

The State Department's Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy

BY MAGGIE MILLER AND ROSMERY IZAGUIRRE | 06/29/2023 05:00:00 AM EDT

PRO POINTS

- **The State Department's Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy was formally established in 2022** after a decade of reorganizations under three different administrations.
- **Congress took action in 2017 to begin the process to formalize a cyber office at the State Department**, in a bipartisan effort.
- **The bureau is now the lead organization in the U.S. federal government in charge of cyber and tech diplomacy efforts**, and represents the U.S. in discussions on issues including countering cyberattacks, telecommunications policies and setting cyber standards globally.

HOW WE GOT HERE

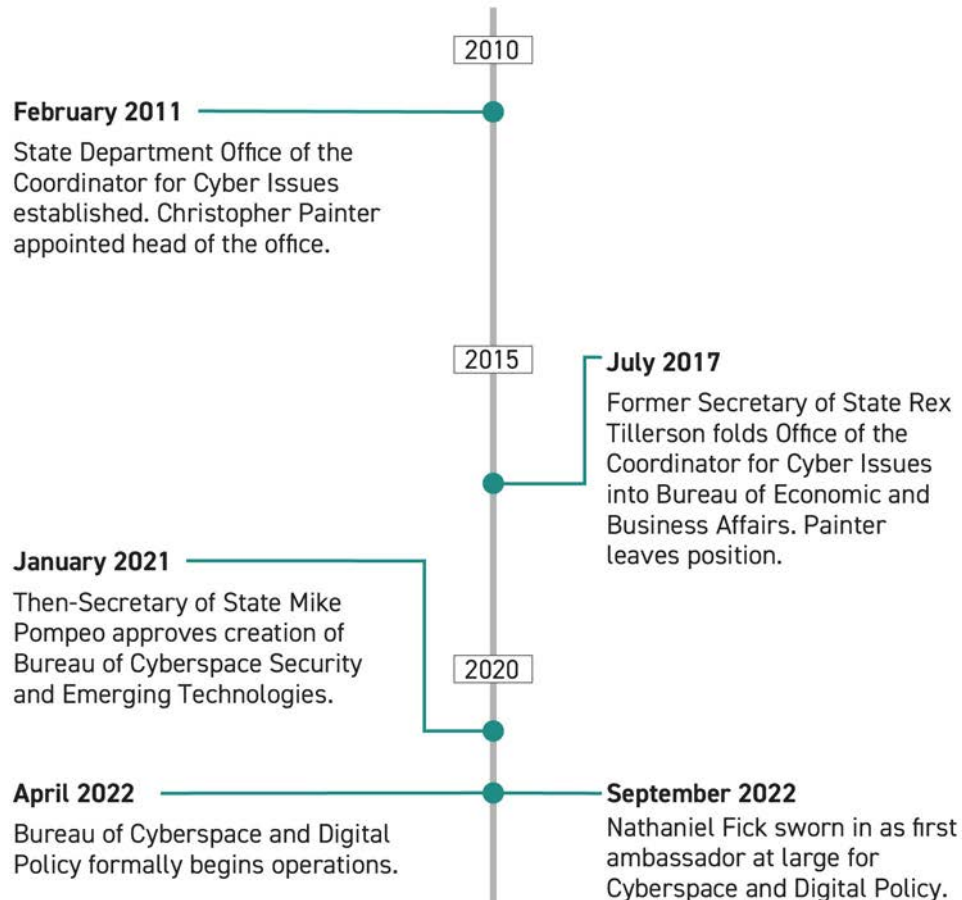
In April 2022, the State Department announced that the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy had started operations, with the office tasked with leading U.S. cyber diplomacy efforts. The bureau opened its doors five years after the previous State Department cyber office closed its doors, and following years of tussles over the course of three administrations to identify how the State Department should address cyber policy.

Nathaniel Fick, a former technology executive, heads the bureau. Since his Senate confirmation in September 2022, the CDP has become a major player on the world stage for tackling issues including responding to cyberattacks on allied nations, negotiating on issues such as 5G and 6G telecommunications equipment sourcing and representing the U.S. in international standards setting organizations.

"We have a major stake in shaping the digital revolution that is happening around us, and making sure that it serves our people, protects our interests, boosts our competitiveness and upholds our values," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said when announcing the plan for the bureau during remarks in 2021 at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute.

The Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy was officially established in 2022

Key events that led to the establishment of the bureau



Sources: Department of State, Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy

The road to the latest iteration of a diplomatic cyber bureau took years. The earlier version — the Office of the Coordinator for Cyber Issues — was established in February 2011 under President Barack Obama. Christopher Painter was appointed as the coordinator for cyber issues.

