SEC. ___. PROTECTION FOR CERTAIN SENSITIVE INFORMATION.

Section 130c(h)(1) of title 10, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph, consistent with section 552(b)(3) of Title 5:

"(D) The Secretary of State, with respect to information of concern to the Department of State, as determined by the Secretary.".

Section-by-Section Analysis

This provision would amend section 130c of title 10, United States Code, to give the Department of State (DOS) the same authority to protect unclassified information received in confidence from foreign governments that three other agencies now possess. The statute currently authorizes the Departments of Defense (DOD), Energy, and Homeland Security (for information in possession of the Coast Guard) to withhold certain sensitive, unclassified information provided to the USG by a foreign government or international organization on a non-public basis. The same reasons underlying the original enactment of 10 U.S.C. 130c support amending it to include DOS. More than any other agency, DOS handles information from foreign governments (for example, in the context of international negotiations) that, though not classified by the foreign government, has been passed to DOS with an expectation that the information will not be released to the public.

Currently, unless this information is subsequently classified under U.S. classification rules, DOS may not have the legal ability to comply with the foreign government's expectations regarding confidentiality. However, U.S. classification may not be substantively appropriate for the information in question, and the U.S. classification scheme triggers rigorous handling and dissemination requirements that may not be desirable or feasible for the information in question. This issue is of increasing importance in light of the passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and similar laws, which encourage/require federal agencies to share counter-terrorism information with state and local officials and to downgrade or declassify pertinent information where possible in order to facilitate sharing.

Changes to Existing Law: This proposal would make the following change to section 130c of title 10, United State Code (material to be added is shown in **boldface underline**):

§ 130c. Nondisclosure of information: certain sensitive information of foreign governments and international organizations

(a) EXEMPTION FROM DISCLOSURE.—The national security official concerned (as defined in subsection (h)) may withhold from public disclosure otherwise required by law sensitive information of foreign governments in accordance with this section.

(b) INFORMATION ELIGIBLE FOR EXEMPTION.—For the purposes of this section, information is sensitive information of a foreign government only if the national security official concerned makes each of the following determinations with respect to the information:

(1) That the information was provided by, otherwise made available by, or produced in cooperation with, a foreign government or international organization.

(2) That the foreign government or international organization is withholding the information from public disclosure (relying for that determination on the written representation of the foreign government or international organization to that effect).

(3) That any of the following conditions are met:

(A) The foreign government or international organization requests, in writing, that the information be withheld.

(B) The information was provided or made available to the United States Government on the condition that it not be released to the public.

(C) The information is an item of information, or is in a category of information, that the national security official concerned has specified in regulations prescribed under subsection (g) as being information the release of which would have an adverse effect on the ability of the United States Government to obtain the same or similar information in the future.

(c) INFORMATION OF OTHER AGENCIES.—If the national security official concerned provides to the head of another agency sensitive information of a foreign government, as determined by that national security official under subsection (b), and informs the head of the other agency of that determination, then the head of the other agency shall withhold the information from any public disclosure unless that national security official specifically authorizes the disclosure.

(d) LIMITATIONS.—

(1) If a request for disclosure covers any sensitive information of a foreign government (as described in subsection (b)) that came into the possession or under the control of the United States Government before October 30, 2000, and more than 25 years before the request is received by an agency, the information may be withheld only as set forth in paragraph (3).

(2)(A) If a request for disclosure covers any sensitive information of a foreign government (as described in subsection (b)) that came into the possession or under the control of the United States Government on or after the date referred to in paragraph (1), the authority to withhold the information under this section is subject to the provisions of subparagraphs (B) and (C).

(B) Information referred to in subparagraph (A) may not be withheld under this section after—

(i) the date that is specified by a foreign government or international organization in a request or expression of a condition described in paragraph (1) or (2) of subsection (b) that is made by the foreign government or international organization concerning the information; or

(ii) if there are more than one such foreign governments or international organizations, the latest date so specified by any of them.

(C) If no date is applicable under subparagraph (B) to a request referred to in subparagraph (A) and the information referred to in that subparagraph came into possession or under the control of the United States more than 10 years before the date on which the request is received by an agency, the information may be withheld under this section only as set forth in paragraph (3).

(3) Information referred to in paragraph (1) or (2)(C) may be withheld under this section in the case of a request for disclosure only if, upon the notification of each foreign government and international organization concerned in accordance with the regulations prescribed under subsection (g)(2), any such government or organization requests in writing that the information not be disclosed for an additional period stated in the request of that government or organization. After the national security official concerned considers the request of the foreign government or international organization, the official shall designate a later date as the date after which the information is not to be withheld under this section. The later date may be extended in accordance with a later request of any such foreign government or international organization under this paragraph.

(e) INFORMATION PROTECTED UNDER OTHER AUTHORITY.—This section does not apply to information or matters that are specifically required in the interest of national defense or foreign policy to be protected against unauthorized disclosure under criteria established by an Executive order and are classified, properly, at the confidential, secret, or top secret level pursuant to such Executive order.

(f) DISCLOSURES NOT AFFECTED.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize any official to withhold, or to authorize the withholding of, information from the following:

(1) Congress.

(2) The Comptroller General, unless the information relates to activities that the President designates as foreign intelligence or counterintelligence activities.

(g) REGULATIONS.—

(1) The national security officials referred to in subsection (h)(1) shall each prescribe regulations to carry out this section. The regulations shall include criteria for making the determinations required under subsection (b). The regulations may provide for controls on access to and use of, and special markings and specific safeguards for, a category or categories of information subject to this section.

(2) The regulations shall include procedures for notifying and consulting with each foreign government or international organization concerned about requests for disclosure of information to which this section applies.

(h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “national security official concerned” means the following:

(A) The Secretary of Defense, with respect to information of concern to the Department of Defense, as determined by the Secretary.

(B) The Secretary of Homeland Security, with respect to information of concern to the Coast Guard, as determined by the Secretary, but only while the Coast Guard is not operating as a service in the Navy.

(C) The Secretary of Energy, with respect to information concerning the national security programs of the Department of Energy, as determined by the Secretary.

(D) The Secretary of State, with respect to information of concern to the Department of State, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) The term "agency" has the meaning given that term in section 552(f) of title 5.

(3) The term "international organization" means the following:

(A) A public international organization designated pursuant to section 1 of the International Organizations Immunities Act (59 Stat. 669; 22 U.S.C. 288) as being entitled to enjoy the privileges, exemptions, and immunities provided in such Act.

(B) A public international organization created pursuant to a treaty or other international agreement as an instrument through or by which two or more foreign governments engage in some aspect of their conduct of international affairs.

(C) An official mission, except a United States mission, to a public international organization referred to in subparagraph (A) or (B).