

**Ambassador John Negroponte**  
*Former Director of National Intelligence and Deputy Secretary of State*

Thanks very much to the International Law Institute for bringing us together. It's a timely topic obviously, given what's happened over the last couple of years. I'd also just like to note as, I don't know if it is a coincidence or not, that all four of us served in Vietnam, which I think is interesting. And I think as a consequence, certainly speaking for myself, I am sure the others... I don't think anyone's going to violently disagree with me, we learned a lot about civilian-military cooperation during that effort.

There were some ambassadors that happened not have been career people, there was Henry Cabot Lodge, he served there twice while I was in Vietnam. There was Maxwell Taylor, who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and there was Ellsworth Bunker, who for many of us was perhaps the ultimate role model of how to be a United States Ambassador. These are all people who had come to their positions from other walks of life, although they had had ample experience in the international sphere. Lodge, of course, had been the permanent representative to the United Nations for eight years under Dwight D. Eisenhower. So anyways, it is an interesting coincidence, and for me, service in Vietnam was kind of a defining experience in my diplomatic career. It's where I learned tradecraft, where I learned about political reporting. I was a provincial reporter, I was assigned to cover seven of the 42 provinces in South Vietnam and assigned to go out one week and come back the next to gather political, economic, and security information. We didn't have the Internet or anything else, so we had to come back and write up our reports on these yellow pads of paper. The secretaries transcribed them into telegram forms, and then the telegram form was brought to the code clerk and he transcribed it onto a tape that was then put in a machine and transmitted in classified form back to Washington.

That was how it worked in those days, so we lived in a very different time. I don't think I ever made a phone call, an international phone call, from Saigon in my almost four years serving there just to tell you of one slight difference in the way we operated. It was considered extraordinary, it was almost unheard of unless there was a family emergency or something. You had to go down to the Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) office of Saigon to book a phone call back then to the United States. So anyway times have changed, but I don't think the tradecraft, the essence of it, has changed that much. I think that knowing the terrain, language and area expertise, those kinds of attributes which were useful then are equally important today. In some respects, they are almost more important because fewer and fewer people try to actually learn about reality. Everything is about virtuality and virtual reality so that people who, my way of thinking, actually have that field experience have actually touched, felt and heard real people and real situations have a tremendous advantage in terms of understanding the reality in which we live and operate.

So I think I partially, maybe I would meet you halfway I think on your critique, Ambassador Ray. I don't think it is necessarily quite as dismal as you painted it, but I think you redeemed your message in a way by saying that in the future there are still great possibilities. And I would also agree with what Ron said that Mr. Tillerson just didn't understand the reality in which he was operating, and so for him, it was a matter of surrounding himself with a bunch of briefing books. I think he hired Mackenzie or someone to study the Department. Then he closeted himself in his office and read those papers. Meanwhile, there were dozens of people more than willing to brief him on any issue that he wanted to know about. The reservoir of expertise in this government, State Department included, is just so enormous, and the capacity of the Secretary of State to mobilize that expertise is almost unlimited. He or she can get pretty

much any information they want, meet any expert they wish to, and so there was a real opportunity cost in terms of his tenure.

To make it worse, for some reason, he ended up supporting efforts to downsize the Foreign Service, somewhat in keeping with the notion that it was part of the deep state. The thinking was that one way we can really save ourselves from the deep state would be to cut annual recruitment of new Foreign Service officers to way below the attrition rate. The attrition is 400-500 people a year, from the Foreign Service ranks. So Mr. Tillerson thought we would cut it back to 100 the first year, recruiting 100 new officers. Thankfully when Mr. Pompeo came into office, with a broader background in government service, whether it was military or Congress or the CIA. He restored our normal recruitment levels, which is what we are at now in the Foreign Service somewhere around 400-500 people a year, which is about right. In terms of giving the personnel system hope and a sense of optimism, I think he is right. He uses a phrase that is a bit unusual, “give them back their swagger,” well he has restored a bit of swagger to the Foreign Service, and that is good.

I would certainly agree with the comments that have been made about substance versus style. That is one of the reasons why it is hard to evaluate the diplomacy, the foreign policy of this administration. The style leaves much to be desired, and I think that error of style and tone and attitude can sometimes cost you big time at the margins and lose your important friends and influencers.

On substance, some of the issues that are so troublesome at the beginning may now look little bit less bad. For example, compare what Mr. Trump said about alliances during the campaign, and about how they were irrelevant, and how Japan might as well go and get itself nuclear weapons, and ditto with South Korea (the implication being they couldn't necessarily

count on us). Those were all really very unfortunate comments, but I think he has gone a certain way towards restoring a modicum of confidence in America's commitment to its alliances. This has not been without hiccups along the way, but you know we have deployed troops to the Baltic countries, we have reaffirmed Article V of NATO, and we have largely restored relations with Japan and South Korea. So it's again the substance versus style. But there can be long term consequences to the things that we say, even if later on we show that we didn't really mean them.

The last point I would make, and Ron hit this right at the beginning about bilateral versus multilateral diplomacy. I think we are not as good on the multilateral front as we are on the bilateral. I would just cite what I consider to be the two most significant errors that the President made, and he made them literally on the first day in office. One was to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) leaving us devoid of an economic strategy for that critical part of the world, and handing a gift to the People's Republic of China on a silver platter. The other was withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accords, which I think was extremely unfortunate because it is one of the areas which most lends itself to international cooperation. We had some examples only a few months before, the summer of 2016, when President Obama met President Hu of China, and they reached some understandings about what to do about global climate issues.

We might come back to the Paris Climate Agreement one of these days, whether it will be in this administration or not I don't know, I think that was a very important initiative. It is not clear what's going to happen to TPP, but our withdrawal remains a serious problem.