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The U.S. Department of State: Background and Selected Issues for the 119th Congress

Background

Created by an act of Congress in 1789, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) is the executive branch's lead foreign affairs agency and oldest cabinet agency. The Secretary of State, appointed by the President with Senate advice and consent, is DOS's senior officer and the President's principal foreign affairs adviser. The most recently available data, accurate as of September 2024, indicate that the Secretary was supported by around 80,000 DOS employees, including about 14,000 Foreign Service personnel, 13,000 Civil Service employees, 2,000 eligible family members of U.S. personnel serving in overseas positions, and 51,000 Locally Employed Staff (largely host country nationals working abroad).

Since taking office in January 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio has prioritized reorganizing DOS consistent with broader Trump Administration priorities, including those specified in Executive Order 14210, "Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative." In May 2025, DOS formally notified Congress of its intent to reorganize its bureaus and offices, with the aim of curbing the growth of DOS's bureaucracy and eliminating or reconstituting offices with missions perceived as at odds with U.S. national security interests, among other goals. These changes are reflected in DOS's current organizational chart, published in July 2025. DOS has also downsized its workforce, reportedly separating around 3,000 employees through reductions-in-force and voluntary retirements and resignations as of July 2025.

DOS's new organizational structure includes over 30 bureaus. Six regional bureaus, along with the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, oversee 279 overseas posts, including 175 embassies and 88 consulates. DOS's reorganization assigns more responsibilities to the regional bureaus, which the May 2025 proposal called "the center of U.S. foreign policy," due to their responsibility for managing U.S. bilateral relationships worldwide. At the same time, DOS has worked to restructure or eliminate several functional bureaus, which focus on specific global issues.

Regional Assistant Secretaries of State, who lead the regional bureaus, support Chiefs of Mission (COMs, usually U.S. ambassadors) in their geographic areas. Congress vests COMs, under presidential direction, with "full responsibility" for leading all executive branch employees in their countries of assignment, with the exception of Voice of America correspondents and employees under a United States area military commander.

Key Laws Governing State Department Operations

Several laws provide statutory frameworks for DOS's operations. The State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (P.L. 84-885), for example, authorizes DOS's organizational structure, including senior positions such as the Secretary of State and the Deputy Secretary of State, and specifies key functions of DOS leaders, such as requiring the Secretary to supervise and direct DOS. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-465) authorizes DOS to administer the Foreign Service; outlines appointment, promotion, and separation procedures; and authorizes COMs to direct U.S. diplomatic efforts. The Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-399) tasks the Secretary with protecting U.S. government personnel on official duty abroad.

Congress has utilized State Department authorization acts to authorize funding for DOS, amend the authorities provided in the aforementioned key laws, and advance new priorities. While Congress has not passed a standalone DOS authorization since 2002, it has included such measures in the four most recent National Defense Authorization Acts. The most recent such law (Division G of P.L. 118-159) included provisions that, among other priorities, authorized new DOS positions (including the Special Envoy for Sudan), authorized appropriations for specific purposes (including the convening of U.S.-Africa Leaders Summits), and provided DOS new authorities to manage its workforce (such as through requiring DOS to modernize the bidding process for Foreign Service officers pursuing new assignments to make it more efficient and transparent).

Strategic Planning

Congress, through the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-352), requires DOS and other agencies to prepare quadrennial strategic plans outlining their goals and objectives. DOS utilizes its strategic planning process to prioritize resources, coordinate with interagency partners, and make informed decisions to achieve what it calls "the most effective U.S. foreign policy outcomes." DOS also organizes annual budget requests to Congress around its strategic planning priorities.

DOS's core strategic planning takes place at several levels. DOS and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) previously fulfilled the GPRA quadrennial planning requirement through developing Joint Strategic Plans (JSPs) to align their priorities with the executive branch's top-level strategic documents (such as the National Security Strategy) and guide bureau and mission planning. Since the Trump Administration has effectively eliminated USAID's role in providing foreign assistance

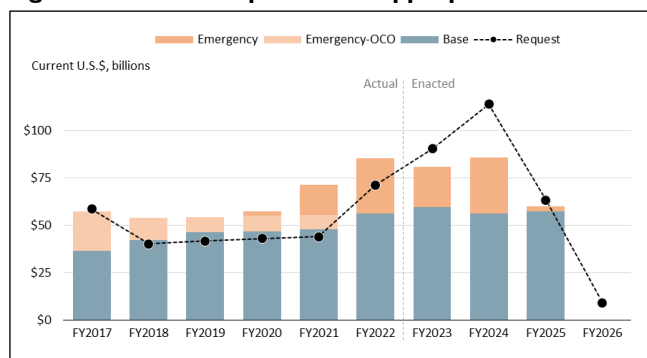
and transferred its functions to DOS, it is unclear how DOS may meet this requirement in the future.

