coercion, center-stage, and 3) a holistic strategy that incorporates the domestic and the international when devising policy.

The State Department must be reformed to implement this foreign policy. Currently, State is geared to a globally oriented approach, reliant on military priorities, and divorces domestic and political concerns

from the work done abroad. Overcoming this requires three broad categories of reform. First, State needs a *reformation in structure* that reduces horizontal cooperation gaps and strengthens the vertical chains of command. Second, it needs a *reformation in authority* that puts State in a leading role with a direct line to the Presidency. Finally, it needs a *reformation in knowledge* through by reforming the Office of Policy Planning (OPP) into a world-class strategic center to develop long-term insights, assist in process improvements, and provide an independent perspective on overall performance.

## Perspective from the People

Recent focus groups and polling from the Center for American Progress and the consulting firm GBAO suggest that Americans want foreign policy centered on domestic aims. Participants stated they could not see a clear goal within U.S. foreign policy. They asked what was gained from the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and why the U.S. has no economic grand strategy. Several participants stated fighting authoritarianism and promoting democracy are not top priorities and could not define the "Liberal International Order."<sup>2</sup> Voters stated that domestic issues should come first. They listed infrastructure, health-care, and education as more important than defense. They identified top priorities as terrorism (86%), protecting elections (78%), protecting American jobs (77%), and ensuring fair trade (75%).<sup>2</sup> All of these are fundamentally domestic issues that operate within an international context.

Millennial and Generation Z voters were additionally focused on issues that were also centered on cooperation. These voters stated that the three most important priorities are climate change, jobs, and good foreign relationships.<sup>2</sup> The next generation views foreign policy as connected to domestic matters, where cooperation is more important than coercion.

## The View from Leadership

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken articulated similar sentiments in his incoming address "A Foreign Policy for the American People". First, American foreign policy must account for impacts to American workers and their families. Second, foreign policy should improve America's strength at home. Third, America's

domestic agenda should improve America's strength abroad. The ordering of these questions shows the unit of interest in foreign policy is not the state or the international community, but the American citizen.<sup>3</sup>

Blinken emphasizes cooperation and engagement with other countries through a multifaceted approach that includes:<sup>3</sup>

- Building a robust global health system
- Designing an inclusive global economy
- Peacefully promoting democratic reforms
- Creating a humane immigration system
- Revitalizing ties with allies and sharing the burdens of engagement
- Addressing climate change
- Maintaining America's technological edge
- Balancing great powers such as China

## A New Strategy

The United States needs a foreign policy that ties back to domestic matters while prudently engaging in peaceful multilateralism to address global challenges. This means forgoing ambitious military efforts and balancing against great powers in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf to avoid facing a state that matches the U.S. in power capabilities. This approach relies on local forces and balancing with multiple powers, shifting as needed with changing power dynamics.<sup>4</sup>

This strategy is critical to fulfilling the American public and Biden administration's preferred foreign policy. It is a framework to focus on diplomacy and domestic needs. The public wants the government to shift from defense spending to domestic spending while simultaneously protecting core institutions: the homeland, workplaces, democracy, and territory. In a world of limited resources, this means adopting a restrained, prudent strategy.

## A Call to Action

Implementing reform not only helps the achievement of America's strategic goals but builds change that carries on into the next administration. To that end, the War in Iraq is a case study in how a maximalist, interventionist foreign policy becomes disastrous. Shifting to a prudent foreign policy means giving

State the authority, structure, and knowledge needed to lead effective decision-making.

State should implement several reforms to achieve this goal. First, its organizational structure should be nimbler and more prudent. Then, State should become the central node in a diplomacy-first approach. After that, it should implement a world-class strategic center to provide expertise on addressing the public's top concerns. Ultimately, Congress should pass a 21<sup>st</sup> century Foreign Service Act to make these reforms a lasting reality.

## A Brief History of the State Department

Why does State look the way it does? Understanding it is critical to knowing the purpose of its design. State was reorganized under three acts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which are detailed below.

### Previous Foreign Service Acts

The first legislative reorganization of State was the Rogers Act, or the "Foreign Service Act of 1924", in response to the diplomatic failures that led to World War I. It merged consular and diplomatic services into a new Foreign Service and professionalized the service through an entrance exam and merit-based advancement. It implemented salary classes and basic benefits, while funding a Foreign Service School and basic infrastructure. To provide oversight, it also created both a Board of the Foreign Service and a Board of Examiners of the Foreign Service.

