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Rebalancing U.S. Foreign Policy: The State Department and Congressional Fellowships

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In the late 1940s, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Republican of Michigan, played an instrumental role in mobilizing Congress to support the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the twin pillars of U.S. policy in Europe after World War II. State Department officials in the Truman administration felt a special affinity for Vandenberg, whose position as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee enabled him to spread his internationalist views within the then-isolationist Republican Party. Yet George Kennan, head of the State Department's policy planning staff, was not quite as impressed. On the matter of European recovery, Kennan later wrote, Vandenberg "deserved credit no doubt for having supported it, but no more than we deserved for having proposed it." Kennan added: "I could not accept the assumption that Senators were all such idiots that they deserved admiring applause every time they could be persuaded by the State Department to do something sensible."¹

Kennan's acidic observation perfectly crystallizes the scorn with which the State Department sometimes views Congress. The feeling is often mutual. A 2002 survey by the Una Chapman Cox Foundation found that congressional staff members view the State Department as "arrogant" and "insufficiently responsive," characteristics which limited State's ability to enlist support for its policy and budgetary priorities on Capitol Hill.² Stanley Heginbotham, a former director of foreign policy at the Congressional Research Service who wrote extensively on State-Congress relations, observed that "The political cultures of the executive-branch foreign-policy arena and the congressional arena are fundamentally different." Thus, he concluded, "Interbranch foreign-policy making efforts are likely to be strained and conflictive because the operating norms of the two systems are incompatible."³ The problem Heginbotham diagnosed has now become a full-fledged crisis.

While bureaucratic decentralization at State and increased partisanship in Congress have certainly contributed to the predicament, the U.S. military's encroachment into an increasing number of foreign policy missions since the end of the Cold War is the primary cause of the State-Congress crisis. This "militarization of diplomacy" has negatively impacted both congressional perceptions of State's efficacy and State's ability to secure adequate funding from Congress.⁴ The Department of Defense (DOD) now receives funds for programs that duplicate efforts traditionally carried out by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, DOD provided four percent of overall U.S. development aid assistance in 1998; by 2005, its share had

¹ George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 405.

² Throughout the essay, all quotations from congressional staff members are from Thomas Melia, *Congressional Staff Attitudes Toward the Department of State and Foreign Service Officers* (Washington, DC: Una Chapman Cox Foundation, 2002), <http://www.usdiplomacy.org/downloads/pdf/congress/Melia2000.pdf>.

³ Stanley Heginbotham, "Dateline Washington: The Rules of the Games," *Foreign Policy* 53 (Winter 1983-1984): 157-172, at 157, 161.

⁴ The phrase "militarization of diplomacy" is from *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness*, 4.

risen to 22 percent.⁵ USAID lost approximately 1,300 permanent positions, 37 percent of its total staff, between 1990 and today.⁶ In fiscal year 2010, the United States will spend about 13 times more on its military than on diplomatic operations and aid, even though their respective functions are equally important to accomplishing U.S. foreign policy objectives.⁷

Although DOD is a much larger organization than the State Department, DOD's growing control over U.S. foreign policy is partly attributable to its highly organized and efficient legislative operations, which are far superior to those of State and allow the Pentagon to dominate the zero-sum game of congressional budgeting. At the present time, DOD is much more committed than the State Department to its congressional fellowship programs, which send mid-career personnel to work in Congress and are considered career-enhancers by young military officers. The Pentagon plans to quadruple (to a total of 100) the number of military fellows serving in Congress by 2009 as part of a complete revamping of its legislative affairs office, the office's first restructuring in almost 20 years. In contrast, the State Department only sends 10 to 12 Foreign Service Officers to Congress each year as part of its Pearson congressional fellowship program. For every Pearson fellow working on Capitol Hill, there are 10 military fellows. This disparity is unacceptable.

The military's more effective use of lobbying and relationship-building on the Hill has allowed it to invert Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's famous dictum—politics has now become a continuation of war by other means. It is time for the State Department to reclaim its proper place alongside DOD as a chief incubator and executor of U.S. foreign policy. The State Department must act now to increase the prestige of its own congressional fellowships and at least double the number of Foreign Service Officers working on the Hill. Otherwise, it risks being completely overrun by DOD's expanded legislative affairs activities.

