

**Statement of John F. Tierney**  
**Chairman**  
**Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs**  
**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**“Fortress America Abroad: Effective Diplomacy and the Future of U.S. Embassies”**

**As Prepared for Delivery**

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On behalf of the Members of this Subcommittee, I welcome our panel of highly distinguished witnesses. Today, we will discuss the challenges – as well as the opportunities – for the future of U.S. embassies and diplomacy with four uniquely qualified experts.

We’ll examine not only the ramifications of the new type of embassies U.S. taxpayers are currently funding around the world – so-called “fortress” embassies on the outskirts of town – we’ll also evaluate the broader purposes of our diplomatic presence abroad, and discuss how we can best maintain and improve our relations with foreign governments and the people those governments represent.

Our diplomats put themselves in harm’s way for all of us day and night. They live in every part of the globe – often in remote and austere places that are afflicted by poverty and violence. And they suffer casualties, like Tom Stefani of the Foreign Agricultural Service who was killed by a bomb in Afghanistan last October, or John Granville, a USAID officer killed along with his driver earlier this month in Sudan.

We all recognize the need for robust and effective security. Our people deserve it, and our missions cannot be effective without it. At the same time, we must recognize that the very effectiveness we seek to maintain with that security is threatened if the security measures are not carefully managed.

Take the symbolism of the American embassy itself. For generations, the sight of the American flag flying openly in the heart of foreign capitals and oppressive regimes gave hope to dissidents, relief to Americans abroad, and pause to many dictators.

Stories are legendary of young people learning in American embassy libraries and cultural centers who would later become leaders of their nations, with affection for the United States they would never forget.

And yet our concerns with security have now led us to build new embassy compounds of cookie-cutter boxes surrounded by walls located on the outskirts of town.

One magazine called our new embassy in Iraq, for example, the, and I quote, “Mega-Bunker of Baghdad.” One of our witnesses today has referred to this phenomenon as “Fortress America.”

But \$700 million Embassy Baghdad is not the only example.

More and more, the American flag flies on the outskirts of foreign capitals, remote from daily life, from inside the fortified perimeter of a massive bunker. In the words of one commentator, and I quote, “These embassies are the artifacts of fear.”

My fear is that our diplomats are at risk of alienation, of becoming unable to communicate face-to-face with the very people they must try to understand and to influence; that they are at risk of irrelevance.

I don’t claim to have the answers for the very difficult questions facing us today – questions of safety, of costs and of the best way to conduct diplomacy in this post-9/11 world.

That’s why we’ve assembled such an esteemed group of experts; for us to ask these tough questions of you, and to learn from your collective years of personal experience and professional study.

For example, if diplomats can’t meet with their counterparts, travel the country and get to know the people, what purpose do they serve?

What is the symbolism of embassies and what messages do they send to the host country and its people? What positive symbols should our embassies be sending? Is this symbolism important? If so, how should this factor be reconciled with other considerations such as security and fiscal discipline?

What are the best ways to protect those serving in our embassies abroad? Do we need to focus not on risk avoidance but on risk management? How do we do that?

How much does heavy security screening reduce casual traffic into American libraries or cultural centers on embassy compounds? How significant is this, and what creative options are there for acceptable substitutes?

How can we best utilize and leverage advanced communications technology in pursuit of diplomacy, especially diplomacy focused directly on the people of a host nation?

How is a U.S. Ambassador supposed to control and coordinate the activities of an ever increasing patchwork of government agencies, especially the large increases of military personnel who do not report to the Ambassador but to a distant theatre Combatant Command?

Should so-called “American Presence Posts” – that is, small expeditionary-type offices with a single diplomat in remote, but significant foreign cities – be a part of the diplomacy puzzle? If so, how can we best provide safety and the necessary manpower?

If we do not have adequate numbers of language-trained and otherwise adequately prepared personnel to send on these and other missions – which the Government Accountability Office, among others, has documented – how do we get them?

In sum, how best should the U.S. pursue diplomacy in the 21st century? And how can we ensure that we have this discussion before we spend more and more millions of taxpayer dollars on fortress-like embassies or other activities that don’t best serve our core and long-term national security needs?

Defense Secretary Gates recently stressed, and I quote, “What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security – diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development.... We must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military.”

And this sentiment about the dangerousness of our lack of investment in diplomatic resources and funding is gaining ground across party lines and ideologies. But how do we best get from point A to point B, and just what should point B look like in operational form?

In the end, I am confident that we can find the right balance of security and openness, of trained personnel and resources necessary to carry out the vital task of American diplomacy in the 21st century.

But we first need a robust and open dialogue among policymakers, experts, and the men and women who represent us abroad in the face of great personal sacrifice.

I thank our outstanding witnesses for being with us today, and I look forward to learning from your experience and expertise.