While a first step in building the diplomatic core, the Act was undermined by the Great Depression. The Depression led to austerity across the government including State where it led to the suspension of promotions, benefit cuts, and a 10% reduction in the Foreign Service.<sup>5</sup>

The next reorganization, the Foreign Service Act of 1946, occurred after World War II and professionalized the Foreign Service into six classes of employees: chiefs of mission, Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Reservists, local employees, and consular agents. It removed the distinction between Foreign Service and the Civil Service to implement

a Commissioned Officer system and an “up or out” system for advancement.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the last reorganization the Foreign Service Act of 1980. The purpose of this Act was to streamline senior officers into a new Senior Foreign Service and ensure the Foreign Service was staffed with the necessary skills for diplomacy. Officers were assessed for remaining future potential and provided a pension if they were unsuitable. In addition, the Act ended the Foreign Service Reserve System and transferred specialists back into the Civil Service. To provide greater oversight, the Board of the Foreign Service would include representatives from other departments, such as the U.S. Information Agency, Department of Labor, among others.<sup>7</sup>

## The Current State at State

### Scope and Authority

State’s goal is to lead on diplomacy and foreign policy with the Secretary of State (SoS) as the nation’s principal foreign policy advisor. Its goals are to 1) fight terrorism, 2) protect U.S. interests, 3) implement foreign policy initiatives, and 4) build a freer, prosperous, secure world.

In terms of staffing, State has three sets of employees: the Foreign Service, the Civil Service, and locally employed staff. The Foreign Service has over 13,000 employees and is the core personnel for representing America overseas and supporting Americans abroad. The Civil Service consists of over 11,000 personnel to provide continuity and expertise. The State Department also employs over 45,000 individuals abroad to support regular operations.<sup>8</sup>

### Internal Structure

State is subdivided into bureaus that oversee the Department’s mission. While each bureau has a specific function, such as climate change or arms control, many have overlapping interests and work together. Some bureaus are regional, such as the Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs, while others are functional, such as the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation. Figure 1 provides an overview of the current organizational structure.<sup>9</sup>

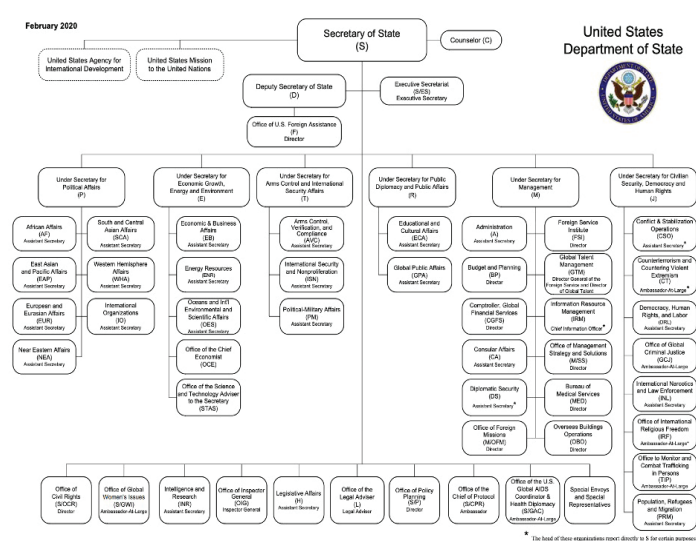


Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the Department of State<sup>9</sup>

In this chart, it is worth highlighting the Under Secretaries, the deputies who report to the SoS aside from direct policy development personnel such as the Policy Planning Staff. The Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security oversees nonproliferation, arms control, defense relations, and security assistance. The Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights focuses on mitigating threats to civilian security and promoting democracy. The Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment assists the Department on economics, food security, science, and the environment. The Under Secretary for Management oversees operational matters such as budgeting, consular affairs, and talent management. The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs oversees communications and outreach efforts such as cultural initiatives. Finally, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs maintains regional foreign policy, overseeing bureaus such as African Affairs and Near Eastern Affairs.<sup>10</sup>

## “More Money, More People” Can’t Fix Everything

The idea of reforming State is not new. Within the past six months alone, multiple think tanks produced their own perspectives including the *American Diplomacy Project* by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Revitalizing the State Department and American Diplomacy* by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and *Strengthening the Department of State* by the American Academy of Diplomacy (AAD).



