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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-162](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Following the 1998 embassy bombings, the Department of State (State) determined that more than 85 percent of diplomatic facilities did not meet security standards and were vulnerable to terrorist attacks. State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has undertaken a program to replace or upgrade the security of these facilities. As of 2007, OBO had constructed more than 50 new embassies and moved nearly 15,000 staff to safer facilities. However, most remaining facilities will not be replaced in the near term. To address these facilities, OBO has obligated about \$140 million per year for its Compound Security Upgrade Program (CSUP).

GAO was asked to (1) describe the process that OBO follows to prioritize and plan CSUP projects, including stakeholder involvement; (2) determine the extent to which CSUP projects met contracted cost and time frames and whether OBO has procedures to ensure security upgrades are installed; and (3) assess whether State's CSUP efforts have enhanced posts' abilities to comply with State's physical security standards. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed pertinent State documents, met with State officials in Washington, D.C., and overseas, and traveled to 11 posts in Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East.

State provided written comments on a draft of this report and agreed with our findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-162](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

EMBASSY SECURITY

Upgrades Have Enhanced Security, but Site Conditions Prevent Full Adherence to Standards

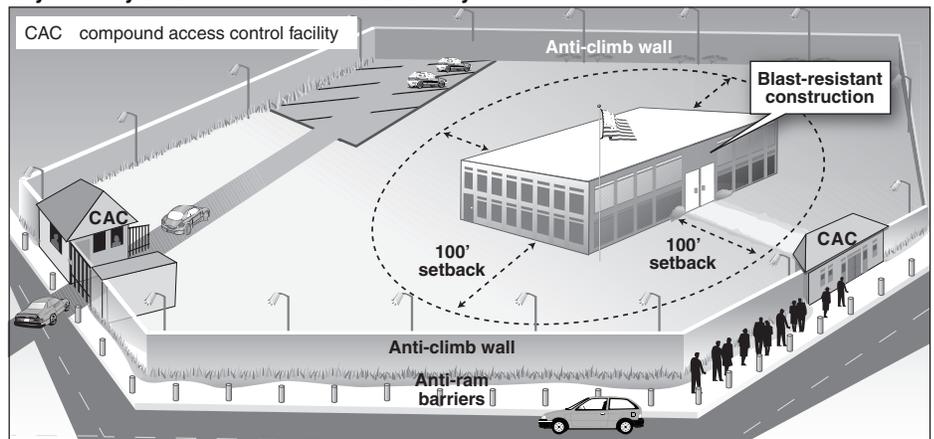
What GAO Found

OBO has a threat- and vulnerability-based process for prioritizing which posts receive CSUP projects and a planning process that utilizes input from State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) and post officials. DS assessments are currently based on physical security of each post's main compound, although many posts have facilities located outside the compound. DS is developing a prioritization process that will factor in the number of personnel, threat levels, and vulnerabilities at each facility, including those off compound. OBO has improved its planning processes by conducting a comprehensive survey of posts' physical security needs, including off-compound facilities.

GAO found that 96 percent of 47 projects undertaken since fiscal year 2004 were completed within 30 days of their contractual completion date. However, OBO modified 81 percent of the contracts to extend their completion dates. GAO also found that while OBO paid the contractors the amount specified in the contracts, contract modifications resulted in cost adjustments to all but two contracts, which GAO found in prior work is not uncommon in government renovation projects. OBO cited factors outside the contractors' control as the cause of most delays and cost increases, such as lengthy local permitting issues. To help ensure security upgrades contracted for are completed, OBO assigns a project manager who is responsible for the project's completion and relies on regional and post officials to provide additional monitoring.

CSUP projects have enhanced posts' compliance with physical security standards by constructing compound access control facilities, safe areas for post personnel, and compound walls and barriers. However, at the 11 posts GAO visited, site conditions prevented them from adhering fully with standards. For example, more than one post's urban location prevented it from achieving a 100-foot setback from the street, a key security standard. As a result, many buildings and their occupants may remain vulnerable to attack.

Key Security Measures at a Notional Embassy



Sources: GAO (data); Nova Development (clip art).