In 2017, President Donald Trump was sworn into office, and then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [undertook a reorganization of the State Department](#). This included merging the Office of the Coordinator for Cyber Issues in the agency's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

The move drew bipartisan criticism on Capitol Hill for potentially downgrading the focus of the State Department on cyber diplomacy and [led to Painter stepping down from his position](#).

Lawmakers introduced legislation twice during the Trump administration to formally establish a State Department cyber office and create a cyber ambassador position, but it was never signed into law.

Amid the push on Capitol Hill, the Trump administration changed its tune. In 2019, the State Department notified Congress that it intended to stand up a Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies. The effort gained steam when the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bipartisan group of lawmakers and federal officials, included a recommendation to create a cyber bureau at the State Department in its [2020 legislative proposals](#) to strengthen the nation's cybersecurity.

In January 2021, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [approved the creation of the bureau](#).

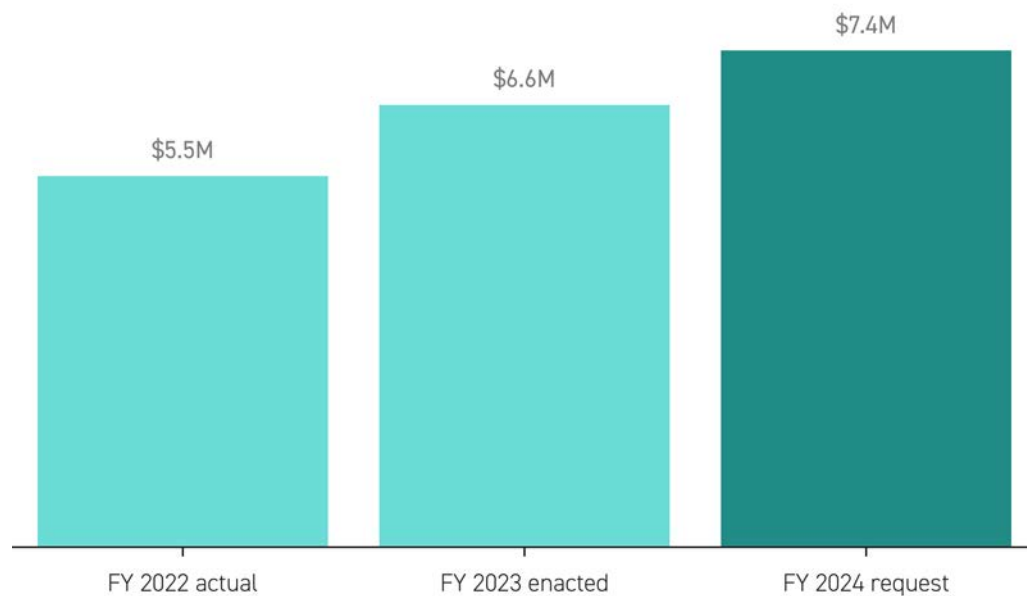
The Biden administration kept the bureau's responsibilities mostly the same when it formally established the bureau in 2022 under its new name.

WHAT'S NEXT

The bureau is no longer in danger of being reorganized or phased out by changing administrations, following passage of the [2023 National Defense Authorization Act](#), which included the Cyber Diplomacy Act. This cemented the CDP and the cyber ambassador position into law as part of the State Department's organizational structure.

Biden requested \$811K increase for State Department cyberspace and digital policy

Discretionary budget authority for Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy



Source: Department of State

Going forward, Fick has been vocal about the CDP's push to ensure that the U.S. diplomatic corps are well-versed in cybersecurity and tech policy issues, and [said in 2023](#) that the goal is to have an individual trained in cyber and tech issues in every U.S. embassy within two years. He also hopes to have chiefs-of-mission and even ambassadors up to speed on cyber diplomacy. Much of the training is done through the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, where the CDP offers a course.

In addition, the CDP is working on [putting out a new international cybersecurity strategy](#) for the nation, which will slot into the National Cyber Strategy published by the White House in early 2023. This will include a review of current State Department cyber policies and an assessment of cyber threats facing the nation, among other policy items.



POWER PLAYERS

- **Nathaniel Fick:** The first State Department Ambassador-at-Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy.
- **Christopher Painter:** The State Department Coordinator for Cyber Issues from 2011 to 2017.
- **Cyberspace Solarium Commission:** Congressionally-established group that produced a series of recommendations to protect the U.S. in cyberspace, including the establishment of a cybersecurity bureau at the State Department.
- **Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas):** Primary sponsor of the Cyber Diplomacy Act and current chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.
- **Former Rep. Jim Langevin (D-R.I.):** Co-chair of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission and co-sponsor of the Cyber Diplomacy Act.
- **Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.):** Co-chair of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission who also co-sponsored the Cyber Diplomacy Act.