DOS bureaus develop Joint Regional and Functional Bureau Strategies (JRS or FBS), while overseas missions prepare country-level Integrated Country Strategies (ICS). Each JRS, FBS, and ICS must describe *bureau and mission goals*, which are long-term priorities directly linked to an Administration's strategic goals; *bureau and mission objectives* that are specific, measurable end-states that DOS aims to achieve within four years; and shorter-term (12-18 month) *sub-objectives* tied to the day-to-day work of the bureau or mission. These bureau- and mission-level goals and objectives are aligned with the department-level JSP.

DOS Funding

Congress funds DOS primarily through Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations. (In the 119th Congress, the House Appropriations Committee renamed its SFOPS Subcommittee the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs [NSRP] Subcommittee.) Since FY2022, Congress has appropriated approximately \$60-85 billion annually for DOS and other agencies through SFOPS. From FY2022 through FY2024, between one-fourth and one-third of these amounts were provided as emergency funds for addressing contingencies, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Hamas-led attacks against Israel in October 2023, and subsequent conflicts involving Israel in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran. The Trump Administration requested \$31.5 billion in new SFOPS budget authority for FY2026 while also seeking \$22.3 billion in rescissions and cancellations of prior-year funds, for a net SFOPS budget request of \$9.2 billion (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. SFOPS Requests and Appropriations



Sources: Appropriations laws and SFOPS budget requests.

Note: Includes rescissions. Requests = Administration Budget Requests. OCO = Overseas Contingency Operations, which largely replaced emergency funds to support extraordinary foreign affairs budget needs from FY2012 to FY2021.

DOS activities are funded through several accounts within SFOPS. The Diplomatic Programs account funds most DOS operating expenses and other priorities, including public diplomacy programs. The Embassy Security, Construction, and Maintenance account funds DOS's share of costs involved with the design, construction, and maintenance of U.S. diplomatic facilities. SFOPS appropriations also fund foreign assistance, the majority of which historically had been administered by agencies such as USAID. As part of

its efforts to reform foreign assistance, the Trump Administration has assigned DOS responsibility for managing the majority of foreign assistance programs, including humanitarian and global health programs that USAID previously managed.

Selected Issues for Congress

During the 119th Congress, Members may consider the following issues, among others:

State Department Budget. As previously noted, the Trump Administration is requesting reductions in future DOS funding, along with rescissions and cancellations of prior-year funds. Furthermore, on August 29, 2025, the Administration announced that it was deploying a pocket rescission to cancel more than \$5 billion in appropriated SFOPS funds it said “violate[d] the President’s America First priorities” (for background on pocket rescissions, see CRS Report R46417, *Congress’s Power Over Appropriations: Constitutional and Statutory Provisions*). The Administration is also seeking to consolidate several SFOPS accounts, including those that have funded programs related to democracy and governance and agriculture and food security, into a single account. Congress is considering the Administration’s request. On July 23, the House Appropriations Committee approved its NSRP bill (H.R. 4779), which would provide \$46.4 billion in funding for such accounts (including rescissions). While this bill consolidates several accounts, it does not implement the entirety of the Administration’s consolidation request. No comparable bill has been introduced in the Senate.

State Department Authorization. In September 2025, the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed a nine-bill DOS “reauthorization package.” These bills specify the authorities of (and in some instances create) senior positions, bureaus, and offices across DOS and include numerous authorities shaping DOS’s work (for example, one bill includes a provision creating an Arctic Watcher Program to combat efforts by China, Russia, and others to undermine U.S. interests in the Arctic). While supporters say this package would “reestablish command and control” of DOS and ensure U.S. diplomats have the tools required to advance U.S. interests, others argue that the package is excessively partisan and does not provide adequate oversight of the department.

Related CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF10293, *Foreign Relations Reauthorization: Background and Issues*

CRS Report R48624, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2026 Budget and Appropriations*

CRS Report R40482, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations: A Guide to Component Accounts*

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