



Highlights of [GAO-05-688T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. government officials working overseas are at risk from terrorist threats. Since 1968, 32 embassy officials have been attacked—23 fatally—by terrorists outside the embassy. As the State Department continues to improve security at U.S. embassies, terrorist groups are likely to focus on “soft” targets—such as homes, schools, and places of worship.

GAO was asked to determine whether State has a strategy for soft target protection; assess State’s efforts to protect U.S. officials and their families while traveling to and from work; assess State’s efforts overseas to improve security at schools attended by the children of U.S. officials; and describe issues related to protection at their residences.

## What GAO Recommends

We are recommending that the Secretary of State develop a soft targets strategy; develop counterterrorism training for officials; and fully implement its personal security accountability system for embassy officials. State generally agreed with our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-688T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-688T).

To view the full product, 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](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

# OVERSEAS SECURITY

## State Department Has Not Fully Implemented Key Measures to Protect U.S. Officials from Terrorist Attacks Outside of Embassies

### What GAO Found

State has a number of programs and activities designed to protect U.S. officials and their families outside the embassy, including security briefings, protection at schools and residences, and surveillance detection. However, State has not developed a comprehensive strategy that clearly identifies safety and security requirements and resources needed to protect U.S. officials and their families abroad from terrorist threats outside the embassy. State officials raised a number of challenges related to developing and implementing such a strategy. They also indicated that they have recently initiated an effort to develop a soft targets strategy. As part of this effort, State officials said they will need to address and resolve a number of legal and financial issues.

Three State initiated investigations into terrorist attacks against U.S. officials outside of embassies found that the officials lacked the necessary hands-on training to help counter the attack. The investigations recommended that State provide hands-on counterterrorism training and implement accountability measures to ensure compliance with personal security procedures. After each of these investigations, State reported to Congress that it planned to implement the recommendations, yet we found that State’s hands-on training course is not required, the accountability procedures have not been effectively implemented, and key embassy officials are not trained to implement State’s counterterrorism procedures.

State instituted a program in 2003 to improve security at schools, but its scope has not yet been fully determined. In fiscal years 2003 and 2004, Congress earmarked \$29.8 million for State to address security vulnerabilities against soft targets, particularly at overseas schools. The multiphase program provides basic security hardware to protect U.S. officials and their families at schools and some off-compound employee association facilities from terrorist threats. However, during our visits to posts, regional security officers were unclear about which schools could qualify for security assistance under phase three of the program.

State’s program to protect U.S. officials and their families at their residences is primarily designed to deter crime, not terrorism. The Residential Security program includes basic security hardware and local guards, which State officials said provide effective deterrence against crime, though only limited deterrence against a terrorist attack. To minimize the risk and consequences of a residential terrorist attack, some posts we visited limited the number of U.S. officials living in specific apartment buildings. To provide greater protection against terrorist attacks, some posts we visited used surveillance detection teams in residential areas.