



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

### Why Is the Senate Hobbling American Diplomacy?

Op-Ed

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Boko Haram's horrifying abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in Nigeria ignited universal calls for help to "bring back our girls." President Barack Obama responded with urgency, but lost in the story is that one tool the United States would like to have at our disposal is hampered by the absence of U.S. ambassadors in neighboring Cameroon and Niger.

Both embassies have been without ambassadors for more than eight months. That means we lost eight months when we would have had full-strength, highest-level capacity to build greater regional cooperation and trust to combat the rising threat from this brutal extremist group. Eight months when U.S. advice and training could have helped equip these critical countries to better help themselves. Eight months when we could have provided better assistance to respond to a moral outrage.

This is not an isolated example. The United States continues to operate without a complete diplomatic toolbox to exert our leadership and advance our security and economic interests across the globe, because a broken Senate confirmation process has left us without permanent ambassadors in 40 countries.

The nominees for these jobs, including Niger and Cameroon, are victims of a confirmation backlog that grows with each passing day. It leaves too many of our best and brightest — particularly career Foreign Service officers — languishing on the sidelines instead of being on the ground fighting to protect and promote our interests.

Who are these diplomats? Fifty-three State Department nominees are pending before the Senate. Thirty-seven of them have been approved by the Foreign Relations Committee and could be confirmed immediately with a simple vote. The majority of the nominees, 35 in all, are apolitical career diplomats, and none of them are controversial.

There is a solution staring us in the face — and that answer is the powerful example of how military nominees are traditionally treated by the Senate. The administration's military nominees are confirmed quickly and en bloc, which is the proper way to handle them. For America to play a strong role in the world, we need equal treatment for diplomats. The Senate should carve out State's career nominees and expedite their confirmation just as it does for military promotions.

Make no mistake: Vacancies in so many world capitals send a dangerous message to allies and adversaries alike about America's engagement. This perception makes it much more difficult to do the nonpartisan work at the heart of U.S. foreign policy — defending the security of our nation, promoting our values and helping our businesses compete to create American jobs back home.

The length and number of these vacancies compromise U.S. national security. In the Middle East alone, the tragic conflict in Syria and rising extremism threaten a region where we have extensive economic and security interests. The Senate, to its credit, confirmed ambassadors to Egypt and Iraq last month, but more remains to be done. The Senate must quickly approve ambassadors to Algeria, Kuwait and Qatar, just three of the countries where we have pressing security interests.

Vacancies also exist in strategic European countries like Hungary, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Albania. Without the authority of an ambassador, we cannot engage fully with officials at the highest levels in places where shared democratic values are under threat. In yet another example, we need an ambassador in Guatemala to help find ways to prevent the crush of unaccompanied minors along our southwestern border.

Ambassadors also are the front line of our global push on behalf of U.S. businesses large and small. Last year, high-level State Department advocacy was responsible for more than \$5.5 billion worth of contracts awarded to U.S. companies by foreign governments. These contracts translated directly into thousands of jobs for Americans here at home.

America's leading companies recognize that our ambassadors are vital to their success overseas. Already this year, U.S. businesses have sought embassy assistance in pursuing \$119 billion worth of contracts in countries where a nominee is pending. These opportunities will go to our global competitors if we don't have ambassadors to lead our advocacy. We simply cannot lead if we are not represented.

In my travels as secretary of state, I have seen as never before the thirst for American leadership in the world. And in my nearly 30 years in the Senate, I saw firsthand the determination of most senators to make their institution work effectively. I believe that both of these are powerful reasons for the Senate to act now to both provide greater American leadership around the globe and to demonstrate that our democracy can work here at home.