State-Congress Relations

State Department's Troubles with Congress

The State Department and Congress are very different in terms of structure. State is geographically diffuse, hierarchical, and adheres rigidly to standard operating procedure. Congress is geographically centralized, multipolar, and thrives on improvisation and compromise. These structural differences have developed into ostensible cultural differences. State is externally-focused, deliberate, and discreet in its dealings with the media. Congress is insular, impetuous, and aggressive in its desire to generate media coverage.

⁵ Gordon Adams, "Rebalancing and Integrating the National Security Toolkit," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 24 April 2008, 14, accessed on the Henry Stimson Center website at <http://www.stimson.org/budgeting/SFRC%20testimony%20final%204%2023%2008.pdf>, 17 October 2008.

⁶ Ken Dilanian, "Short-Staffed USAID Tries To Keep Pace," *USA Today*, 1 February 2009.

⁷ *Ibid.*, "Under Bills, U.S. Would Funnel More Money Into Diplomacy," *USA Today*, 20 July 2009.

The State Department struggles mightily to understand and interact successfully with Congress. Congressional Research Service analyst Stanley Heginbotham observed that executive branch officials tend to see members of Congress as “predisposed to grandstanding, prone to disrupting important incremental day-to-day shifts in relations with other countries, dilatory and unpredictable in their legislative actions, ignorant of basic foreign-policy realities, and parochial in their approach to global issues.”⁸ Some of State’s frustration with Congress can be partially explained by Congress’s labyrinthine structure. As Heginbotham pointed out:

Congress has none of the characteristics that enable bureaucracies to function effectively: it has no definitive hierarchical structure, the functional specialization of its subunits (committees) is very limited, responsibility for effective operations is not assigned to specific individuals, the persona of its members cannot be separated from their office, and its members are rewarded or penalized on the basis of criteria that have little, if anything, to do with effective decision making.⁹

This lack of hierarchical structure in Congress is compounded by the reality that legislating oftentimes is as much about politics and personality as it is about process or procedure. As Morton Halperin and Priscilla Clapp wrote, “Congress can be hydra-headed, influencing foreign policy through both legislation and pressure by individual members.”¹⁰

This lack of any centralized, formal power center can be nettlesome for State Department officials trying to push a legislative initiative through Congress. For example, who should State consult about securing increased funding for an international aid program? The most obvious answers are the House and Senate chairmen and ranking members on the foreign relations committees, as well as the committees that handle appropriations for the aid program in question. This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. The leadership of both houses may have an interest in the aid program if it has political implications; for instance, if the increased funding is for Latin America, it could impact elections in states with large Latino populations such as California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. Any member of Congress whose constituents are interested in the program also may want to be consulted about State’s legislative efforts.

Navigating the congressional maze consumes time that State Department officials would rather spend pursuing their primary responsibility of representing the United States

⁸ Heginbotham, “Dateline Washington: The Rules of the Games,” 158.

⁹ Quoted in Barry Blechman, *The Politics of National Security: Congress and U.S. Defense Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 28.

¹⁰ Morton Halperin and Priscilla Clapp with Arnold Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 343-44.

in its dealings with foreign countries. Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher estimated that he spent at least 25 percent of his time testifying, preparing to testify, or otherwise engaged in relations with Congress.¹¹ George Kennan articulated the problem with his usual panache: “My specialty was the defense of U.S. interests against others, not against our own representatives...I resented the State Department being put in the position of lobbyists before Congress in favor of the U.S. people.”¹² William Bacchus observed within State a general dismissiveness, similar to that expressed by Kennan, of the need to go before Congress and seek budgetary resources. “There has been a general lack of concern about resource issues, resulting in a tendency to equate them with what has been called mere ‘housekeeping’ in the executive branch,” Bacchus wrote. “They are not ‘pure diplomatic activities,’ so they are seen as ‘secondary.’”¹³ Some in Congress realize the demands placed on State Department officials’ time can be burdensome. This recognition of the opportunity cost involved in spending time on the Hill, however, has not led Congress to scale back its demands for frequent consultation.

