UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

The Global Mission that Defines the Leading Edge of Technology

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A security engineering officer installs a long-range acoustic device on top of an armored vehicle that transports dignitaries. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SECRECY SHROUDS THE TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYED AT AMERICAN EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES AROUND THE GLOBE. AND FOR GOOD REASON; WE DO NOT WANT THOSE WHO WISH TO DO US HARM TO KNOW HOW WE THWART THEIR ATTACKS. SO IT IS NOT COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY (DS) DEPLOYS SOME OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED TECHNICAL SECURITY COUNTERMEASURES IN THE WORLD.

Diplomatic Security is often a catalyst for technology evolution in carrying out our mission to protect U.S. personnel, facilities, and information, stateside and overseas. The reason for that is threefold: We deploy globally, we face ever-changing threats, and the scope of our work is vast.

The State Department is one of the few organizations that operate all over the world, so DS needs to employ modern technologies at 750 overseas and 140 domestic facilities – some of them in less than modern environments. We are not only deploying but interconnecting technology in places with underdeveloped infrastructure, intermittent electrical service, and minimal bandwidth. That requires designing around the absence of what is normally considered the essential framework for technology.

Extreme weather is another challenge. It is essential that our equipment work reliably in vastly different climates all over the world – in arctic temperatures; in the middle of the desert with shifting sand; or in the tropics along seashores where salt water becomes highly corrosive. This is why we have one of the most stringent vetting processes in the federal government for evaluating equipment.

As the U.S. military draws down operations, the State Department remains open in some of the most unstable regions in the world. The threats we face in those regions continue to evolve as our enemy advances in its use of technology. This drives our vigilance in rolling out technical solutions that accurately address the continually changing nature of global threat, and why we persist in maintaining a forward-thinking perspective that takes into consideration every possible scenario.

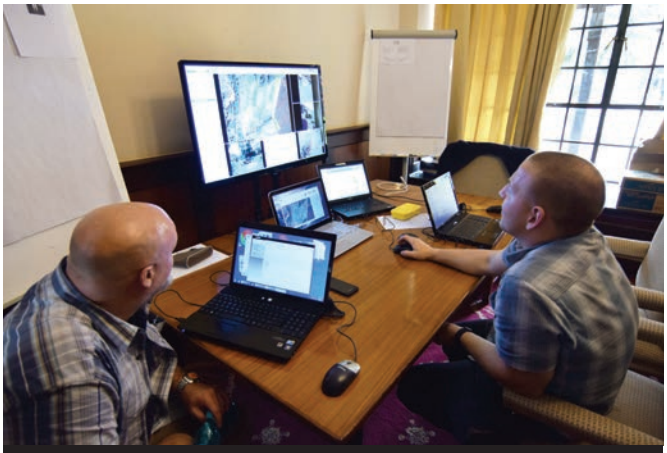
Deploying new technology is not an instant process. To do it correctly requires a tremendous amount of due diligence and planning. We do our utmost to make sure we are selecting the best possible solution for our money. Purely custom technology is not always reliable and always expensive. Only when a commercial off-the-shelf solution is not available will we use a hybrid of commercial technology that has been tailored to our specific requirements. A great deal of engineering ingenuity goes into that process.

In terms of the breadth and depth of our work, the State Department invests more than $400 million, annually, in physical, technical, and cyber security systems. We leverage advanced electrical, computer, and wireless technologies, as well as mechanical, civil, and structural technologies. The variety of systems we are responsible for ranges from anti-ram vehicle barriers to forward-looking infrared cameras, and from armored vehicles to biometric access control. Lifecycle support for all these systems is a massive undertaking. Carrying out this vast and complex mission requires a right mix of talented engineers, technicians, U.S. Navy Seabees, civil servants, and contractors.

What is not secret about DS's technology program is the incredibly talented team that works in every corner of the world to meet an amazingly diverse mission set. They continually amaze in terms of their capability, willingness, and desire to commit to an altruistic mission of protecting our people, property, and sensitive information around the world. ■

Diplomatic security engineering officers and security technical specialists work with their colleagues to load up equipment headed to support a major international summit. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A U.S. Marine (far right) watches as DS security engineering officers oversee the set up of this Fly-Away, Very Small Aperture Terminal (in foreground) atop a U.S. Embassy in Africa. (U.S. Department of State photo)



A security engineering officer (right) views the local Internet Protocol-CCTV system that DS augmented with thermal and low-light cameras to improve the organic coverage of an area in Africa. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A security engineering officer (left) optimizes the mesh network that supported the camera system during a major international summit. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A U.S. Navy Seabee cuts open a locked-out container outside a U.S. Embassy in the Caribbean. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A security engineering officer (right) works on a radio transmitter used to livestream video from security cameras, temporarily installed atop a building in downtown Manhattan during during a major event. (U.S. Department of State photo)

Working from the Dignitary Protection Operations Center, security engineering officers verify the operational status of security cameras temporarily installed throughout New York City for a major event. (U.S. Department of State photo)

A security technical specialist braves the snow to troubleshoot the power of the Internet Protocol-CCTV system at a U.S. Embassy in Europe. (U.S. Department of State photo)

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