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**Highlights**

Highlights of [GAO-06-479](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

**Why GAO Did This Study**

The President has emphasized the importance of safety, efficiency, and accountability in U.S. government staffing overseas by designating the achievement of a rightsized overseas presence as a part of the *President's Management Agenda*. One of the elements of rightsizing involves relocating certain administrative support functions from overseas posts to the United States or regional centers overseas, which can provide cheaper, safer, or more effective support. This report (1) reviews State's efforts in providing administrative support from remote locations, (2) identifies the challenges it faces in doing so, and (3) outlines the potential advantages and concerns associated with providing support remotely.

**What GAO Recommends**

We recommend that the Secretary of State (1) identify and analyze the various costs associated with providing support remotely, (2) develop systematic performance measures and formal feedback mechanisms to measure the quality and customer satisfaction of support services provided remotely, and (3) use the cost analyses and feedback to make decisions on supporting embassy operations. State generally concurred with our report and indicated that it is taking steps to implement all of our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-479](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-479).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

**OVERSEAS PRESENCE**

**Cost Analyses and Performance Measures Are Needed to Demonstrate the Full Potential of Providing Embassy Support Remotely**

**What GAO Found**

State has a number of regional and domestic offices that provide some management support remotely to overseas posts in areas such as financial management and human resources. For example, State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs provides support to posts in its region through staff based in Florida. State announced in October 2005 it would identify and remove additional functions that do not need to be performed at post and could instead be performed domestically or at regional centers overseas.

State faces several challenges in trying to expand its use of remote support. For example, restrictions on what management functions non-American staff can perform might limit the extent to which services can be provided remotely. In addition, current funding arrangements for various regional bureaus and posts might limit opportunities for remote support to be offered from one region to another, while posts' reluctance to change is a further constraint. State is assessing whether certain regulations could be waived or changed and how institutional challenges might be overcome.

There are several potential advantages to providing administrative support to posts from remote locations, and several concerns. For example, one U.S.-based officer provides financial management support to multiple overseas posts, eliminating the need for an American financial management officer at each post served, which, according to State, could result in cost savings. Officials at posts we visited reported they were generally satisfied with the level of support and customer service at a regional or domestic service center, though some noted concerns. However, at the time of our review, State had neither analyzed the potential cost savings associated with providing remote support nor systematically assessed the quality of support provided. In addition, many officials in Washington and overseas were unaware of the full breadth of support offered by regional service centers.

**The Regional Service Center in Florida and Supported Posts**



Sources: GAO, and Map Art.