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Protecting Americans Abroad: The Academy Urges the State Department to Focus on Its Core Mission

Washington, D.C. – The protection and well-being of American citizens living or traveling overseas is one of the primary responsibilities of the State Department and our diplomatic missions. Ever since Thomas Jefferson decided in 1801 to dispatch the U.S. Navy to Tripoli to fight Barbary pirates and rescue kidnapped and enslaved American sailors, countless Americans have benefited from this commitment.

It was therefore with grave concern that the American Academy of Diplomacy watched the buildup of U.S. military forces in and around the Gulf without any corresponding effort to organize, protect, and extract American citizens who were in harm's way. This failure to anticipate the obvious impact of military action against Iran was compounded by structural impediments to providing necessary services to American citizens. The absence of ambassadors in most U.S. embassies in the Middle East and the degradation of State Department capabilities through the Administration's methodical efforts to strip the institution of both the most experienced senior officers and mid-level talent have further harmed the Department's ability to meet its basic responsibilities to American citizens.

Recently, the Academy sponsored a conversation with five retired Ambassadors with nearly two centuries of combined diplomatic experience in the Middle East and managing crises and the protection of American citizens. The purpose was to establish a baseline of understanding for the American public about what to expect from our own government in time of war. Regrettably, the State Department's response has been to personally attack and impugn the five career diplomats.

The Academy, a non-partisan organization of retired, high-ranking diplomats and other national security and development professionals, reiterates the important role the State Department and our diplomatic missions should be playing in the protection and well-being of American citizens in and around the Gulf. We stand ready to engage with the Department and bring to bear our considerable experience and expertise on behalf of those Americans who find themselves in harm's way.

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Strengthening American Diplomacy

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