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Science and Diplomacy

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Science and Diplomacy

THE WORLD HAS MUCH TO GAIN FROM DEVELOPING MORE KNOWLEDGE- AND INNOVATION-BASED societies and from spreading scientific values, including meritocracy and transparency, that support democracy. This fundamental assumption underlies a renewed interest in science diplomacy, along with the widespread recognition that science and technology (S&T) are strategic assets for U.S. diplomacy. My recent appointment as S&T Adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has increased my appreciation of the great potential of America's S&T capabilities for enhancing our foreign policy. S&T are strategic assets for U.S. diplomacy because all countries, regardless of their politics, culture, and worldview, respect our S&T capabilities and want to engage with U.S. scientists and engineers. This is true even of countries with which governmental relations are strained. S&T are critical to fostering innovation and economic prosperity in a highly competitive and interconnected world, and are essential for solving national and global problems.

My office, the Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State (STAS), assists the Department of State but is not an operational bureau. Its goals are to strengthen the S&T knowledge base in the department, anticipate S&T issues that can affect foreign policy, advocate for science-informed decisions in all countries, and support global S&T engagement that serves U.S. interests. It works closely with the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), which has many policy and operational responsibilities as well as activities regarding S&T relations with other countries and organizations. OES and STAS report to Under Secretary Robert Hormats, who is a strong proponent of science diplomacy. STAS also works closely with the Office of Science and Technology at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which has expanded the role of S&T in America's international development efforts.

Last month, in public testimony to the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology,* I outlined 10 areas where I believe the State Department and USAID are making substantial contributions in science diplomacy. STAS is assisting in these areas by serving as an advocate inside and outside the government, adding ideas to the mix, partnering when helpful, and spearheading efforts where needed. Department activities now under way include the support of policy dialogues and programs that create knowledge-based societies worldwide, including in countries such as Colombia, South Africa, and Indonesia, which are investing heavily in education, research, and constructive policies. We also are supporting creative approaches for sourcing innovation, such as through open competitions and challenges that reach out to smart entrepreneurial people of all ages and countries. And we are working to remove barriers and garner more financial support for global S&T engagement involving U.S. federal agencies, universities, and private companies; to expand opportunities for U.S. scientists and engineers to engage in public diplomacy overseas; to promote programs that empower women in science and engineering; and to enhance fellowship programs that bring bright scientifically trained people to work at the State Department and USAID.

One of my most important goals is to encourage other governments to seek independent, objective advice from their S&T communities. The United States has benefited greatly from expert advice from the U.S. National Academies and other scientific nongovernmental organizations. The government may not always like the public advice, but it listens, and important policies are frequently influenced for the better.

Making progress in science diplomacy will require energetic international engagement by America's scientists and engineers. With that commitment, I see bright prospects for our S&T contributing significantly to our diplomacy in building a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous world.

— E. William Colglazier

10.1126/science.1220355

*www.twworldwide.com/events/pcast/120106/.

