

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,
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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays September 23, 2003

According to the President's Management Agenda, "In most agencies, human resources planning is weak. Workforce deficiencies will be exacerbated by the upcoming retirement wave of the baby-boom generation. Approximately 71 percent of the government's current permanent employees will be eligible for either regular or early retirement by 2010, and then 40 percent of those employees are expected to retire. Without proper planning, the skill mix of the federal workforce will not reflect tomorrow's changing missions."

The strategic human capital time bomb described by the Administration has been ticking at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for some time. For the better part of the last decade, both the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the State Department Inspector General have reported a failure at USAID to plan for the impacts of downsizing, employee demographics and the changing needs of a more dangerous world.

Today GAO updates those earlier findings and answers our questions about the impact of workforce planning lapses on the ability of USAID to perform critical missions in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.

At USAID the mission has changed, the manpower has not. New laws, regulations, policies and host nation expectations have not prompted corresponding reforms of USAID personnel practices. For a variety of long-evident reasons, the core function of USAID has evolved from that of direct aid provider to one of contract and contractor management. Skilled and dedicated veterans at USAID have done their best to adapt, but the lack of a clear plan to identify and deploy the skill sets demanded by a fast changing world leaves the agency hard-pressed to meet current missions and ill-equipped to face a demanding future.

The GAO report released today notes 61 of 103 USAID positions in Kabul remain vacant. The agency is also finding it difficult to place foreign service officers in Iraq where unaccompanied tours in harsh living conditions do not attract many takers from among a predominantly married, over-forty talent pool.

According to GAO, efforts to address strategic human capital management weaknesses at USAID have had limited impact. To meet its important mission in places like Afghanistan, Iraq and other development frontiers, the agency needs a comprehensive workforce planning system and similarly expanded method of calculating the true cost of doing business.

We welcome our panel of witnesses from the General Accounting Office and the Agency for International Development this morning, and we look forward to their testimony.