The Belfer Center provides ten actions on how to “Reimagine American Diplomacy and Reinvent the Foreign Service”. Some of these are second order, such as redefining missions and institutionalizing reforms through a new Foreign Service Act. However, all other actions involve human-resource improvements such as diversity initiatives, education, and flexible work.<sup>11</sup>

CFR’s reforms focus on greater issue expertise, better career development, and technological overhaul. Issue expertise includes better staffing and educational programs on matters such as pandemics and climate change. They recommend career development programs such as better employee evaluations and more diverse hiring. The technology recommendations include appointing a Chief Technology Officer, developing information and communications technology related skills, and investing in cybersecurity. Additionally, the CFR lists institutional reforms that consist entirely of diversity and inclusivity initiatives measures and workforce expansion.<sup>12</sup>

AAD’s reforms also focus on education, training, and professional development. First, they recommend testing a pilot program for an improved performance evaluation process. Second, they advise developing a career program for developing diplomatic professionals. Third, they propose updating the Foreign Service Specialist system to include more expertise. These recommendations are almost all centered on providing State with more resources and capital: human, financial, and social.

Greater funding increases what State can do but does not show how to develop better solutions and implement them across the executive branch. A better way both improves the inputs that feed into State’s processes, while re-orienting them to better fit one another, feed into the foreign policy machine, and evolve over time.<sup>13</sup>

## Promoting Diplomacy with a Pragmatic Perspective

State’s organizational structure should be centered on regional prioritization because U.S. interests vary across the world. Prudent foreign policy involves knowing how to apply the foreign policy tool kit,

military, economic, and social, in a way that acknowledges ground conditions. What the U.S. wants from each region varies based on their level of economic development, power position, and state stability. This approach allows each subunit to operate autonomously, collaborating as needed on issues of greater scope.

The Under Secretaries should have a direct regional domain instead of a functional one. This means Under Secretaries domains would be the following: African Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central Affairs, Western Hemisphere Affairs, and International Organizations. Each region would have functional bureaus each led by an Assistant Secretary. These bureaus would each be focused on a different component of the DIME model: diplomatic, informational, security, or economic. It breaks out as follows:

- Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (Diplomatic)
- Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (Informational)
- Arms Control and International Security Affairs (Security/Military)
- Economic Growth, Energy and Environment (Economic)

Every organization has minor seams that enable coordination and major seams that weaken it. These seams determine the ability to command, control and communicate across the organization. By having the second layer of the organization be individuals with generalized regional knowledge, State can reduce the impact of organizational seams.<sup>14</sup>

A regional approach has several benefits. First, developing layers with synonymous functions reduces major seams because of the similarities in operations and expectations. Second, having synonymous departments under each region improves collaboration on diplomatic initiatives and policies. Third, this is an improvement over the current state, where there is no place for agencies to oversee economic policies or martial resources. Finally, regionalizing the staff would mitigate the ability to overstaff in comfortable postings that do not represent national priorities.<sup>15</sup>

This reorganization should be followed up by dividing the United States Agency for International Devel-

opment into each of the six major regions under their respective Economic Growth, Energy and Environment Bureau. This gives each Under Secretary autonomy to administer aid towards infrastructure and long-term regional development. Regional development, an alternative to coercion, is critical to matching the long-term investments currently being done by other great powers, such as China through the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the Administration should divide the U.S. Agency for Global Media along regional lines. Public diplomacy is a critical part of America's engagement abroad. It is easier to do business with another country when their electorate sees Americans in a positive light. Private media already pursues decentralized strategies to tailor media to local interests by building localized brands and programming.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. should match that success in the public sector. Incorporating media and information-gathering within each region would also overcome the limits of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which does not have the staff to collect the raw data that feeds its analyses.<sup>16</sup>

The failure of State to perform effectively was apparent during the Iraq War. One month before the war began, bureau chiefs were already warning of planning gaps and their inability to actually take on a policing role.<sup>19</sup> During the war, the State Department either ended or was unable to implement several critical programs aimed at helping Iraqis prevent civil disorder such as a tribal reconciliation program that had a record of resolving various disputes between tribal groups. This was because the cuts did not "[factor in] U.S. foreign policy priorities in Iraq".<sup>17</sup>

Finally, State should have a stronger voice in refusing requests to take on military operations from the Defense Department (Defense). Defense's ability to push its burdens into State creates a free rider effect that undermines State's focus on actual priorities. During Iraq, State lacked the personnel to continue programs started by the Pentagon and was forced to impose cuts that extended into its own core functions.<sup>16</sup>

Making matters worse, the Defense Department also undermined the pre-planning done by the State Department's "Future of Iraq Project". This effort was underfunded and eventually ended by Defense but struggled towards completion through its lifetime

because other departments refused to work with State on the matter. In critical meetings, it was the Kurds who requested State personnel because American staff forgot to include them.<sup>18</sup>

These experiences show the need for properly structuring State. It needs the effectiveness of regional model to perform the multi-faceted analysis needed for prudent foreign policy. In the short term, the Biden administration should fix the internal structure of the State Department so that it can do its job more effectively. This should include developing the new regional sub-departments, the functional bureaus, and USAID and USAGM. To minimize resistance to change, this reform should be coupled with new career pathways and opportunities for learning and development towards both functional and regional areas of expertise. Resistance is likely to be strongest in reforming USAID and USAGM. This should be overcome by proportionally higher funding to each of the new regional equivalents to ensure a smooth transition into the new operating model.

