

**Question for the Record submitted to
Deputy Assistant Secretary Todd Brown by
Chairman Paul Cook (#1 and 2)
House Foreign Affairs Committee,
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee
September 6, 2018**

Diplomatic Presence in Cuba

In response to threats to the health and safety of U.S. diplomats in Cuba, the Department of State curtailed operations at the U.S. Embassy in Cuba, ordered the departure of non-essential personnel assigned to the Embassy and family members, and issued travel warnings:

Question 1:

What is the current level of risk to the health and safety of U.S. diplomats in Cuba?

Answer 1:

The safety and security of U.S. government personnel is a top Department priority. There is an ongoing investigation into the cause and source of the health attacks against our personnel in Havana, Cuba. In May 2018, the Deputy Secretary of State established an interagency Health Incidents Response Task Force at the Secretary's direction. The Task Force meets regularly to coordinate the U.S. response to the health attacks in Cuba, including assessing and taking action on threat information.

Question 2:

What is the process for the Department to review staff reductions at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, and what conditions would be required to send more U.S. diplomats and reverse the decision to designate Havana as an unaccompanied post?

Answer 2:

The established Department process to manage personnel and family member accompaniment originates with a request from a diplomatic mission. U.S. Embassy Emergency Action Committees (EACs) are responsible for initiating discussions on increasing or decreasing existing staffing levels at our embassies, to include accompanying family members. This EAC process would also apply to a decision to return more U.S. diplomats and family members to Havana, with the Department's authorization. However, due to the complexities associated with the health attacks and the overall security environment in Cuba, a more thorough Department-wide review will ultimately be required to determine whether or not it is safe to increase our personnel in Havana. The decision to increase personnel in Havana will be made by senior Department leadership with input from Mission Cuba.

In addition to the regular EAC reporting and post-led decision-making process, the Department's complementary High Threat High Risk Post Review Process is applied to diplomatic posts that meet specific security related criteria, including those designated as "High Threat High Risk Posts" and diplomatic posts approved for authorized or ordered departure for security reasons for 90 or more days. Earlier this year, the Deputy Secretary approved a recommendation from the Senior Committee for Overseas Risk Evaluation, the group of senior Department leaders engaged in the High Threat High Risk Post Review Process, to maintain the current Department presence in Havana, Cuba.