

**Opening Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

“The Diplomat’s Shield: Diplomatic Security in Today’s World.”

December 9, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today’s hearing to discuss challenges facing the Bureau of Diplomatic Security within the U.S. Department of State.

In the report released yesterday, GAO repeats its call for the State Department to engage in the type of strategic planning necessary to carry out increases in people and resources. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security is no different in this respect and its expanded mission in the wake of the 1998 bombings must be coupled with better guidance.

As discussed in the GAO report, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security suffers from a lack of strategic planning with little capacity to prepare for future security needs. We are beginning to see the effects of the lack of attention to strategic planning with a diplomatic security workforce that is stretched too thin.

For example, 53 percent of special agents do not speak or read at the foreign language level required by their position. Approximately 90 percent of the Bureau’s workforce needs are met by contract personnel. I am concerned about potential lack of accountability given the high percentage of contractor support. GAO found other special agents who did not feel adequately prepared for the mission they were inheriting.

Staffing and resource challenges have been compounded by initiatives that require the United States to keep diplomatic missions in high-threat areas that typically would have been abandoned including Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Bureau of Diplomatic Security may have one of the most difficult jobs within the State Department – ensuring appropriate security protocols in a culture that relies on outreach and human contact. We are here today to examine this balance and understand how to foster relationships while maintaining a secure environment for the conduct of our foreign policy.

As we speak, the State Department is in the midst of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. The review is the first of its kind at the State Department and will provide a blueprint for our diplomatic development efforts. As GAO indicates, it will be absolutely critical that the Bureau of Diplomatic Security is part of this review. As transnational terrorism continues to threaten our diplomats overseas, the Bureau is an essential element of this blueprint and any plan which neglects the Bureau would be incomplete.

Mr. Chairman, the concerns identified by GAO today are similar to those we've discussed in prior hearings on State's human capital. Difficultly recruiting and retaining those with critical skills – such as languages – is a systemic problem at State, and our federal government as a whole. It should serve as a reminder to us all of the need for more attention to workforce planning.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing thoughts and recommendations from our witnesses today on the future of Diplomatic Security and am anxious to hear the opinions of some of our witnesses who have served overseas in high threat-differential posts and their own experiences in balancing security with mission.