

Statement of  
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Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Hearing on Interrupting Terrorist Travel:  
Strengthening the Security of International Travel Documents

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10:00 a.m.

Good morning Chairwoman Feinstein, Ranking Member Kyl, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee;

I am honored to appear before you today with my distinguished colleagues. I'd like to thank you and the Committee Members for your continued support and interest in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's (DS) protective and investigative programs. Through Congressional support, DS safeguards American diplomats and facilities around the world and protects the integrity of U.S. travel documents. With your permission, I would like to present a brief statement and submit a copy of our Visa and Passport Security Strategic Plan as my full testimony for the record.

One of the most critical national security challenges that the American will face for the foreseeable future is the desire by terrorist groups and individuals to inflict catastrophic harm to the United States. A key element in all terrorist operational planning is access to their target. Such access requires the acquisition of travel documents (including visas and passports) that allow terrorists to enter, and move freely within, our country.

As the law enforcement arm of the Department of State, DS is responsible for upholding the integrity of the U.S. visa and passport through enforcement of relevant portions of the U.S. Criminal Code. DS is the most geographically extensive federal law enforcement agency in the United States Government, with approximately 1,400 Special Agents dispersed among 25 field and resident offices domestically, with representation on 26 Joint Terrorism Task Forces, and with assignments to U.S. embassies and consulates in 159 countries. DS is uniquely positioned and committed to meet the serious national security challenge of travel document fraud. Our agents conduct investigations into passport and visa fraud violations wherever they occur. Our partnership with the Bureau of Consular Affairs has enabled us to jointly focus on protecting the U.S. passports and visas.

Overseas, we work with foreign partner nations to target and disrupt document fraud rings and human smuggling networks. Domestically, we work with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to investigate, arrest, and seek prosecution of fraud violators. Throughout this global network of law enforcement professionals, DS Special Agents are on the frontlines of combating terrorist and criminal travel.

Terrorists targeting the U.S. attempt to discover, manipulate, and exploit vulnerabilities within our travel document system. To successfully counter this threat, DS has crafted a Visa and Passport Security Strategic Plan that leverages our international expertise and worldwide presence. The Plan provides the framework for a worldwide Visa and Passport Security Program and will significantly augment the Department's ongoing efforts to prevent terrorist travel. Our approach incorporates the principles of the National Strategy to Combat Terrorist Travel and addresses the objectives of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

The Strategic Plan requires the deployment of additional DS personnel to critical posts worldwide, resources to enhance our intelligence and data-sharing efforts, and training and technical assistance to our foreign partners. Presently DS has Special Agents assigned to consular sections abroad to focus solely on travel document fraud. By the end of this year, DS will have 33 Special Agents assigned to key posts investigating travel document fraud. By the end of 2008, DS will have 50 agents in such capacity. Since 2004, the results have been promising, yielding nearly 1,050 arrests for document fraud and related offenses; in excess of 3,400 visa refusals and revocations; and more than 6,200 foreign law enforcement and security personnel trained.

The Plan is built upon a cornerstone of three strategic goals:

- To defend the U.S. and our foreign partners from terrorist attack through aggressive, coordinated international law enforcement actions and initiatives;
- To detect terrorist activity, methods of operation, and trends that exploit international travel vulnerabilities; and
- To disrupt terrorist efforts to use fraudulent travel documents through strengthening the capabilities of our foreign partners by such highly successful programs as the DS Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program.

Our Strategic Plan offers a comprehensive and proactive approach to ensuring the integrity and security of U.S. visas and passports.

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on this vital aspect of DS's mission.

We look forward to your continued support.