## **Ensuring that the State Department's Voice is Heard**

Fixing departmental priorities is step one. Step two is ensuring State has a seat at the table. This means a part in decision-making forums and direct input with the President on policy options. Other departments need to take State seriously and provide support in its policy development.

First, if military options are in service of diplomacy, then State needs a lead role on when to use the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). The executive branch should be required to have State perform an assessment on potential impacts from activating the AUMF as well as alternative impacts from diplomatic and economic solutions. This assessment should be provided to Congress as public record to allow insight from the legislature and the public. Giving State a role on the AUMF can constrain the issue of anticipatory compliance within large, political organizations. Anticipatory compliance is when advisors seek to show loyalty to an inspiring leader. Their lower rank and desire for success causes them to align their views with the agenda of the leader and even punish others who dissent.<sup>19</sup>

Second, State needs access to resources necessary to do its work effectively. This means it should be able to formally request data, documentation, and resources for its projects from other departments. As a last resort, it should include the ability to subpoena another department through the court system when diplomatic work is critical to an impending decision.

Bureaucratic politics makes cooperation between departments difficult with proper incentives. The problem is that bureaucracies force advisers to compete and form alliances based on group identification. This creates in-groups and out-groups that fuel inter-bureaucratic conflicts and incentivize the use of manipulative tactics.<sup>18</sup>

State was not able to assess the issues leading up to the Iraq War because it did not have the access and authority needed to provide that input. Constant infighting between Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as well as Vice President Dick Cheney meant their respective departments refused to cooperate on critical matters. State was isolated from key areas of decision-making in the run-up to the war. This lack of collaboration continued in the nation-building phase. Paul Bremer, Administrator of the Coalitional Provisional Authority, submitted a now much-criticized plan to “de-Baathify” and suspend existing security forces without undergoing an actual interagency review.<sup>18</sup>

These conflicts were exacerbated by the lack of an “honest broker” to mediate disputes. Then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice was perceived as unable to manage conflict among principals. Instead, she was reported as papering over ideological differences to pursue options in alignment with President Bush’s preexisting preferences.<sup>18</sup>

This inability to collaborate manifested throughout the war. As early as 2003, experts from State made unheeded warnings to CENTCOM about “serious planning gaps for post-conflict public security and humanitarian assistance” and that current efforts did not address short-term humanitarian concerns. William Burns, then-head of the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau, pointed out that several requests by Defense are actions State had already taken or planned.<sup>20</sup>

This continued into the war where State struggled to run operations requiring collaboration and included attempting to persuade the CIA to split the cost of operating posts to no avail.<sup>16</sup>

State also experienced several challenges on completing interagency analysis. For example, the multiyear analysis on Iraqi development could not be completed because it was impossible to organize analysts from 16 different agencies and provide access to each other’s reports due to secrecy and incompatible computer programs.<sup>21</sup> These limits meant that State, CIA, and Defense’s postwar planning was never organized into government policy and detailed enough to be operationalized. Actual plans were put together just months before the war.<sup>22</sup>

Third, State’s voice must be a regular input into the President’s ear. It should have oversight in drafting the President’s Daily Briefing (PDB). This is daily communication provided directly to the President and its development is dominated by the military and intelligence agencies.

The ability to reach a President’s attention is contingent on their management style. During the Iraq War, President Bush adopted a formal style of management common within hierarchical organizations. In this framework, the leader chooses the best policy among options generated by the advisors. The President’s own preference was to rely on experts and make instinctive decisions from a range of options due to his own inexperience. The combination of decentralized management coupled with inexperience led him to rely on the tutelage of the people who advised him on the campaign and now led the intelligence agencies and Defense.<sup>18</sup>

State’s inability to reach the President’s ear was a recurring motif during planning. Officials at Defense and other intelligence agencies had already decided that State was “against the war” and undermined them to run the Iraq in their preferred way. This included seizing complete control of postwar reconstruction and excluding State personnel, the very professionals most equipped to build political institutions.<sup>23</sup> These reforms are especially necessary during a crisis, such as 9/11, because critical situations can intensify the various pathologies listed above. The need for immediate action and the possibility of failure intensifies

divisions among advisers and leads to poor decision-making.