While not considered as glamorous within the State Department as postings abroad, jobs in program development and management, strategic planning, contracting, budgeting, human resources, and congressional relations are nonetheless vital to accomplishing the Department’s objectives.¹⁴ Without administrative and logistical assistance, American diplomats working on the front lines do not have the support they need to maintain productive relationships with U.S. allies and avert international crises before they start.

Congress’s Troubles with the State Department

The State Department’s culture is also mirrored in its legislative operations: reserved, decentralized, and unrevealing. While these characteristics make good diplomats, they do not always make effective liaisons on Capitol Hill.

Perhaps the clearest encapsulation of congressional frustration with the State Department came from Heginbotham, who asserted that members of Congress and their staffs tend to see executive branch officials as:

...unquestioning in their advocacy of administration policies, obsessed with the minutiae of ritualized diplomatic exchanges, insensitive to broad patterns of American interests, more concerned with the interests and needs of their foreign counterparts than with the democratic processes of their own government, arrogant in their belief that their academic training and field experience give them

¹¹ Warren Christopher, “Ceasefire between the Branches: A Compact in Foreign Affairs,” *Foreign Affairs* 60 (Summer 1982): 989-1005, at 1000.

¹² Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, 405.

¹³ William Bacchus, *The Price of American Foreign Policy: Congress, the Executive, and International Affairs Funding* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 267.

¹⁴ See Adams, “Rebalancing and Integrating the National Security Toolkit,” 5.

a monopoly on foreign-policy wisdom, hypocritical in their claim exclusively to represent the national interest, and skilled primarily in stanching the flow of meaningful information to the Hill.¹⁵

This perception did not just develop in recent years. It is the cumulative result of decades of State-Congress animosity that has only intensified since Heginbotham published his critique in the 1980s.

Congressional staffers have communicated that they are made to feel intellectually inferior to State Department officials. This perceived condescension was a common refrain in the 2002 Una Chapman Cox Foundation survey. “Many of the executive branch see the vast majority of Hill staffers, in my opinion, as somewhat unclean,” said a mid-level Republican Senate aide. “We are not policy experts... We didn’t pass an exam getting this job. We didn’t go through basic training to get here.” One mid-level Democratic Senate aide characterized FSOs this way: “Foreign Service Officers in general are people that were very successful academically. They are people that read a lot, are very interested in foreign cultures. So I think you tend to find a lot of introverted people as opposed to in DOD or some other agencies.” In the aggressive, contact sport of congressional politics, this perceived bookishness is seen as out of place. “I see a lot of people whose basic human skills in interacting in a normal way seem to be severely lacking and you wonder how these people got into the [Foreign] Service,” remarked one Senior Democratic Senate committee staffer.

Some congressional staffers believe that the State Department, as an organization, has not placed a high enough priority on understanding and working effectively with Congress. For instance, as one mid-level Democratic House aide remarked, some State Department employees “have a shocking lack of respect for Congress...there is sometimes a lack of political [global positioning system].” One Democratic House staffer thought the problem was lack of effort on the communications front: “We never hear from State. They never call for appointments. It’s just not something State does. I would never, ever hear from them if I didn’t call them.” Congress does not take well to being treated dismissively; in fact, defending its constitutional prerogative can become excessively retaliatory when Congress responds to perceived superciliousness emanating from the State Department. “[Congress] is really the only place where some kid making 30,000 a year, two years out of college, can kick the crap out of an assistant secretary who’s been in the diplomatic corps for fifty years, and he can do it quite easily any day he wants to, at any briefing he wants to,” said one mid-level Republican Senate aide.

An independent task force convened in 2001 by the Council on Foreign Relations and Center for Strategic and International Studies found that State was guilty of many of the transgressions listed above. The task force concluded:

¹⁵ Heginbotham, “Dateline Washington: The Rules of the Games,” 158.

- The [State] department’s professional culture is predisposed against public outreach and engagement, thus undercutting its effectiveness at public diplomacy and undermining its coordination not only with Congress, but also with other agencies of the U.S. government.
- The [State] department’s professional culture remains predisposed to ‘information policing’ rather than ‘information providing.’
- State Department personnel still regard reaching out to Congress as more of a risk than an opportunity, and they often project an air of elitist confidentiality in dealing with Capitol Hill.¹⁶

Independent assessments by the Henry Stimson Center, Foreign Affairs Council, Una Chapman Cox Foundation, and American Academy of Diplomacy have reached similar conclusions.

