



Secretary of State Rubio Eliminates Major State Department Activities

On Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio unveiled plans for a massive shake-up of the State Department – one which troublingly seeks to target human rights programs and others focused on democracy promotion, preventing war crimes, and combating extremism. The measures proposed would eliminate or restructure over 130 offices and at least 700 positions within the leading foreign policy agency in the United States, amounting to a 17% reduction. Some State Department officials have highlighted how the plan could result in major downsizing which would possibly affect tens of thousands of global employees, in addition to numerous U.S. consulates and facilities abroad. The shake-up plans have been passed along to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee – the entities responsible for oversight of the State Department – where lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have raised concerns about the significant changes, many of which have not been clearly explained, were developed without consultation of Congress, and leave questions as to how they will functionally alter things. On top of the lack of clarity and these other issues is the fear that the changes are being proposed simply to satisfy Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) desires for cuts without properly taking into account the damage that they could inflict on American interests, diplomacy, and multilateral foreign policy.

The various cuts and restructurings proposed consist of many that have evoked unease. This includes the closure of the Office of Global Criminal Justice – a body that seeks to investigate war crimes – as well as the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations – one that works to prevent wars. As observers have pointed out, these bureaus play an important role in helping to implement the Global Fragility Act (GFA), a bipartisan-passed law which improves the ways that the U.S. government advances conflict prevention and stabilization around the world, and the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, a law that provides critical training for foreign service officers assigned to a country experiencing or at risk of mass atrocities such as genocide and war crimes. The offices serve vital national security functions, and as such, the proposed plans to eliminate them have been criticized as being sorely misguided. Furthermore, rights advocates have sought to draw attention to the fact that these closures are likely to be particularly damaging given the massive cuts that have already been made to foreign aid and development assistance entities like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). More than 80% of USAID programs have been cut, and hundreds of workers posted overseas have been dismissed. All of this would mean that the United States' assistance programs would have even fewer resources and less bandwidth moving forward if the proposed State Department shake-up is implemented.

Some of the planned closures, especially those to offices tied to human rights and war crime prevention, are notably alarming at a time like this considering the plethora of ongoing violations around the world. There are credible allegations of human rights abuses and war crimes in every corner of the globe that should warrant increased focus and investigation, but instead these cuts will have the opposite effect of hindering the mechanisms for countering these. Additionally, offices that are dedicated to addressing other key contemporary issues like climate change will also be negatively impacted. In the proposal, Trump administration officials are seeking to eliminate the Office of Global Change – a body which oversees international climate change negotiations for the United States. As one analyst highlighted, this will hamstring international climate cooperation at the worst possible time and is even foolish from a strategic standpoint as it would leave a global leadership vacuum that China will likely fill. Departments that deal with migration and refugees are on the chopping block as well in the

proposed overhaul. While the administration tries to claim that this is all in the name of government efficiency, there do not appear to be any alternatives to the necessary functions that many of these agencies were tasked with carrying out.

Civil rights advocates, former officials, Congressmembers, and others have responded concerningly regarding the programs and operations that the Trump State Department wants to eliminate, stressing that they are important to promoting U.S. values like freedom and democracy. These individuals, including many Democrats, have stated that the proposed actions are “abdicating U.S. soft power on the global stage.” Former members of the State Department have criticized the shake-up as something merely designed to satiate desire for cuts irrespective of the potential damage to American interests or how it “demolishes our international influence instruments.” Elected officials on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have relayed their intent to deeply scrutinize everything that has been proposed in order to get to the truth of these widespread cuts, also lamenting the lack of transparency with the process which underscores its flawed nature. In fact, the absence of oversight in the Trump administration’s alleged determination of where cuts should be made is one of the most unnerving elements surrounding the situation.