



Highlights of [GAO-03-557T](#), testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Why GAO Did This Study

The 1998 terrorist bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed more than 220 people and injured 4,000, highlighted the compelling need for safe and secure overseas facilities. In November 1999, an independent advisory group, the Overseas Presence Advisory Panel, said that thousands of Americans representing our nation abroad faced an unacceptable level of risk from terrorist attacks and other threats. The panel called for accelerating the process of addressing security risks to provide overseas staff with the safest working environment, consistent with the nation's resources and the demands of their missions. Moreover, the panel concluded that many U.S. overseas facilities were insecure, decrepit, deteriorating, overcrowded, and "shockingly shabby," and it recommended major capital improvements to redress these problems.

GAO was asked to (1) assess the current conditions of overseas diplomatic facilities, including security, maintenance, office space, and information technology; and (2) provide some preliminary observations regarding State's efforts to improve facility conditions by replacing existing buildings with new, secure embassy compounds.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-557T.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128, or fordj@gao.gov.

OVERSEAS PRESENCE

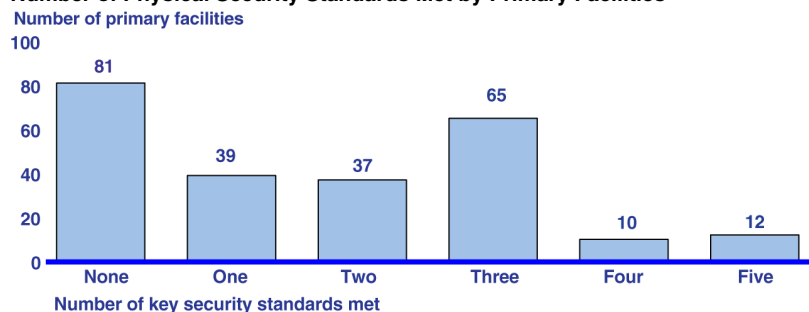
Conditions of Overseas Diplomatic Facilities

What GAO Found

The State Department has done much over the last 4 years to improve physical security at overseas posts. For example, State has constructed perimeter walls, anti-ram barriers, and access controls at many facilities. However, even with these improvements, most office facilities do not meet security standards. As of December 2002, the primary office building at 232 posts lacked desired security because it did not meet one or more of State's five key current security standards of (1) 100-foot setback between office facilities and uncontrolled areas; (2) perimeter walls and/or fencing; (3) anti-ram barriers; (4) blast-resistant construction techniques and materials; and (5) controlled access at the perimeter of the compound. Only 12 posts have a primary building that meets all five standards. As a result, thousands of U.S. government and foreign national employees may be vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Moreover, many of the primary office buildings at embassies and consulates are in poor condition. In fact, the primary office building at more than half of the posts does not meet certain fire/life safety standards. State estimates that there is a backlog of about \$730 million in maintenance at overseas facilities; officials stated that maintenance costs would increase over time because of the age of many buildings. At least 96 posts have reported serious overcrowding.

While State continues to fund some security upgrades at embassies and consulates, State is shifting its resources from these upgrades toward constructing new buildings and substantially retrofitting existing, newly acquired, or leased buildings. Funding for these capital projects has increased from \$9.5 million in fiscal year 1998 to a requested \$890 million in fiscal year 2004. In addition to completing ongoing construction projects, State believes it needs to replace facilities at about 160 posts at an estimated cost of \$16 billion. At the proposed fiscal year 2004 rate of funding, it will take more than 20 years to fully fund and build replacement facilities. While GAO has not fully analyzed State's performance in the early stages of this large-scale building program, GAO has observed that State has taken a number of positive steps to improve its program management. Because of the high costs and importance of this program, GAO believes the program merits extensive oversight.

Number of Physical Security Standards Met by Primary Facilities



Source: State Department.
Note: GAO analysis of data.