Regrettably, the crisis in State-Congress relations is not improving. As a senior Republican committee staffer remarked, “Frankly, I have been working here through Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and Bush II, and State has not changed during any of those four.” What has changed during those four administrations, however, is that the U.S. military has usurped from the State Department a greater number of roles and missions in the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy. This encroachment onto the State Department’s bureaucratic territory is partially explained by the Pentagon’s mastery of legislative affairs.

DOD and State Congressional Fellowships

Department of Defense

One way DOD seeks to cultivate organizational expertise in legislative affairs is by sending its best and brightest young officers to serve appointments in the legislative and executive branches. Several of the most storied American military officers of the past generation spent at least some of their military careers serving in the civilian world of politics. Generals Colin Powell and Wesley Clark each served as White House Fellows in the Office of Management and Budget, where they helped prepare the President’s annual budget request for Congress. General James Jones, current National Security Advisor and former North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commander, spent five years in the Navy-Marine Corps Senate liaison office on Capitol Hill; afterwards, he wrote a report for the National War College titled *Effective Legislative Liaison and the United States*

¹⁶ *State Department Reform* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations and Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 2, 9, 21, http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/state_department.pdf.

Senate (1985). Perhaps most famously, Senator John McCain's four years as Navy Senate liaison were called the "turning point" that started the former Navy Captain on the trajectory toward the Republican presidential nomination in 2008.¹⁷

The military's commitment to producing well-rounded, politically-savvy officers has become part of its official doctrine. For example, the U.S. Army has fully embraced the "Pentathlete" model in its leadership guidance. A Pentathlete, according to former Army Secretary Francis Harvey, is "a multiskilled leader who personifies the warrior ethos in all aspects, from war fighting to statesmanship to enterprise management."¹⁸ This definition was broadened in 2007 when *Army Regulation 600-100* outlined that, as leaders, Pentathletes must "be able to operate independently in an ambiguous, dynamic, and politically sensitive environment." This included the need for leaders to communicate, coordinate, and negotiate with everyone from interagency partners to nongovernmental organizations to U.S. and foreign media.¹⁹ This top-level guidance already has trickled down through the ranks, as several mid-level officers have published articles that expounded upon the Pentathlete leadership model in the past few years.²⁰

The U.S. military as a whole takes its work on Capitol Hill very seriously. This is certainly the case when it comes to congressional fellowships. After a rigorous application and selection process, the fellowship usually unfolds in three phases: one or two months of training and orientation; one full year as a congressional fellow; and two full years afterwards on a "payback" or "utilization" tour in the service's legislative liaison office or some other assignment requiring knowledge of Congress. In House and Senate personal offices, military fellows typically work in close conjunction with the legislative assistant responsible for military and defense issues, known on the Hill as an "LA" for legislative assistant or "MLA" for military legislative assistant. Fellows lend their military expertise and perform a variety of functions, including crafting legislative language, writing questions and statements for oversight hearings, building support for new pieces of legislation, processing appropriation requests, drafting press statements and articles, responding to constituent mail, and accompanying the member on fact-finding trips. Mastering staff work in the competitive, fast-paced atmosphere of Capitol Hill prepares bright young officers for general staff assignments they may undertake later in their careers. As Dan Stanley, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, said, "The fellowship allows the Fellow to see the [Defense] Department...and

¹⁷ David Kirkpatrick, "Taste of Senate Set Capt. McCain on a New Path," *New York Times*, 29 May 2008.

¹⁸ Francis Harvey, "Building the Future Force While Continuing to Fight the Global War on Terrorism," *Army Magazine* (October 2005): 17-21, at 19.

¹⁹ *Army Regulation 600-100: Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2007), 1, http://www.army.mil/usapa/epubs/pdf/r600_100.pdf.

