

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays April 7, 2003

After the guns stop firing, the battle for freedom, peace and security in Iraq and throughout the world will continue to be waged with words and ideas. Success in that global arena will be determined by the size, scope and skill of the United States diplomatic presence abroad.

Today, America's diplomatic front lines are staffed by more than 60,000 people representing up to 40 federal agencies working at 260 embassies and consulates worldwide. But that overseas posture appears to be the product of Cold War habits and bureaucratic inertia rather than any systematic effort to put the right people in the right places to advance U.S. interests.

Currently, no one can even say with any accuracy how many executive branch employees are posted at foreign missions. No common accounting system measures the true costs of international activities by so many different federal agencies and programs. Ambassadors have little more than titular authority to manage the comings and goings of non-State Department personnel. Many embassies are not safe, and new buildings are being built without reliable projections of how many people will have to work there.

The President's Management Agenda calls for a "right-sized" overseas presence to better shape, focus and secure the work of U.S. citizens and foreign nationals abroad. Today, we continue our assessment of how aggressively and effectively the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget are pursuing this important initiative.

Last year, at the Subcommittee's request, the General Accounting Office (GAO) undertook a series of studies to assess right-sizing efforts. To rationalize and standardize decision-making, GAO developed an analytical framework that gives priority to security, mission and cost considerations. In two new reports released today, GAO recommends broader application of that framework and an improved process to derive the staffing projections upon which new embassy designs are based.

More than a decade after the Cold War, five years after terrorists targeted our embassies in Africa, and eighteen months since the attacks of September 11th, we still lack a systematic approach to determine who will be tasked to project U.S. ideals and policies into a more dynamic, more dangerous world. International economic, political, military and cultural alignments are changing rapidly. The size and skill of U.S diplomatic engagements must change with them.

Sitting as one panel, all our witnesses this afternoon share one goal: a right-sized U.S. presence abroad that puts the right people, with the right skills, in secure facilities throughout the world. We appreciate their time, their dedication and their expertise and we look forward to their testimony.