Ana, thank you for your very kind introduction. I congratulate you on your graduation from the Master’s Program in International Affairs at Columbia University and on your progress in the Foreign Service. I look forward to the day when I can address you as “Madame Ambassador.” That, by the way, is an undisguised and brazen request for an invitation to your future swearing-in as Ambassador of the United States.

Director Kassen, officers of the alumni association, fellow alumni, students, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you on the topic “Diplomacy, Foreign Affairs, and How to Effect Change.” I would like to focus on four questions: 1) what is diplomacy, 2) what are the major affairs challenges before us, 3) how can you effect change, and 4) what is the status of diversity in the Foreign Service.

Let me begin with my concluding message, the points that I ask you to keep always in mind and pass on to your children, your grandchildren, and all young people with whom you spend time.

The first concluding message is that you have as much right as anyone else in our country to have a say in American foreign policy and in the conduct of our foreign relations. Become informed and get engaged. Do not rely solely on newscasts and politicians’ sound bites to form your views on US foreign relations.

The second concluding message is that you have as much right as anyone on our planet to have a say in global affairs well beyond US foreign policy and US foreign relations. Become informed, lean into issues such as universal human rights, global poverty, global health, and climate change.

**QUESTION 1: WHAT IS DIPLOMACY?**

Let me now turn to the first question: what is diplomacy. A 19th century Italian diplomat once said that diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way. While there is some truth in that language, I would offer a more pragmatic view. Diplomacy is the skilled and hard work of building relationships that advance our country’s interests on a given issue while persuading other countries that they also can benefit from our approach.

We employ two types of diplomacy to achieve the latter result. We use the diplomacy of high politics in which at the highest level the President participates in summit meetings with his counterparts. Examples are President Nixon’s meeting with Chairman Mao in Beijing that changed forever US relations with China and President Reagan’s meeting with President Gorbachev in Reykjavik that eliminated an entire class of intermediate range nuclear missiles
and launched successive rounds of negotiations to reduce other classes of nuclear missiles. In addition to bilateral summits such as those, the President also takes part in multilateral summits such as the summits on the global financial crisis, the NATO summits in Brussels, the ASEAN summits, the Global Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, the Africa Summit in Washington, and periodic UN Summit meetings.

We also employ the day-to-day diplomacy of managing relations with other countries. With embassies, consulates, and missions in 193 countries, the State Department and our overseas posts work hard with our diplomatic counterparts to resolve problems and seek opportunities to improve relations. In this regard, Foreign Service officers concentrate their efforts along five career tracks: consular affairs, political affairs, economic affairs, public diplomacy, and management. Consular officers’ statutory responsibility is to protect American citizens abroad. They also protect the homeland by exercising great caution in deciding to whom to grant visas for entry into the US. Political officers assess developments in host countries and advise Washington how US interests are affected and what the US needs to do to protect those interests. Economic officers advance US economic interests in host countries by eliminating barriers to mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities creating jobs in the US and in host countries. Public diplomacy officers explain US policies to host country citizens and facilitate educational and cultural exchanges to improve mutual understanding. Management officers ensure that our overseas missions have the financial, human, and technological resources vital to carrying out their work efficiently.

**Diplomacy** is not the only instrument of national power the US has to address foreign affairs challenges. Other instruments include **economics** (aid, sanctions), **information** (public diplomacy going out, intelligence coming in), and the **military**. Please do not think the military is only capable of breaking down doors and blowing up buildings. Our military has also reinforced our diplomacy when it managed the airport in Haiti to receive overwhelming numbers of flights bringing aid to earthquake victims, when our military’s hospital ship off the coast of Haiti brought to the ship by helicopter many of the injured, and when during the earthquake in Turkey, our military ships desalinated seawater to provide fresh drinking water to thousands when Turkey’s damaged infrastructure could not.

Where possible, diplomacy should be our **first** resort to addressing foreign affairs challenges. All efforts should be made to avoid use of military force. That said, there will be times when we must. In the recent past, the use of war to stop the Serbian army’s slaughter of Bosnian Moslems and Croats and, later, Kosovar Albanians are such cases.

