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United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Office of Inspector General

# Report of Inspection

## Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt

Report Number IT-I-05-02, March 2005

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## INTRODUCTION

Embassies and consulates worldwide are increasingly turning to Regional Information Management Centers (RIMC) for telecommunications, network, systems engineering, installation, and maintenance support. The Regional Information Management Center in Frankfurt, Germany (RIMC Frankfurt) also provides temporary duty (TDY) support for information management operations to posts through its rover program, consultations on systems configuration and operation through its operations officer, and technical training through its information management training center (IMTC). Additionally, RIMC Frankfurt supports the Department of State's (Department) antiterrorism initiatives by conducting communications systems installations in the major theaters of the war on terrorism, as well as general telecommunications support and operational assistance in areas of political instability. This report focuses on the results of the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) review of RIMC Frankfurt's maintenance and support services. The objectives, scope, and methodology for the review are discussed in Appendix A.







## BACKGROUND

RIMC Frankfurt is one of four regional telecommunications support centers. Through these support centers, IRM provides telecommunications, network, systems engineering, installation, and maintenance support to U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide. RIMC Frankfurt maintains satellite branch offices with forward-deployed staff in Berlin, London, Paris, USNATO Brussels, Geneva, Moscow, Vienna, and Cairo.

RIMC Frankfurt provides technical and operational support for IRM programs at 117 embassies and consulates throughout Europe, Near East Asia, South Asia, and West Africa. This support impacts all post operations by providing guidance for IRM program standardization, digital services, telephone services, radio system services, and telecommunications maintenance and logistical support. RIMC Frankfurt hosts the IMS rover program that provides operational support to 90 posts. Additionally, RIMC Frankfurt operates the IMTC, a training center with two fully equipped classrooms, which provides in-depth training to information management professionals from over 200 posts.

In addition to providing information technology support, RIMC Frankfurt supports the Department's antiterrorism initiatives by providing installation and operational assistance for communications equipment in key locations of the war on terrorism. RIMC Frankfurt sent three technicians to Kabul for a total of 105 days to provide installation assistance, and one digital technician stayed on as an operator for an additional 46 days. Three rovers and 17 area volunteers have rotated in and out of Kabul for a total of 733 days during the past two fiscal years.

Efforts in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom have included a three-month TDY in Baghdad by RIMC Frankfurt's Deputy Director in fiscal year 2004 to provide logistical and communications advisory support, as well as a twelve-day visit by the Director to discuss, with a joint Department of State and Department of Defense team, the communications implications of the handover of governance on June 28, 2004. Four technicians spent 73 days setting up digital and radio communications support. Additional support to Embassy Baghdad has included a 45-day TDY by a telephone technician and completion of an OpenNet optimization project by a RIMC contractor and digital technician in December 2004. RIMC

Frankfurt will be providing radio support for a 90-day period beginning in January 2005, and plans are underway to provide additional TDY support to allow for rest and recreation of currently assigned information management staff in Embassy Baghdad, beginning April 2005. Demands on RIMC Frankfurt for telecommunications installation and operational assistance will only increase in the near future as RIMC Frankfurt expects to be involved in the installation of the information technology infrastructure of embassy facilities in Tripoli. RIMC Frankfurt is already supplying two rovers who must work 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, to assist in providing communications support for the temporary facilities in Tripoli.

RIMC Frankfurt's organization consists of an Executive Office that includes the Director, Deputy Director, and Operations Officer positions, as well as Digital, Telephone, Radio, Training, and Rover branches. The Operations Officer heads the Rover branch, while branch chiefs head the remaining branches. The Frankfurt office is staffed by 41 direct-hire Americans, three personal service contract (PSC) Americans, four American contractors, three Foreign Service nationals, and one third-country national. The satellite branch offices are staffed by 18 direct-hire Americans, one PSC, and three contractors.



## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RIMC Frankfurt provides comprehensive information management support for a region spanning three continents. There are areas for improvement, however, and needs that must be addressed to ensure that current support levels do not decline. The increased need for resources to support global antiterrorism initiatives, of which RIMC Frankfurt is a significant participant, exacerbates resource shortages.

### SUPPORT PROVIDED TO POSTS

As part of the survey for this inspection, OIG solicited the 117 posts supported by RIMC Frankfurt for feedback on the level of support received. Fifty-four embassies and consulates responded. More than 96 percent of these responses indicated that the level of support provided has been good, with almost 80 percent rating RIMC Frankfurt outstanding. However, many qualified their answer by noting that they were aware of resource constraints and were therefore understanding of times when there were no technicians available to send. Many posts indicated they would like to have more regular visits from RIMC technicians to perform preventive maintenance.