²⁰ For example, see Lieutenant Colonel Jimmie Keenan, "Developing the Pentathlete: The Army Congressional Fellowship Experience," March 2006, accessed on the website of the U.S. Army War College at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/ksil390.pdf>, 17 October 2008; and Lieutenant Colonel Kevin McElroy, "Developing the Army Pentathlete," March 2007, accessed on the website of the U.S. Army War College at <http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA468972&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>, 17 October 2008..

the administration through [congressional] eyes. This is vital; it makes better strategic leaders.”²¹

Congressional fellowships bestow invaluable political know-how on ambitious military officers. As one senior Republican committee staffer remarked, “There is probably no [better] place in the U.S. government where people learn how to deal with Congress and get their way in doing so, than in our military.” As a military fellow for Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Republican of Texas, Lieutenant Colonel Jimmie Keenan helped draft legislation that reversed a law barring military involvement in health research without explicit advance consent, a change which eventually allowed DOD to participate in clinical trauma research.²² In an appraisal of her fellowship experience published in 2006, Keenan recognized the valuable political skills she attained while working in Congress. “Relationships define the Hill. Maintaining and developing those relationships is important,” Keenan wrote.²³ The relationships that Keenan developed did benefit the Army when she served her payback tour as the chief congressional liaison for the Surgeon General and U.S. Army Medical Command.

The total number of military fellows from all service branches serving on Capitol Hill declined from approximately 40 to only 26 in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Our uniformed military should be focused on military missions, especially in a time of war. We simply do not have the luxury of providing adjunct staff for congressional offices,” Assistant Secretary of Defense Stanley remarked.²⁴ DOD policies have changed considerably, however, in the past two years. The Secretary of Defense recently announced DOD’s intention to increase the total number of military fellows from all service branches from 26 to 100 by 2009. These 100 fellowships will be evenly divided between the four service branches with the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps each allocated 25 fellows.²⁵

State Department

Before describing the State Department’s congressional fellowship program, it is important to offer two caveats to keep in mind when comparing it to DOD’s. First, State does not possess the same personal, political, or economic constituency in Congress as DOD. Twenty four percent of members of Congress – 129 out of 535 members of the 110th Congress – had military experience. While this is down from the peak in 1977, when more than 75 percent had served in the military, it is nevertheless significant.²⁶ In contrast, only Representative William Thornberry, Republican of Texas, served in the State Department prior to being elected to Congress (the 111th Congress added another

²¹ Quoted in Keenan, “Developing the Pentathlete: The Army Congressional Fellowship Experience,” 7.

²² Gina Kolata, “Trauma Medicine: Stepchild No More,” *New York Times*, 8 April 2003.

²³ Keenan, “Developing the Pentathlete: The Army Congressional Fellowship Experience,” 13.

²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ Gina Cavallaro, “Army to Increase Congressional Fellowships,” *Army Times*, 30 May 2007, accessed on the website of the *Army Times* at http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/army_congress_fellowship_070530w/, 20 October 2008.

²⁶ Susan Kuczka, “Congress Has Fewest Veterans Since WWII,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 September 2007.

former State employee: Representative Glenn Nye, Democrat of Virginia).²⁷ Besides this lack of personal experience working for State, many members of Congress regularly express concern that they will be accused politically of not caring enough for their own constituents if they become too active on international affairs. One Congressional aide remarked that his boss often “worried about the perception in the district that he cared more about foreign policy issues than local issues.”²⁸ Last but certainly not least, the military-industrial complex penetrates virtually every congressional district in the United States. Defense spending often means jobs for members’ constituents, something that can rarely be said of spending on diplomacy or humanitarian aid.

A second caveat is that there are more personnel from DOD eligible to serve tours on Capitol Hill than there are from the State Department. As of 30 June 2008, there were 169,207 officers of the appropriate rank that could apply to be congressional fellows (appropriate rank includes first lieutenants, captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels, along with Navy equivalents).²⁹ If DOD increases its total number of congressional fellows to 100, as currently planned, it would divert 0.06 percent of its eligible workforce to the Hill. By comparison, the State Department employed only 11,555 Foreign Service employees as of 30 June 2008.³⁰ If the State Department sent 100 Foreign Service employees to the Hill, it would represent 0.87 percent of its Foreign Service workforce, a proportion fourteen times greater than DOD’s. Australian counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen, senior advisor to General David Petraeus, put it best: “There are substantially more people employed as musicians in Defense bands than in the entire foreign service.”³¹

Every year, between 10 and 12 congressional fellowships are available for State Department Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) through what is known as the Pearson program. The Pearson program is named after Senator James Pearson, Republican of Kansas, who passed an amendment in 1975 providing the opportunity for FSOs to spend time working in Congress, state and local governments, or non-governmental organizations. The Pearson program is open to all generalist FSOs with seven years of experience and usually lasts for one year but can be extended for an additional year.³² Another route for FSOs to serve on the Hill is through the American Political Science Association (APSA) Congressional Fellowship Program. On average, between zero and

²⁷ Author’s review of members’ biographies, 110th Congress.

