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The Academy Opposes Deep Cuts to American Diplomats

Washington, D.C. – The American Academy of Diplomacy strongly opposes the proposed deep cuts in personnel and expertise soon to be undertaken at the Department of State. This “reduction in force” exercise, eliminating 15% of the Department’s workforce, combined with the earlier dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the haphazard re-organization of the State Department, will seriously undermine the ability of our government to understand, explain, and respond to a complex and increasingly contested world.

This is bad management of an important resource: American diplomats. This exercise is Washington-based, forgetting that the Department of State has a large component of its personnel stationed overseas. Many of these officers are transitioning to new posts this summer, more than a few with families in tow. The Department’s inability to present a coherent and integrated personnel reform proposal, much less a strategic argument for the proposed personnel cuts, is worrisome and mistaken.

At a time when the United States faces unprecedented challenges from strategic competitors and adversaries, ongoing conflicts in Central Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, and emerging security threats, the decision to gut the Department of State’s institutional knowledge and operational capacity is an act of vandalism.

The diplomats and national security professionals that make up the Foreign Service and the Civil Service at the Department of State have been the foundation of American global leadership. Always forward deployed, they have been a constant and faithful presence in a dangerous and complicated world, often with their families beside them.

The Academy recognizes that institutions and bureaucracies must evolve and engage in reform to meet current challenges. However, downsizing without broad consultation with the Congress and other stakeholders is a mistake that threatens profound damage to America’s security, diplomatic capacity and global standing. On a more intimate and human level, the rationale offered so far for the downsizing is disingenuous, pernicious, and false. It is distressing that current Department leadership seems unwilling to acknowledge or recognize the contributions made by its own officers and employees to the prosperity and well-being of the United States. The diplomats and national security professionals facing dismissal are

Strengthening American Diplomacy

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hard-working and dedicated patriots who have committed their lives to the advancement of American interests and values. This is a commitment that should be celebrated.

The Academy is a non-partisan organization made up of retired high-level diplomats and other national security professionals who have served at the most consequential levels of the U.S. government, in the United States and abroad. Our careers have tracked the trajectory of American power and purpose across decades. We tip our hats in acknowledgement of all those who have served and continue to serve our great Republic with honor and distinction, not a small number of whom have given “the last full measure of devotion.” We are dedicated to improving the ability of the Department of State and other national security agencies to serve elected leaders and the American people. For this reason, we register opposition to the proposed personnel cuts and urge the Secretary to rescind this action.

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