Several survey responses suggested that RIMC Frankfurt clarify the means by which it can be contacted for support. The Executive Office has already begun drafting an information e-mail that will be sent to all serviced posts on a semi-annual basis with updated contact information as well as links to useful information. This information will also be updated on RIMC Frankfurt's intranet site, which one survey response described as 'invaluable.' RIMC Frankfurt personnel indicated that they have received positive feedback on the intranet site from posts worldwide. The intranet site and other electronic means of communication such as e-mail can serve to ameliorate resource issues that often preclude sending technicians to posts. During periods when the intranet site has been offline for maintenance, the widespread reliance on it as a resource has been apparent in the numerous inquiries from information management personnel worldwide asking when it would be active again.



**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, the Bureau of African Affairs, and the Bureau of Human Resources, should request additional radio technician positions to support the constituent posts of the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt. (Action: IRM, in coordination with EUR, NEA, SA, AF, and DGHR)

## TECHNICIAN QUALIFICATIONS AND ATTRITION

RIMC Frankfurt currently has a number of new-hire technicians. While these technicians have completed the Department's training program, many lack skills that can only be learned through experience. IRM previously assigned new technicians for one tour to the Office of Local Area Network/Wide Area Network Services to gain this experience, but many technicians now are immediately assigned to a RIMC. As these technicians have not learned how the Department works, they must accompany another technician to obtain the on-the-job training. Further, many have not developed the interpersonal skills vital to providing good customer service.

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## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST ROVER SELECTION

RIMC Frankfurt management is concerned that they have no input in the selection of personnel who become rovers. The geographic bureaus that are supported by the program make these decisions. However, the staff that fill these positions must be knowledgeable and able to adapt to tough circumstances, as they are often sent to posts that are having difficulties. Equally important is the fact that the performance of staff in rover positions reflects heavily on RIMC Frankfurt and will shape posts' perception of the quality of service available through RIMC. The Director wants to ensure that he can fill these positions with staff he can trust will perform.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management should ensure that the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt has input in the staffing of the information management specialist rover program. (Action: IRM)

## EMPLOYEE EVALUATION REPORT INPUT FROM TEMPORARY DUTY POSTS

Posts at which RIMC technicians have served TDY have not provided sufficient input regarding the technicians' performance to RIMC Frankfurt. To ensure accountability for technicians' performance at posts, and to ensure the overall quality of their complement of staff, RIMC Frankfurt includes a request for employee evaluation report input in all TDY assignment cables. However, OIG received survey comments from several posts claiming that they had no means to contribute to the evaluations of certain under-performing technicians. Similarly, some technicians noted that not all of their work was accurately reflected in their employee evaluation report due to insufficient input from the posts visited. Because most TDYs are shorter in duration than the minimum number of days required to complete a formal evaluation, most posts simply reply with a few cursory words that are of little value in crafting an evaluation. RIMC Frankfurt needs to pursue more detailed and consistent assessments of their technicians' activities while on TDY.

**Recommendation 4:** The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, in coordination with the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs, South Asian Affairs, and African Affairs should ensure that posts receiving temporary duty site visits from Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt technicians submit the required input on technician performance as requested in the temporary duty assignment cable. (Action: EUR, in coordination with NEA, SA, AF, and RIMC Frankfurt)

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TRAINING CENTER

The IMTC is a valuable asset to RIMC and Consulate General Frankfurt. It provides technical training opportunities to a wide range of students, some of whom have few other avenues for such training. Located at the Regional Service Center (RSC) in Frankfurt, the IMTC trains more students on a yearly basis than does the RSC. The IMTC plans their training schedule a year in advance, in coordination with FSI's School of Applied Information Technology, to complement the schedule of courses offered at FSI in Arlington and Warrenton, and the RIMC in Ft. Lauderdale. This helps ensure the same class is not offered simultaneously at more than one campus, and gives students worldwide access to a greater variety of available offering dates in a particular course.

However, the lack of a clearly defined niche for the IMTC within RIMC's organizational structure and the Department as a whole, ambiguous funding sources, and uncertainty of the adequacy of projected training facilities at Creekbed may threaten the future effectiveness of the IMTC. The IMTC has no budget under RIMC and receives no funding through RIMC other than incidental operating expenses; in fact, IMTC has no formal budget at all. Although funding for materials is provided by FSI, there is no memorandum of agreement between RIMC Frankfurt and FSI regarding how the resources are to be used.

**Recommendation 5:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management, in coordination with the Foreign Service Institute and the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt, should develop a memorandum of agreement detailing the types and number of training classes that will be offered by the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt using funding provided by the Foreign Service Institute. (Action: IRM, in coordination with FSI, RIMC Frankfurt)

While the IMTC offers some FSI-sponsored courses (i.e., those identified with an FSI-assigned code), the IMTC processes the registrations itself and then forwards the course completion information to FSI. This is the standard registration model FSI uses for training provided at locations other than FSI Washington. There is no direct link between RIMC Frankfurt and FSI's Student Training Management System, and efforts to create a link using online registration are as yet unresolved. The lack of a direct link undercuts the feasibility of IMTC registrations being processed solely by FSI in Washington, because RIMC Frankfurt would not have access to timely enrollment information essential to planning and conducting training classes. FSI should, however, explore whether there are other ways the registration could be done to lessen the workload on RIMC IMTC staff.