The medium-term priority should be to re-orient State's relationship with both the White House and the other executive departments so that it can put its expertise at the front of a diplomacy-first foreign policy. This includes providing AUMF assessment and oversight, the ability to acquire critical information from other departments, and provide regular input into the PDB. Given the current battles over the AUMF, it would likely be the hardest to provide oversight over since it is unclear how it will be replaced. The Administration should first prioritize mandating a more collaborative framework between State and other national security institutions to avoid the gridlock and misinformation that occurs during crises with the existing framework.

## **Developing Strategy and Building World-Class Diplomacy**

To promote a domesticated foreign policy agenda, the State Department needs a dedicated unit to provide the strategy needed for such a shift. State should redesign the OPP as a world-class strategic center, like leading practices in the private sector, that reports directly to the SoS to develop recommendations supporting a new foreign policy.

The new OPP's function concentrates existing expertise and resources to optimize performance by providing leadership, research, insight, and best practices. In the private sector, strategic center's focus on operational efficiency under changing market conditions such as cost pressures, emerging competitors, and battles for talent.<sup>24</sup> The goal here is to deliver value and define strategy as opposed to sustaining business-as-usual functions.<sup>25</sup>

For State, this approach would include reforming the OPP to focus on improving diplomatic processes given the 1) rising multipolar world, 2) public desire to shift resources towards domestic development, and 3) need to address global public goods. The OPP would develop key goals and metrics to determine incremental steps to deliver value to the American people.

This approach includes scenario-based analyses to examine what happens if mechanisms normally dedicated towards foreign policy, such as security assistance and sanctions, were instead reallocated towards domestic affairs. By factoring the domestic side, State could drive discussion on re-evaluating current commitments in light of a changing world. For accountability, these assessments should be public record and provided to Congress for review.

Building up this team requires careful attention to detail. The planning phase should include a definition of design principles and best practices followed by an understanding of the skills needed to sustain them. The team should start by building smaller, incremental assessments, such as on improving consular services and public diplomacy initiatives, and then rolling them into more strategic initiatives.<sup>26</sup> The team should deliver regular assessments on foreign policy to the SoS with recommendations on achieving national goals and how particular actions can lead to improvements in performance indicators tied to power capabilities.

In addition, the OPP should be required to provide an objective assessment on the feasibility of any military intervention including diplomatic alternatives as well as assessments on any post-war political solutions. This is to avoid situations such as Iraq and Libya, which were not properly planned prior to the intervention. In fact, both of these situations led former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to say that "the State Department has become too bureaucratic and requires reform" and military restraint and reform must be critical to protecting American interests. To that end, any Administration must define objectives and assess resources for any mission to avoid foreign policy disaster.<sup>15</sup>

The long-term priority is to build a new OPP that can grow and evolve the organization over time. This requires identifying individuals with the right skillset and recruiting from both the public and private sector as needed. In addition, it will require training and awareness to be provided across the organization to help build a culture for the Service to work with their new strategic partners.



# Roadmap to a New Foreign Service Act

Previous Foreign Service Acts focused on staffing requirements, career opportunities and core functions for the foreign service. Given the shortcomings of the State Department, a 21<sup>st</sup> century Foreign Service Act would not only revamp the Foreign Service personnel but reimagine the State Department along the lines shown above.

A new Act is necessary for several reasons. First, it codifies reforms to last beyond the current Administration. Organizations need consistency to operate effectively and reforms purely through executive order run the risk of being undone by an incoming administration. Congressional ratification would write these reforms into law. Second, diplomacy is built on public perceptions. An actual public debate over what foreign policy ought to be would help win public support. Third, Congress was historically the arbiter of the direction of American diplomacy. Passing a new Foreign Service Act would reassert Congress's role and bring foreign policy within constitutionally defined limits. Given the nature of political battles, this bill should be passed into law in the current Congressional session and fully implemented before the end of Biden's first term. In the event of legislative gridlock, the Administration should still be able to pass by Executive Order the medium-term organizational relationship reforms through new requirements to provide resources requested by State and provide it with a partnership role in developing the PDB. In addition, while a redesigned OPP would likely not be possible without Congressional consent, the administration can still reorient the Policy Planning Staff towards providing strategic guidance across the organization and developing the reports the new OPP would produce when finally completed.

## Conclusion

The task of reforming long-standing bureaucracies is not easy, but the stakes could not be higher. Structure has a direct impact on performance and the long-standing nature of the State Department plays a key role in foreign policy misadventures and the risks of interventionism. In addition, changes in the inter-

national arena and public opinion mean that the new era requires new policies and therefore new organizations. Rebuilding the State Department with the diplomatic infrastructure suited to the new political climate is critical to rebalancing policy efforts and promoting a new domesticated foreign policy.

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