**How do we use diplomacy?** We use diplomacy to build partnerships aimed at strengthening the international order to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity and to resolve conflicts that could erupt into war. The diplomatic negotiations that led to the formation of the United Nations after World War II, the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO), and the World Trade Organization (The WTO) are some examples. We also use diplomacy to incentivize other governments to improve governance and their capacities to meet their citizens’ basic needs for shelter, food, clean water, and sanitary living conditions. Through
diplomacy and economic aid, we press other governments to enhance inclusive democratic processes, protect human rights, practice gender equality, respect minorities, and uphold freedom of religion. In doing so, we draw increasingly on civil society to reinforce the work of our professional diplomats. We encourage international collaboration, between citizens’ movements, development professionals, communities of faith, entrepreneurs, scientists, innovators, artists, mayors, governors, and rising state and local political leaders. This is how we build and deepen international understanding.

QUESTION 2: What are the Major Foreign Affairs Challenges before US?

On Substantive Challenges

The first major foreign affairs challenge before us is stopping war and preventing armed conflicts around the world from escalating into war. With our allies, the US played a major role in stopping World War I, World War II, and the Balkans War. The US made the difference in bringing peace in Southeast Asia and relative stability to the Korean peninsula. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the US, with our allies, continues play a critical role in defeating terrorism threatening our allies and us. For decades, the US has worked with the USSR and later with Russian Federation to reduce our nuclear missile arsenals. In addition, we continue to cooperate with Russia and many other governments to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, President Obama has hosted two nuclear summits aimed at wiping nuclear weapons from our planet.

Our second major foreign affairs challenge is halting the proliferation of conventional weapons and arms smuggling that fuels intra-country conflicts that that destabilize countries and erupt into trans-border wars. Amid such destabilization, violent extremist groups such as Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, ISIS and others can establish a foothold and expand their attacks. In recent years, we have seen such developments in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin, Turkey, Libya, Mali, and Burundi. We should all be concerned over China’s aggressive claims to areas of the South China Sea and the potential there for armed conflict.

Our third major foreign affairs challenge is coordinating working with our allies and friends to prevent terrorist attacks against our citizens, our industries, our physical infrastructure, and our cyber networks, all of which are so vital to our personal well-being, our economy, our society and our defense capabilities.

Our fourth major foreign affairs challenge is working with our allies, our friends, international institutions such as the United Nations and its affiliated agencies (the World Health Organization, the UN Human Rights Commission), Non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, to build state capacity in developing countries with governments failing to meet basic human needs for food, water, sanitary living spaces, and personal security against violence.
**Our fifth** major challenge is engaging with international partners, including the European Union, the G-7 member states, and the UN to bring the citizens of developing countries into the global economy by expanding opportunities for education relevant to 21st century needs, enterprise development, and enterprise ownership. In doing so, we will need to press developing country governments to enact and enforce legislation to erase widespread corruption, to include women in politics and the economy, to educate girls, to punish severely the perpetrators of rape and violence against women, to protect the rights of minorities, and to end discrimination and violence against LGBTQ individuals. The aim here is to extend rule of law, equality under law, and equal opportunity for individuals to reach their potential, provide for their families, and escape poverty.

**On Operational Challenges**

Human and financial resources are our major operational challenges. For managing the major substantive challenges above (and there are many more), we have worldwide roughly 6,700 US professional diplomats or career foreign service officers. To put this in perspective, when Secretary of State Powell took office, we had roughly 5,000 Foreign Service officers. By comparison, there were at that time 4,300 members in of the bands of all the military services. The Defense Department’s budget dwarfed the State Department’s budget then and now.

In addition, the American Academy of Diplomacy’s study entitled “American Diplomacy at Risk,” highlights the degree to which the professional US diplomatic corps is losing positions that are increasingly filled by political appointees whose knowledge of issues and foreign cultures is limited. That report also criticizes the State Department’s management leaders for filling traditional Foreign Service officer positions increasingly with civil service employees. Please “Google” that report for further details. To meet the challenges before us, we need a larger, better trained, well-resourced, and stronger professional diplomatic corps, not a corps side-lined and diluted with inexperienced political appointees and civil servants lacking deep foreign affairs expertise.

