

**STATEMENT
OF**

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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATION
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today and address the Department's efforts to support our dedicated employees serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The men and women of the State Department, through their presence in every corner of the world, serve on the front lines in the global struggle against terrorism. Our commitment to supporting American interests abroad has remained steadfast and, in fact, is second to none. We know terrorism first-hand, having lost colleagues – American and foreign national alike – throughout the years and, most dramatically, in the embassy bombings in Lebanon, Kenya, and Tanzania. For our size, I would note that the entire Foreign Service corps is less than one military division, we are doing our part to protect and defend America. With your support, through initiatives such as the Civilian Reserve Corps, we will be even better able to respond to the demands our country faces in helping others build democracy.

Although I have served as Director General of the Foreign Service for only one month, I have taken a keen interest in ensuring that the services we provide to our personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan support them and their families as they fulfill this vital mission. In fact, I am leaving for Iraq today to personally survey the Department's operations and learn first-hand.

STAFFING

One of the Department of State's highest priorities is positioning our people in line with the nation's most critical foreign policy needs. Those needs have changed considerably since the end of the Cold War and again since the tragic events of 9/11. Sixty-eight percent of the Foreign Service is "forward deployed" at all times, serving overseas in support of the Department's global mission. Despite the need for two years of training to

gain proficiency in key critical languages such as Arabic and Chinese, our current staffing levels permit only five percent of the Foreign Service to be in long term training of any kind. The median hardship differential for overseas positions is now 15%, and nearly 60% of our embassies are classified as hardship posts. Over 700 of our people are in locations too dangerous for families to accompany. The men and women of the Department serve under dangerous and challenging circumstances throughout the world. In fact, approximately 20 percent of our Foreign Service employees have volunteered to serve in Baghdad, Kabul, and/or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams located throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.

In order to fill our most critical overseas positions first, including those in Iraq, we introduced substantial changes to the assignments process in 2006. We assign the hardest to fill jobs first and have changed our Fair Share rules to require service at hardship posts more frequently. We have eliminated extensions at posts with less than 15% differential. We successfully filled 90% of our positions in Iraq for 2007, including those in Baghdad and in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), with volunteers, and we filled nearly all of our unaccompanied positions worldwide – also with volunteers. This fill rate for Iraq compares very favorably with the State Department’s world-wide fill rate. In Afghanistan, we filled 100 out of 101 Foreign Service jobs, including all 78 positions in Kabul and 22 out of 23 PRT positions in the summer 2007 cycle. With only 11,500 diplomats to staff 267 posts worldwide, the State Department constantly stretches to get the best talent where it is most needed.

In order to continue to meet effectively the challenge we face in staffing Embassy Baghdad and the Iraq PRTs with qualified officers, we introduced in June 2007 the first-ever country-specific special assignments cycle -- for Iraq. Even though no other assignments for 2008 have yet been made, as of October 3 we have filled more than 50% of the summer 2008 vacancies in Iraq – with volunteers. We will continue to work throughout the fall to find the best qualified men and women to serve at the Embassy in Baghdad and in the PRTs.

INCENTIVES

Foreign Service and Civil Service career employees who serve in Iraq are eligible for financial and non-monetary incentives as outlined in the Department's Iraq Service Recognition Package. The package includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ***Compensation:*** Employees in Iraq and Afghanistan receive their basic salary plus 70 percent in differentials for danger and hardship service. In addition, junior officers are eligible for premium pay for overtime work and midlevel officers qualify for an additional special differential of 20% of basic salary to compensate for the long hours worked.
- ***Support for Families:*** The Department is committed to easing the difficulty of extended separation for the employees in Iraq from their families. Employees may leave their families at their previous overseas posts, contingent upon host country rules and regulations, or can receive a separate maintenance allowance to defray the costs of supporting their families at a location of their choice.
- ***Onward Assignment Preference:*** Bureaus give the highest consideration to bidders coming out of Iraq. Employees who serve in PRTs or REOs in Iraq are guaranteed one of their top five at-grade, in-cone choices for onward assignments. In addition, some mid-level Baghdad positions are now linked to onward assignments.
- ***Rest and Recuperation (R&R):*** Employees in Iraq and Afghanistan are entitled to a number of R&R trips and regional rest breaks based on the length of service in Iraq.
- ***Promotion Consideration:*** Service in Iraq and Afghanistan is looked on favorably by the Department's Selection Boards who recommend employees for promotion, though sustained exemplary performance throughout the period under review remains the key factor for promotion consideration.