²⁸ Eileen Burgin, “The Influence of Constituents: Congressional Decision Making on Issues of Foreign and Defense Policy” in Randall Ripley and James Lindsay, eds., *Congress Resurgent: Foreign and Defense Policy on Capitol Hill* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 73-74.

²⁹ Department of Defense Active Duty Military Personnel by Rank/Grade, as of 30 June 2008, <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/rg0806.pdf>.

³⁰ State Department Human Resources Fact Sheet, as of 30 June 2008, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/108983.pdf>.

³¹ David Kilcullen, “New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict,” *eJournal USA: Foreign Policy Agenda* 12 (May 2007): 39-45, at 43, accessed on the website of the State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs at <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0507/ijpe/kilcullen.htm>.

³² Juanita Adams, “The Pearson Program and U.S. Foreign Policy: State Department’s Domestic Assignment Program,” *Department of State Dispatch*, August 1993, accessed on the website BNET at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_n31_v4/ai_13267941, 17 October 2008.

four FSOs obtain APSA fellowships each year.³³ Additionally, State Department Civil Service employees who have a minimum grade of GS-13 or equivalent at the time of application also are eligible for congressional fellowships through the Brookings Institution's Congressional Fellowship. Between three and six State Department employees participate in the Brookings program each year, and they are almost always Civil Service.³⁴

Once selected, State Department congressional fellows follow a process similar to military fellowships: they must contact, interview with, and be selected by a congressional office before assuming the duties of a normal congressional staffer. Beyond this initial procedural similarity, however, State's involvement in congressional fellowship programs is nowhere near as formalized or robust as the armed services. No payback or utilization tour is required for State the way it is for DOD. There is also no planned expansion of State's fellowship programs to rival that being undertaken by DOD. Moreover, participation in congressional fellowships is not encouraged in any of State's personnel doctrine; in fact, FSOs often shy away from spending time working in Congress because of a fear that time spent away from the foreign circuit will harm their prospects for promotion.³⁵

State fellows face an uphill battle once they start working on the Hill due to congressional staff members' preconceived notions about the State Department's lack of respect for Congress. One way to explain the State Department's problems building congressional support is explained by the lack of competence both State and Congress associate with the "H" bureau, State's office for legislative affairs. One senior Republican Senate committee staffer who previously worked in the Foreign Service analyzed the problem this way: "When I was in the Foreign Service, 'H' was like the idiot in the basement. A dead end. It was not a career enhancing move to go there. In fact, it is where substandard people go to die bureaucratically. It is part of the received wisdom of the Foreign Service that you hold 'H' in contempt." Another mid-level Democratic House aide said, "The legislative affairs office at State is its own worst enemy. Everybody I know tries to deliberately do an end run around them. 'H' I guess it's called." A House Democratic staffer added, "I've always thought that 'H' was one of the State Department's weakest points. I swear if they could they would come up to the Hill with their Foreign Service Officers with ankle shocks and a remote control to make them shut up and say what they want. They don't get it. It's offensive to Congressional staff."

The irony underlying the troubled State-Congress relationship is that approximately 25 percent of congressional staff members reported that they at one time considered a career in the Foreign Service.³⁶ FSOs working as congressional fellows could easily inspire young Hill staffers with stories about living in other countries and

³³ Interview with Laura Bravery, Foreign Service Institute, State Department, 16 October 2008.

³⁴ Interview with Peter Schoettle, Director of Policy Programs, Brookings Institution, 9 October 2008.

³⁵ John Krizay, "Making the State Department Work Better," July 1984, 10, accessed on the website of the Heritage Foundation at http://www.heritage.org/Research/GovernmentReform/upload/91216_1.pdf, 17 October 2008.

