

Statement of Mark I. Thompson

Chairman and members of the Committee. I began my 35 (+) year service to our nation in 1977 when I was commissioned in the Marine Corps after graduating from Buena Vista University with a major in social science and a minor in math.

I started my fleet duties with the Marine Corps as an infantry officer and led platoons and companies aboard Amphibious Ready Groups in northern Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and operationally in the Caribbean. I also served in the Western Pacific for four years. During my military tenure I graduated from Jump School, SCUBA school, Aerial Observer School and survival school, as well as numerous military academic institutions.

In 1996 I was assigned to the Department of State Counterterrorism office. Since then I have served in the Administrations of Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama, along with six Secretaries of State (Secretaries Christopher, Albright, Powell, Rice, Clinton and Kerry).

In 1997 I was the Department of State lead for the return of Amir Kasi to the United States to stand trial for the murder of CIA employees. In 1998 I was the operations officer on the State-led Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) in response to the East Africa bombings. Under Chief of Mission authority, the FEST coordinated the military, law enforcement, security, medical resupply and secure communications for the Ambassador in Nairobi after a truck bomb had destroyed the embassy. That same year I accepted a civil service position upon retirement from the Marine Corps.

In 2000, I deployed to Aden, Yemen with the FEST to perform similar duties in support of the Chief of Mission in response to the bombing of the USS Cole.

In 2001 I led the FEST to Latin America to gain the safe recovery of American and foreign hostages. In 2002 I led the FEST to Asia to gain the safe recovery of American hostages. In 2004 I led in the establishment of an Office of Hostage Affairs in Baghdad, Iraq. That office subsequently leveraged the resources of the country team, military and our international partners to free hostages. In 2006, I led a team to West Africa, which resulted in the release of American and foreign hostages. In 2008 I was selected for the Senior Executive Service, and the following year I led the team on a mission that exceeds the classification of this hearing.

On a daily basis I am responsible for 35 uniquely skilled and dedicated professionals comprised of civil servants, military officers and contractors. It is they and our interagency teammates who deserve full credit. They form a formidable team that coordinates sensitive activities around the world, while standing ready to respond to emergencies such as those involving the FEST. It is my honor to serve with all of them.

I'm prepared to take your questions.

Mark I. Thompson
Deputy Coordinator for Operations
Bureau of Counterterrorism
Department of State

Mark Thompson has served in the Department of State since 1996, first as a Marine Officer, and now as the Deputy Coordinator for Operations (deputy assistant secretary equivalent). In 2008 he entered the senior executive service (SES).

In his current capacity, he leads a 35-member team of civil servants, Foreign Service, active duty and reserve military as well as contractors in addressing some of the nation's most complex counterterrorism challenges. He ensures sensitive CT proposals are fully vetted with senior Department of State leaders prior to President approval. He leads the development and implementation of hostage policy, and works closely with foreign governments to develop options that support a no-concessions strategy. His team also represents the Department in the Technical Support Working Group, which fuses the resources of all agencies of government as well as foreign partners to develop technical solutions to emerging terrorist threats. He led in the establishment of the Hostage Working Group in the US Embassy in Baghdad in 2004 to develop innovative methods to safely recover U.S. and allied hostages. Mark has also led Department of State efforts in returning indicted terrorists to stand trial in the United States.

Additionally, he is responsible for leading and deploying the NSC-directed Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) in support of U.S. Chiefs of Mission in anticipation of, or in response to, terrorist events impacting U.S. government interests overseas. The FEST is comprised of interagency CT expertise from throughout government. In this capacity he has deployed in response to the 1998 East Africa Embassy bombings, 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, Hostage recovery efforts in Latin America, SE Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Prior to retiring from the Marine Corps, Mark was an infantry officer serving in deployed units from all four Marine Corps Divisions, as well as service with special operations organizations in Colombia and the Western Pacific.