**Recommendation 6:** The Foreign Service Institute, in coordination with the Bureau of Information Resource Management and the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt, should explore ways to allow student registrations for Foreign Service Institute-coded courses conducted at the Information Management Training Center in Frankfurt to be processed centrally by the Foreign Service Institute in Washington. (Action: FSI, in coordination with IRM, RIMC Frankfurt)

A common concern among RIMC officials and IMTC instructors is the impending move to Creekbed. While existing facilities are ideal, there are concerns that the space allocated for the training center at Creekbed will be less than adequate. Even if the overall area is comparable in size, the configuration might not be well suited to a training environment. Furthermore, efforts to consolidate training spaces with the classes taught by Regional Support Center will prove difficult, as one needs space configured for end-user workstations, while the other trains users by building workstations.

**Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with the Bureau of Information Resource Management, the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt, the Foreign Service Institute, and Consulate General Frankfurt should ensure that facilities provided for use by the Information Management Training Center at the Creekbed facility meet adequate standards to allow the training center to continue its current level of service. (Action: OBO, in coordination with IRM, RIMC Frankfurt, FSI, CG Frankfurt)

## SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR ACCESS FOR DIGITAL TECHNICIANS

RIMC digital technicians need system administrator privileges to perform their daily tasks of providing customer support to constituent posts. RIMC Frankfurt receives OpenNet Plus access as a customer of the information systems center of Consulate General Frankfurt. However, digital technicians need administrator-level access rights on the OpenNet Plus and ClassNet networks in order to talk RIMC customers through troubleshooting steps by phone. Additionally, administrator privileges are necessary to perform diagnostic operations such as pinging servers and routers.

**Recommendation 8:** Consulate General Frankfurt should provide Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt digital technicians with administrator-level access to the OpenNet Plus and ClassNet networks for which they have regional support responsibility. (Action: CG Frankfurt)

## TEMPORARY DUTY FOR TELEPHONE TECHNICIANS

Surveyed posts and RIMC telephone technicians alike indicated that more TDY trips are necessary to maintain a high level of customer service. While advances in technology have allowed for sophisticated remote diagnostics capabilities, RIMC telephone technicians commented that there are many situations where “you just have to be there.” Despite the development of a telephone lab that allows RIMC to simulate the operational environment of the customer in order to walk them through troubleshooting steps over the phone, several technicians believed that it just does not work, and that RIMC is relying too heavily on providing support via telephone in lieu of sending a technician on TDY. No matter the remote capabilities, much still depends on having competent eyes on the ground to look at and work with the system, which is not always the case with IMS staff who may have limited experience with telephone switches. Technicians described these switches as difficult systems for a dedicated telephone technician to maintain, let alone an IMS for whom it is only one of many duties. RIMC Frankfurt should take these concerns under consideration as they pursue cost-savings through the use of remote diagnostics.





## FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management, in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, the Bureau of African Affairs, and the Bureau of Human Resources, should request additional operations officer positions to support the constituent posts of the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt. (Action: IRM, in coordination with EUR, NEA, SA, AF, and DGHR)

**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management in coordination with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, the Bureau of African Affairs, and the Bureau of Human Resources, should request additional radio technician positions to support the constituent posts of the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt. (Action: IRM, in coordination with EUR, NEA, SA, AF, and DGHR)

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Information Resource Management should ensure that the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt has input in the staffing of the information management specialist rover program. (Action: IRM)

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**Recommendation 7:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with the Bureau of Information Resource Management, the Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt, the Foreign Service Institute, and Consulate General Frankfurt should ensure that facilities provided for use by the Information Management Training Center at the Creekbed facility meet adequate standards to allow the training center to continue its current level of service. (Action: OBO, in coordination with IRM, RIMC Frankfurt, FSI, CG Frankfurt)

**Recommendation 8:** Consulate General Frankfurt should provide Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt digital technicians with administrator-level access to the OpenNet Plus and ClassNet networks for which they have regional support responsibility. (Action: CG Frankfurt)

## APPENDIX A - OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this review were to determine whether supported posts are receiving adequate maintenance and support services from RIMC Frankfurt, to assess whether RIMC Frankfurt staffing levels and training were adequate to support these posts, and to determine RIMC Frankfurt functions in support of the Department's antiterrorism initiatives.

To meet its review objectives, OIG reviewed documentation from various sources that provided background information about RIMC Frankfurt and its role in providing telecommunications support to posts. OIG also solicited all posts supported by RIMC Frankfurt for feedback on the level of support received. On site, the inspector met with officials in RIMC Frankfurt to learn about its operations and to obtain information supporting the review objectives.

The Office of Inspector General's Information Technology Office performed this inspection, including work in Washington, D.C. between April 19-May 20, 2004, and at the Regional Information Management Center in Frankfurt, Germany, between May 24-June 9, 2004. Contributors to the report are Lynn Allen, Mary S. Heard, and Matthew J. Ragnetti.