

International Exchange Supports National Security: Comprehensive Approach Critical

PAPER GOAL

- **Defining the key role international exchanges play in supporting the national security of the U.S.**

RATIONALE

This paper developed by former Alliance for International Exchange Executive Director, Michael McCarry, reflects on the importance of sustaining exchange programs for a prosperous national security, despite the recent proposals by the current administration.

IMPACT

For decades, the United States has funded a wide range of exchange programs in response to critical challenges abroad. These programs have been successful in supporting: initiatives to discover and cultivate emerging leaders; language and area studies programs that prepare U.S. citizens for the workforce; capacity development for women; youth engagement; exchanges of cultural and artistic expression; interactions with international athletes; and virtual exchanges that connect people who are unable to travel. Recent proposals by the Trump Administration for significant cuts to these programs would reverse that success, undermining our national security. Instead, the United States should continue funding a comprehensive, strategic approach to people-to-people diplomacy, an approach that has served the U.S. well for over 50 years.

State Department exchange programs found their Magna Carta in 1961's Fulbright-Hays Act, passed with the purpose of authorizing educational and cultural programs 'to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations' between the U.S. and other nations.

For nearly 50 years, the Act has been serving that purpose, in part through two time-tested 'flagship' programs.

- The Fulbright Program builds deep connections of empathy and understanding among scholars and students, fostering individual and institutional relationships that last for decades.
- The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) allows U.S. Ambassadors to invite rising foreign leaders in fields that affect our national interests - politics, government, education, and media, for example – for structured professional trips to the U.S., often the first visit of these guests to our country.

In addition to these two distinguished flagships, our country has creatively, appropriately – and repeatedly – used Fulbright-Hays authority to respond to international challenges and opportunities by crafting exchange programs that target specific national needs and particular groups of participants. These programs have attracted broad and consistent support from Presidents and Congressional leaders of both parties.

In Ronald Reagan's first term, West German public opinion opposed his desire to deploy intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe to match a Soviet deployment. In the Reagan administration's analysis, part of its public opinion problem was generational. Younger German adults did not experience World War II and its aftermath as their parents and grandparents had. As a result, they did not feel the same emotional connection to the U.S., or the same sense of gratitude for the defeat of Hitler, the Berlin Airlift, the Marshall Plan, and the creation of NATO.

One Reagan administration response to this problem was the President's Youth Exchange Initiative. In launching his initiative, the President stated that we all needed to learn 'a language of understanding'. One way to learn that language, he argued, was by having more European teenagers spend a year in an American

community, eating dinner every night with their American host family, attending an American high school, experiencing football games, Thanksgiving, and the junior prom, making lifelong friends and memories in the process.

Less than a decade later, a diplomatic opportunity presented itself with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Exchanges played a prominent role in U.S. diplomatic strategy. The new nations of the region had wiped their political slates clean, and we wanted to support and encourage the development of civil societies, democratic institutions, and new, more broadly based ties of friendship.

- High school exchange was again at the core of a multi-faceted effort. Following rigorous merit-based selection, the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX) brought students from the post-Soviet republics to the U.S. for a year-long program. A U.S. Information Agency study revealed FLEX's profound impact. The survey compared program alumni to their countrymen of similar age who had not participated in the program. After their year in the U.S., FLEX alumni attitudes toward such important civic elements as free elections, free press, free trade, and foreign investment were strikingly more positive than others in their age cohort. Importantly, the FLEX alumni also far surpassed their counterparts in their aspirations for leadership roles.
- To reach a wider range of talented, ambitious young adults in the Newly Independent States, the U.S. created a wider range of programs. To cite one example, the Muskie Fellowship Program supported the development of civil society by targeting graduate students in fields such as business, journalism, public administration, education, and law. The participants selected came to the U.S. for an intensive year of graduate study and professional experience, aimed to equip them for leadership roles in the development of their new societies.

When the 9/11 attacks created a profound national security crisis, the U.S. paired its robust military response with a new set of exchange programs.

- Prompted in part by the FLEX program's documented ability to foster attitudinal change, Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Richard Lugar created what is now known as the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study program (YES) for high school students from Muslim-majority countries. A 2009 study of the YES program discovered that 94 per cent of participants completed their program with more favorable views of the U.S. A high proportion of YES participants gained confidence and leadership skills, and motivation to work for change in their own societies.
- To reach students in disadvantaged and potentially disaffected communities, the State Department created the ACCESS Microscholarship Program. Through this program, talented students in underserved communities in the Muslim world received small scholarships for English study in their home country. ACCESS has now expanded beyond the Muslim world to 85 countries and has reached over 100,000 students. Program alumni are getting jobs, securing university entrance, and even qualifying for scholarships from U.S. universities.

One of 9/11's lessons, policymakers agreed, was that more young Americans needed to know the world. Creative responses abounded.

- The new Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program significantly expanded the number of U.S. student awards, placing talented young Americans in classrooms around the world as cultural ambassadors.



- The YES high school exchange program became reciprocal by sending young Americans to the Muslim world.
- The National Security Language Initiative provided a highly competitive program of overseas summer instruction for American high school students in critical languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Russian, and Turkish. The Gilman International Scholarship Program expanded opportunities for American students with financial need to study abroad. Gilman participants exhibit more diversity than the overall pool of Americans study abroad, and more frequently choose destinations outside Western Europe. Survey data show that a high percentage of Gilman alumni remain internationally engaged, and indicate that their exchange experience has helped them in their careers.

Despite the success of international exchange programs, President Trump's budgets have sought severe cuts in funding for exchanges. In fact, exchange programs have consistently and effectively supported three key components of the Administration's National Security Strategy: championing American values, encouraging aspiring partners, and advancing American influence.

Exchanges expose rising international leaders to American values by connecting them with American citizens, communities, and institutions. In nearly every country in the world, the cohort of U.S. exchange alumni represents a significant reservoir of good will that supports strong bilateral ties with the U.S. And data on the attitudinal impact of an exchange experience show clearly how influential these programs can be.

The Trump Administration has sought cuts of 27, 55, and 75 percent in the last three fiscal years. Congress has played a significant role in protecting these exchange programs. The appropriation for the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) in 2017 was near its high water mark year of 2010. In the face of repeated proposed cuts, Congress will need to continue to take the lead to ensure that our country has all of its proven diplomatic tools, including exchange programs, available to meet the threats and opportunities in our world today.

Note: all data cited are drawn from Department of State program evaluations, available on the Department's website.