Beyond our new assignments procedures and the attractive Iraq Service Recognition Package, the credit for our success in staffing positions in Iraq goes to the dedicated men

and women who—in the finest tradition of the Foreign Service and the Department in general—have taken on board the need for change and are committed to serving the needs of America. The Secretary and I are grateful and proud of their service. We recognize that many State Department personnel are serving in dangerous and difficult posts and that all, including those serving elsewhere in the world beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, are advancing our nation’s interests.

IN-COUNTRY SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

The Department is committed to meeting the medical and mental health needs of our employees preparing for, serving in, and returning from assignments in Iraq and other overseas locations. The Department’s Office of Medical Services has operated a Foreign Service Health Unit in Baghdad since July 2004 to meet the routine medical needs of State employees in Iraq. The Health Unit is staffed by a general medical officer, two nurse practitioners, and a registered nurse. A Master of Social Work (MSW) clinical counselor familiar with stress and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) issues is also permanently assigned to the Health Unit to provide mental health support to employees in Baghdad, as well as those serving in the PRTs and REOs. A regional psychiatrist based in Amman, Jordan also makes regular visits to Iraq to consult with employees and offer additional support to the Health Unit. Moreover, the Department’s Office of Mental Health Services has a network of regional psychiatrists in the field as a resource for employees at other unaccompanied and onward assignment posts.

PTSD SURVEY RESULTS

The Department of State’s Office of Medical Services and the Family Liaison Office recently developed and conducted a survey of Foreign Service employees who had completed unaccompanied tours (UTs) from 2002 until the summer of 2007. The survey included questions about exposures to physical dangers and the impact of danger- and isolation-related stressors upon a broad range of psychological symptoms and psychosocial functioning in these employees. Of the approximately 2,600 employees

who completed unaccompanied tours from 2002 to 2007, survey responses were received from 877 individuals. 74% of the respondents served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia (31%, 18%, 15 % and 12% respectively). The other 26% had served in at least one of 13 other unaccompanied posts. In addition, 26% indicated that they had served more than one unaccompanied tour.

Preliminary analysis of the survey results shows widespread indications of stress-related symptoms among employees serving at unaccompanied posts, though the number and severity of these symptoms lessens somewhat over time after completion of the tour. With regard to the specific complex of symptoms that characterize PTSD, the survey results indicate it is probably present in 2% of the respondents. Another 15% of respondents might possibly have PTSD, but would require a more thorough examination to make a definitive diagnosis.

The Department is working with an outside firm to conduct a much more detailed analysis of our survey results to see if responses differ depending upon the specific post where the UT was served; the length of the tour; and the amount of time since departing the post, among others. This will allow for a specifically focused assessment of the stress impact in Iraq and Afghanistan, and possible further distinctions among postings within those countries.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES AND FAMILIES

We take the health and well-being of our employees and their families seriously, and Secretary Rice has made clear that she is personally committed to getting our people the help they may need. Even as we await the final results of the in-depth survey analysis, the Department is improving its ability to support employees who may be experiencing PTSD or other mental health issues associated with high-stress assignments. The Office of Medical Services (MED) is reviewing the current pre-assignment briefing and mandatory outbrief sessions to determine what changes might be most effective, such as directing more time to discussion of mental health counseling resources, insomnia, and

social withdrawal. The outbrief is designed to raise awareness of the effects of chronic stress and acute traumatic stress, to provide guidance on coping, as well as knowledge on when and how to seek professional mental health services.

In addition, we are implementing a Deployment Stress Management program and have assigned one of our clinical psychologists to temporarily head the four-position program until staffing is complete. The Deployment Stress Management program will develop, teach, counsel, and become involved in all activities supporting employees involved with unaccompanied tours. Additionally, the Employee Consultation Services (ECS) within the Department's Office of Medical Services offers a variety of different programs including confidential bi-weekly support group for returnees, individual and family clinical assessments, short-term counseling, and if necessary, referral to local private mental health practitioners in the United States.

The Department has also taken a number of steps to better support our families. The Family Liaison Office established a dedicated position for a specialist to work with our families while the employee is serving an unaccompanied tour. We have over 200 such families in the U.S. today, and over 80 of them have loved ones in Iraq. The Family Liaison Office has developed and presented information sessions and a two-day orientation seminar for employees and families preparing for an unaccompanied tour and also contracted last summer with the Managed Health Network to provide separated employees and family members with an educational self-help website, monthly e-newsletter, and a 24/7 hotline for information and referral services. To provide additional support to the children of employees at unaccompanied posts, we are developing age-appropriate handbooks to help them understand and cope with the stress and uncertainty of having a parent serving on an unaccompanied tour. We have also developed recognition awards for the children of those serving at unaccompanied posts.

These are exciting and challenging times. The Department has adapted to changing conditions throughout its two hundred-year history. I am confident that, with your support, we will successfully do so again.

