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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on “National Security Reform: Implementing a National Security Service Workforce.” My expertise on matters relating to the national security workforce derive from a report that my colleague, Rob Seidner and I wrote for the IBM Center for the Business of Government entitled, “Federated Human Resource Management in the Federal Government: The Intelligence Community Model.” Our report documents an initiative underway within the Intelligence Community (IC) to develop a common human resource management (HRM) framework pursuant to the direction provided by Congress in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2002 (IRTPA). Many of the provisions of IRTPA in turn, were based on the report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, also known as the “9/11 Commission.” The commission concluded that the intelligence failures that led to the terrorist actions of September 11, 2001 were in large part attributable to a lack of cooperation and collaboration between units within the IC. As one means of fostering greater interagency cooperation, IRTPA directed the new Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to create common personnel policies and programs for the IC.

Perhaps the most critical element of the new HRM framework is the joint duty program that has been instituted for senior, civilian executives within the IC. The IC’s joint duty program is modeled after that implemented by the armed services pursuant to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. In both instances, the objective is to encourage inter-agency cooperation and collaboration by providing senior executives and/or officials with direct work experience in an agency other than the one in which their careers are anchored. The executives thereby gain knowledge of the work practices, cultures and personalities of sister agencies which can facilitate long-term operational collaboration.

Executive Order 13434 issued by former President George W. Bush in May 2007 references the creation of a joint-duty-type program for national security professionals, a recommendation that I support. Just as cross-agency collaboration is key to the successful accomplishment of intelligence objectives, so too can such collaboration contribute to the effective accomplishment of national security objectives more broadly. However, as the national security community embarks on this journey, important lessons can be learned from the experience of the IC in setting up its joint duty program.

One lesson is that the success of a joint duty program is enhanced to the extent that it is compatible with other HRM systems. For example, prior to implementing its joint duty program, the IC first identified a common set of elements according to which the performance of all IC employees is assessed. With the new performance elements in place, managers accepting temporary assignments in sister agencies can be assured that their performance will be assessed according to the same criteria employed by the home unit.

Those participating in a joint duty program also need to be reassured that they won't lose promotional advantages as a consequence. In our investigation of the IC's program we heard concerns from managers about being "out of sight" and therefore "out of mind" when promotional opportunities arose in the home agency. To address this problem, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) has instituted a procedure whereby agencies are required to report the promotion rates of those who participate in joint duty as well as of those that do not.

For joint duty to succeed, the needs of the home units of joint duty participants need to be accommodated. To continue to meet operational demands, provision must be made for these units to fill in behind those on temporary assignment to another agency. This requires an increase in overall staffing levels to allow for the creation of a personnel "float" in the form of positions that can temporarily be assigned to units with members on joint duty assignments.

Although the IC's joint duty program is still in the early stages of implementation, members of the community with whom we talked, including in particular the chief human capital officers of the various IC components are optimistic about its success. An important reason for their optimism is the collaborative manner through which the policy was designed. Collaboration was necessitated by the ambiguous nature of the authorities granted the DNI. Congress deliberately did not grant the DNI line authority over the other intelligence units and hence ODNI did not have the option of simply imposing a new policy framework on the community. Instead, all members of the IC had to agree on the final product. This insured that agency as well as community-wide needs were addressed and the broad acceptance of the policy that has resulted will enhance prospects for successful implementation.

As the national security community proceeds with the implementation of a joint duty program, I recommend that careful consideration be given to the process through which program specifics will be designed. If policies are designed centrally and imposed on the participants, problems are likely to surface. First, it is less likely that the resulting program will accommodate the operational needs of the agencies and second, without agency buy-in, implementation will become problematic. The experience of the Department of Homeland Security holds important lessons in this regard. I therefore recommend that the governance structure for the program require consent to the final policy by all participants.

Inevitably, a program like joint duty which runs counter to a tradition of agency autonomy on matters of job assignments and to one whereby the careers of relatively few officials cross agency lines will run into resistance from those with an interest in preserving the status quo. To overcome that resistance, it is important that an entity within the national security community be assigned a role similar to that of ODNI within the IC. The Security Professional Development Executive Steering Committee (SPDESC) created by E.O. 13434 and chaired by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management is the obvious candidate for this purpose.

In my view, the effectiveness of SPDESC will be enhanced to the extent that its mandate is expanded and that it is given general authority for approving the job assignments of senior executives within the national security community. This would provide the committee with the “teeth” needed to gain the interest and attention of the participant agencies as well as to overcome the inevitable resistance that will emerge. Allowing the careers of SES members to be managed at a central level is further consistent with the original vision of the SES as a corps of generalists whose career paths would routinely cross agency lines and whose affiliation is to the corps rather than to a particular agency.

Finally, I recommend limiting the scope of a joint duty mandate to members of the SES or those at equivalent levels. The IC discovered during its design efforts that the numbers of prospective participants grows exponentially as the scope of the program is extended into the GS-15, 14, and 13 ranges. For reasons of administrative simplicity as well as of program coherence it is therefore advantageous to limit the scope of the program to members of the SES.