



Testimony of Susan Rockwell Johnson
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Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia
Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)

Hearing on:

*“The Diplomatic Shield: Diplomatic Security and its Implications for U.S.
Diplomacy”*
June 29, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Senator Johnson, and distinguished subcommittee members, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) welcomes the opportunity to speak before this subcommittee on the subject of diplomatic security and its vital role as an essential enabler of effective diplomacy in today’s difficult and dangerous environments. We are grateful to you for convening a hearing on this important issue and for your continuing oversight of this important function.

In an increasingly complex and dangerous global environment, in which foreign policy and the Foreign Service are required to operate as our nation’s first line of defense, the need to ensure the safety and security of our Foreign Service personnel cannot be overemphasized. The challenge assumes particular gravity with the expanding requirement for Foreign Service missions, personnel and programs in conflict zones. The State Department’s diplomatic security training structures and content must evolve to keep pace with these developments.

The June 2011 Government Accountability Office report titled *“Diplomatic Security: Expanded Missions and Inadequate Facilities Pose Critical Challenges*

to Training Efforts” identifies some fundamental weaknesses in the structure and substance of our diplomatic security training, affecting both training of DS officers and non-DS personnel, which State has acknowledged. The GAO rightly concludes that State’s programs are currently not as well designed to meet the challenge - especially in light of expanding missions, such as the impending ramp-up of our civilian presence in Iraq - as they need to be.

AFSA notes that the State Department essentially agrees with the GAO’s assessment. But we have additional questions about the wider implications of the report’s conclusions, both for the ability of our diplomats to do their jobs effectively and securely, and for efforts to find the right balance between those two sometimes conflicting imperatives. In particular, we have serious questions about the current Iraq transition plan.

AFSA also concurs with many of the conclusions and recommendation of the Jan. 31 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report on *Iraq: The Transition from a Military Mission to a Civilian-Led Effort.*” Given the unprecedented size and complexity of the diplomatic mission in Iraq -- currently projected to encompass some 17,000 individuals at 15 different sites, including three air hubs, three police training centers, two consulates, two embassy branch offices, and five Office of Security Cooperation sites -- a reading of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report raises some fundamental questions:

- What kind of security relationship will the Iraqi government want with the United States?
- How can the State Department effectively operate in difficult security environments without the support of the American military?
- Is the scope of the mission in Iraq compatible with the resources available, including State Department capacity, the financial commitment from Congress, a degree of U.S. military support, and the backing of the Iraqi government?
- If these elements are not fully in place, will the administration choose to scale back the diplomatic mission? Or will it accept a degree of physical risk familiar to military personnel but normally unacceptable for diplomats?

Addressing these and other similar questions, the report has made a number of recommendations which deserve careful consideration, especially those addressing efforts to ensure that resources, capacities and policy objectives are in balance, and

to clarify what the U.S. military presence in Iraq, if any, will look like beyond 2012.

AFSA does not currently have sufficient information about the situation in Iraq or about the scope of the U.S. mission and the personnel required to carry it out. But we believe it is our responsibility, both as a professional association and the union representing the entire Foreign Service, to seek answers to the following questions, in addition to those raised by the GAO and Senate Foreign Relations Committee reports.

- 1) Considering that, according to GAO figures, the total number of Diplomatic Security agents deployed worldwide is only about 720, does DS have the adequate resources and numbers to manage the approximately 39,000 security contractors worldwide effectively, including those proposed for Iraq?
- 2) As U.S. forces draw down in Iraq, does the Transition Plan assume that the Iraqi government and its military forces are ready, able or even willing to support and protect the U.S. civilian mission in Iraq? If so, what evidence do we have to support this assumption?
- 3) Given that Dec. 31, 2011 – just six months away – is a hard deadline for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces, is transition planning sufficiently advanced to allow all elements of the plan to be adequately prepared, supported and effectively implemented in time, without compromising the security of civilian personnel or impeding their ability to adequately fulfill their mission?
- 4) Is the content of the Foreign Affairs Counterterrorism (FACT) course, given to all non-DS personnel embarking for dangerous posts, either adequate or relevant to the conditions that are expected to prevail in Iraq after the drawdown?
- 5) Finally, is the Iraq Transition plan right-sized, are its various elements correctly balanced for maximum effectiveness, and are means adequately matched to ends to perform the mission for which it is intended? Or is this unprecedented undertaking too large and overly complex to be performed effectively and securely?

CONCLUSION

AFSA agrees with the GAO report's conclusion that State's diplomatic security training programs suffer from a systemic weakness. These stem from structural deficiencies which the report identifies and in which State concurs, and are exacerbated by the need to adapt course content – both for DS agents and other Foreign Service personnel -- to the changing realities of how diplomacy is actually conducted today in war zones and other dangerous environments. This consideration is particularly relevant for the safety of our diplomatic personnel and for the success of their difficult mission in Iraq. We hope that the subcommittee will examine that plan closely and ask hard questions about the assumptions upon which it is based.

There is inherent conflict between assuring real security, particularly in war zones, and the ability of diplomats and civilians to do their jobs effectively, which includes the ability to move unencumbered by heavy security and, when needed, on short notice. To find the right balance between the two imperatives is difficult. However, we cannot escape the responsibility to provide security for those we send into harm's way to carry out the mission. Doing so will depend on provision of the necessary resources, financial and human; training of DS personnel of appropriate content and duration; and assurances that the host government clearly understands and agrees with the scope and nature of the mission, including the military support it must provide.

In addition, DS must have the flexibility to deal with non-performing security contracts or other problems, and to respond quickly and creatively to unpredictable developments or new situations on the ground.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The United States Foreign Service has a long and honorable tradition of serving wherever and whenever it is called upon to do so, whatever the conditions. Its leadership bears the responsibility of ensuring that the diplomatic mission is well conceived and viable.

AFSA values your longstanding support of initiatives to enhance the diplomatic readiness of our civilian Foreign Service agencies. We particularly appreciate the leadership you have shown in convening this hearing, and we look forward to continuing to serve as a resource for you and your colleagues.



BIOGRAPHY OF SUSAN R. JOHNSON, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

Susan R. Johnson is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. Prior to her election as President of the American Foreign Service Association, she served in a number of senior positions including Senior Advisor in the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, in Iraq as Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina as Deputy High Representative and Supervisor of Brcko District. Her Foreign Service career has integrated traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomatic work with assignments involving program and project management including as DCM in Romania and Mauritius, first Director of the Ambassador's Assistance Coordination Unit in Embassy Moscow, and first Director of the USAID funded International Executive Service Corps (IESC) in Central Asia, establishing programs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Earlier in her career she served at the US Mission to the United Nations in New York, and at the US Interests Office in Havana. In Washington she has served as senior coordinator in the Resources, Plans and Policy Office of the Secretary of State, as Special Assistant in the Office of the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, in the office of Senator Bill Bradley on a Pearson Fellowship, and on detail to the National Endowment for Democracy. She is an alumnus of the Department's 45th Senior Seminar, and received the Department's Deputy Chief of Mission of the Year Award (2001). She speaks French, Italian, Russian and Spanish. She holds an M.A. degree in International Relations from SAIS and a B.A. in history from Principia College. Her term as AFSA President began on July 15, 2009 and she was re-elected to a second term on June 2, 2011. She supports animal welfare and protection organizations and activities.