

Department of State



Highlights of [GAO-03-107](#), a report to Congress included as part of GAO's Performance and Accountability Series

Why GAO Did This Report

In its 2001 performance and accountability report on the Department of State, GAO identified important issues concerning the security of U.S. facilities and personnel overseas, visa issuance, illicit drugs entering the United States, information security, and other issues facing the department. The information GAO presents in this report is intended to sustain congressional attention and a departmental focus on continuing to make progress in addressing these challenges and ultimately overcoming them. This report is part of a special series of reports on governmentwide and agency-specific issues.

What Remains to Be Done

GAO believes that State should

- continue to improve security at overseas posts, primarily by replacing about 180 facilities where security is inadequate;
- strengthen the visa process by, among other things, developing clear guidance and policy;
- address staffing shortages at hardship posts; and
- continue to work on other challenges involving rightsizing the U.S. presence overseas, U.S. drug eradication assistance, financial management, information technology and performance planning.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-107.

To view the full report, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

In carrying out its missions of forming, representing, and implementing U.S. foreign policy, the State Department faces complex challenges, some of which have intensified since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. State has made progress in addressing its management challenges over the last 2 years, but further improvements are needed in the following areas:

- **Improving the security and maintenance of U.S. facilities overseas.** State has enhanced security at existing facilities but needs to continue to replace many embassies and consulates that are not set back far enough from busy city streets and/or are not sufficiently blast resistant.
- **Strengthening the visa process as an antiterrorism tool.** Visa policy and procedures are inconsistent among overseas consular posts, and staff at many posts are inadequately trained. Eliminating the Visa Waiver Program could require increased overseas staffing and facilities.
- **Continuing to rightsize embassy staffing levels.** Assessing staffing needs is essential for State to ensure the security and effectiveness of overseas missions and determine the appropriate size and cost of new facilities. To help achieve a rightsized overseas presence, State and the Office of Management and Budget are using a framework proposed by GAO that addresses the mission, security, and costs of overseas posts as well as staffing alternatives.
- **Better managing human capital.** Although State has made progress in recruiting new hires, providing leadership and management skills training, planning its workforce needs, correcting foreign language shortfalls, and staffing hardship posts, further improvements are needed.
- **Help to reduce illegal drugs entering the United States.** Despite arrests of drug traffickers and seizures of large amounts of drugs, the availability of illicit drugs in the United States has not been materially reduced.
- **Addressing additional challenges to building a high-performing organization.** State has worked to enhance information technology and security, strengthen financial management, and improve performance planning. However, challenges remain.



Source: Department of State.

The U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, after the 1998 bombing