**QUESTION 3: How can you effect change?**

**Step 1:** Become informed, lean into issues of war and peace, universal human rights, global poverty, global health, and climate change and any other foreign affairs issue important to you. Do not rely solely on newscasts and politicians’ sound bites to form your own views on foreign affairs issues.

**Step 2:** Participate in discussions of foreign affairs issues hosted frequently by the World Affairs Council, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Global Leadership Forum, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs. Those groups invite senior US and foreign leaders in government and in business to speak on a spectrum if foreign affairs issues and respond to questions. Distinguished leaders often are in the audience and contribute their views. Those fora provide very helpful opportunities to raise questions, offer views, and suggest alternative approaches to foreign affairs challenges.
**Step 3:** Participate in people to people diplomacy. One of the most effective and least known ways of doing so is to volunteer to invite to your home for dinner or for an overnight stay a foreign participant in the International Visitor Leadership (IVLP) program. Our overseas diplomatic posts excel at identifying top flight rising young political and business leaders in their host countries and arranging for them to spend 30 days traveling in the US for discussions with their professional counterparts. A visit with an American family is often included in their programs. The visitor most likely will return home with very positive impressions of the US and the American people. When those visitors rise to positions of power, they will often still have positive attitudes towards the US. Among distinguished world leaders who participated in the ILVP were former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, Former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and former President of Mexico Felipe Calderon.

**Step 4:** Host and exchange student. The umbrella organization “World Learning” ([http://www.worldlearning.org/](http://www.worldlearning.org/)) administers a number of exchange programs, including the Experiment in International Living. This opportunity will leave a life-long impression on a young foreign student’s mind.

**Step 5:** The LREI family includes many who are accomplished in the arts. Join the US Department of State’s art in embassies program and lend to ambassadors works of art for display in the representational rooms at the ambassadors’ official residences. The artists thereby share American artistic expression facilitating greater understanding of American culture. At the same time, the artist could benefit from greater exposure and potential sales opportunities.

**Step 6:** Through the American Council of Young Political Leaders and similar organizations, let rising political leaders at the local, state, and national levels know what you think about policies of importance to you. Question those policies and offer alternative ideas that you believe might be more effective. The aim would be to influence their thinking as those young leaders rise.

**Question 4: What is the Status of Diversity in the Foreign Service?**

When my nomination as Ambassador to Iceland was announced, I received a call from Ambassador Johnny Young who was serving in Slovenia at the time. Ambassador Young said that he was calling to congratulate me and to welcome me to the “Black American Ambassadors in Europe Club,” of which he was the president and only member. One day, as she walked down the corridors connecting the State Department’s executive suites, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright commented that the portraits displayed there were all pale, male, and Yale. The State Department has not attained its stated goal of having a Foreign Service that is representative of the talent and diversity of the American people. In fact, were it not for the Pickering Foreign Affairs Graduate and Undergraduate Fellowship Programs and the Rangel Graduate Fellowship Program, the State Department on its own would not have reached even its current level of diversity. The often-stated idea of having a Foreign Service that looks like the American population misplaces the value of diversity in its broadest sense and in its greatest potential contributing to American foreign policy. While racial, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity are important, we also need the diversity of thought that is also rooted in life experiences from differing socio-economic and regional backgrounds. To ensure fuller foreign affairs deliberations and more informed and judicious foreign policy decision-making, we need to draw on our
nation’s rich and varied intellectual strength and experience base. That is the diversity that will best advance American interests. In this regard, there is much more work yet to do. You can help by urging political leaders whom you meet to exert their pressure for greater diversity at all levels of the Foreign Service.

I hope this overview will spark deeper interest in foreign among LREI students and family members. I also hope everyone in the LREI community will become more informed and more willing to engage, as suggested earlier. That is how you can effect change.

Thank you again. I would welcome your questions.