³⁶ Melia, "Congressional Staff Attitudes Toward the Department of State and Foreign Service Officers," 5.

meeting foreign dignitaries. These informal, personal relationships are of paramount importance on Capitol Hill, but they are not being cultivated sufficiently because congressional staffers simply do not have enough contact with State employees. Bringing more State Department FSOs onto Capitol Hill could help improve Congress's view of the State Department and bolster the Department's legislative efficacy.

Recommendations

Due to its responsibility for appropriating funds, Congress is where the rubber meets the road for U.S. foreign policy. In order to secure better budget funding during the annual appropriations cycle, the State Department must improve its relations with Congress. After all, as one junior Democratic House aide commented, "The easiest way to get your funding cut is to tick off one of the key [congressional] staffers. And it stinks, but that's just the way it is." State's well-documented lack of interest in and knowledge about Congress will continue to "tick off" congressional staff members until steps are taken by the State Department to significantly improve its person-to-person interactions on Capitol Hill.

Increasing the State Department's utilization of congressional fellowships is a necessary reform that must be implemented as soon as possible. Congressional fellowships help develop State Department officials who are effective at working with Congress. These leaders possess the knowledge and skills necessary to win support for State initiatives on the Hill. If State changed its policy so fellows were required to serve payback tours in the "H" bureau after their time on the Hill, it could increase the competency of State's legislative operations, keep State employees that Hill staffers knew and trusted involved with "H", and bring former fellows' rolodexes into the use of the State Department. This might change Congress's negative opinion of "H". These congressionally-savvy former fellows would become the State Department's "dual-role players," in Heginbotham's formulation, who could "anticipate and correctly interpret actions of the other branch and suggest ways to limit the damage from congressional-executive conflict on U.S. foreign relations."³⁷ Only dual-role players stand a realistic chance of outmaneuvering DOD Pentathletes.

The following three steps should be taken with all due speed to better utilize the State Department's use of congressional fellowships:

- Increase to 25 the number of FSOs assigned to Congress each year through the Pearson and APSA fellowships from the current 10 to 16. The State Department realistically cannot send 100 employees to the Hill each year the way DOD can. In light of DOD's planned congressional fellowship expansion, however, State risks being completely overshadowed by DOD if it does not increase its presence in Congress. Having 25 fellows would allow the State Department to be represented on the staffs of members who exert the most influence on foreign policy, as well as on all the House and Senate committees responsible for foreign policy oversight and appropriations.

³⁷ Heginbotham, "Dateline Washington: The Rules of the Games," 169.

- Require a one year utilization or payback tour immediately after the fellowship. The State Department must take advantage of the experience gained by its congressional fellows by requiring them to serve immediately after their fellowships either in “H” or in some other part of State that interacts frequently with Congress. Adding a utilization requirement also would make a congressional fellowship a two-year billet, which is the same length of service as a typical Foreign Service posting abroad.
- Service in “H” or a congressional fellowship should be positively weighed during promotion and professional advancement decisions. Currently, promotions all too often are given to employees who work at the geographic desks at State, not employees who work at “H”. This helps explain why the number of applications to work at geographic desks is exponentially greater than applications to work at “H”.³⁸ If State employees saw service in Congress as a way to speed their ascension up the pay scale and to attain prestigious assignments later in their careers, they might be more inclined to serve in “H” or as congressional fellows.

If State wants to reclaim its position alongside DOD as America’s face to the world, the State Department must learn to maneuver more efficaciously in the corridors of Capitol Hill. While it is easy to look down on Congress for its shameless politicking and provincialism, it remains the branch of government most in touch with and responsive to Americans’ opinions and expectations. Elected to represent the nation as a whole, Congress is accountable to American citizens in a way that the State Department is not.

The State Department’s primary responsibility should be the defense of U.S. interests against others, as George Kennan insisted, but that does not mean it gets to divorce itself from the institution that serves, for better or for worse, as the manifestation of American democracy—the United States Congress. Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher said it best: “We have not yet resolved the dilemma posed by our need to reconcile the imperative of democracy at home with the demands of leadership in the world.”³⁹ By strengthening its congressional fellowship programs, the State Department could improve its participation in democracy at home—democracy that can sustain American global leadership far into the future.

³⁸ Interview with Schoettle.

³⁹ Christopher, “Ceasefire between the Branches: A Compact in Foreign Affairs,” 989.