

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 2:30 p.m. EDT
Wednesday, June 29, 2011

DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

**Expanded Missions and
Inadequate Facilities Pose
Critical Challenges to
Training Efforts**

Statement of Jess T. Ford, Director
International Affairs and Trade



G A O

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the training efforts of the U.S. Department of State's (State) Bureau of Diplomatic Security (Diplomatic Security). My testimony is based on our report, which is being released today.¹ Diplomatic Security is responsible for the protection of people, information, and property at over 400 embassies, consulates, and domestic locations and, as we reported in previous testimony, experienced a large growth in its budget and personnel over the last decade.² Diplomatic Security trains its workforce and others to address a variety of threats, including crime, espionage, visa and passport fraud, technological intrusions, political violence, and terrorism. To meet its training needs, Diplomatic Security relies primarily on its Diplomatic Security Training Center (DSTC), which is an office of Diplomatic Security's Training Directorate and is the primary provider of Diplomatic Security training. Diplomatic Security's training budget grew steadily from fiscal years 2006 to 2010—increasing from approximately \$24 million in fiscal year 2006 to nearly \$70 million in fiscal year 2010. In fiscal year 2010, DSTC conducted 342 sessions of its 61 courses and trained 4,739 students.

Our prior work identified the challenges that Diplomatic Security experienced as a result of growth stemming from the reaction to a number of security incidents.³ GAO found that State is maintaining a presence in an increasing number of dangerous posts, is facing staffing shortages and other operational challenges that tax Diplomatic Security's ability to implement all of its missions and has not provided Diplomatic Security with adequate strategic guidance.

Today I will discuss (1) how Diplomatic Security ensures the quality and appropriateness of its training and the extent to which Diplomatic Security ensures that training requirements are being met, and (2) challenges that Diplomatic Security faces in carrying out its training mission.

¹GAO, *Diplomatic Security: Expanded Missions and Inadequate Facilities Pose Critical Challenges to Training Efforts*, [GAO-11-460](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1, 2011).

²GAO, *Department of State: Challenges Facing the Bureau of Diplomatic Security*, [GAO-10-290T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 9, 2009).

³GAO, *Department of State: Diplomatic Security's Recent Growth Warrants Strategic Review*, [GAO-10-156](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 12, 2009).

To address these objectives in our report, we interviewed numerous State and Diplomatic Security officials at headquarters, several training facilities, and five overseas posts, as well as officials at other relevant agencies. We reviewed and analyzed government standards and other legislative and regulatory guidance, data and documentation related to Diplomatic Security-provided training efforts, information and data on recent DSTC and other Diplomatic Security-provided course offerings, and overall funding for training from 2006 to 2011. We also observed classroom- and exercise-based training at several Diplomatic Security training facilities and viewed examples of other types of DSTC-provided learning. Because we recently reviewed training provided by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), this report did not include an assessment of the training that Diplomatic Security personnel received through FSI.⁴ We conducted this performance audit from June 2010 to May 2011, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. More information on our scope and methodology and detailed findings are available in the full report.⁵

In brief, DSTC has had to meet the challenge of training more personnel to perform additional duties while still getting Diplomatic Security's agents, engineers, technicians, and other staff—as well as a growing number of personnel outside of its workforce—into the field, where they are needed. DSTC has largely met this challenge by maintaining high standards for its training. Specifically, DSTC incorporated Federal Law Enforcement Training Accreditation (FLETA) standards into its operating procedures and became the first federal law enforcement agency to receive accreditation. Certain issues, however, constrain the effectiveness of DSTC's systems. DSTC lacks the systems needed to evaluate the effectiveness of some required training despite its own standards to do so, and its systems do not accurately and adequately track the use of some of its training. More importantly, we identified three key challenges that DSTC faces: an increasing number of training missions in Iraq, a potential

⁴GAO, *Department of State: Additional Steps Are Needed to Improve Strategic Planning and Evaluation of Training for State Personnel*, [GAO-11-241](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 25, 2011).

⁵[GAO-11-460](#).

increase in the number of students it has to train, and inadequate training facilities.

Diplomatic Security Generally Adheres to Standards and Tracks Training, but Its Systems Have Weaknesses

To ensure the quality and appropriateness of its training, Diplomatic Security primarily adheres to FLETA standards. Diplomatic Security incorporated FLETA standards into its standard operating procedures, using a course design framework tailored for DSTC. In our report, we used the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) course to demonstrate how DSTC modified the design of one of its courses over time. The FACT course provides mandatory training on conducting surveillance detection, aspects of personnel recovery, emergency medical care, improvised explosive device awareness, firearms familiarization, and defensive/counterterrorist driving maneuvers to all U.S. government employees serving under chief of mission authority in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, and parts of Mexico. Since 2003, FACT has been redesigned and modified several times in response to changing high-threat environments. For instance, a 2005 State Office of Inspector General report noted that U.S. government personnel were not expected to drive themselves in Iraq but regularly did so. As a result, DSTC added driving skills to the FACT course. In 2009, because of indirect fire attacks, the Ambassador to Iraq noted that personnel needed to know what the sirens announcing a rocket attack sounded like and what the protective bunkers looked like. In response, DSTC built two bunkers on one of its leased facilities and now uses them in conducting duck-and-cover exercises to recorded sirens. DSTC officials noted that FACT is very well received by the students, and one State official stated that the reason she survived a bombing attack was because of her FACT training.

Diplomatic Security does have some weaknesses when it comes to evaluating all of its training population and tracking the training to ensure that training requirements are met. Distributed or online training is a growing part of DSTC efforts to save costs and reach people in the field. However, DSTC's systems do not have the capability to obtain feedback on its online training. DSTC officials also stated that DSTC has difficulty obtaining feedback from non-State personnel, a growing portion of its student body. DSTC instead relies on voluntary comments from the agencies or individual students from those agencies. Without feedback, DSTC is less able to ensure the effectiveness of these efforts.

DSTC's systems also do not have the capability to track whether personnel have completed all required training. For example, DSTC officials are using an unofficial method to track completion of FACT training; called

the FACT tracker, it is used on DSTC's internal web site to log in all personnel who take the class, including non-State students. Additionally, agents are required to pass a firearms requalification every 4 months when they are posted domestically and once a year if posted overseas. However, DSTC systems do not effectively track this requirement, and it is the agents' and supervisors' responsibility to keep track of when their next requalification is due. Moreover, DSTC systems are not designed to track training delivered through distributed or online training or keep records of participation or performance. For example, DSTC provides "Knowledge from the Field" DVDs—information and professional development products that include lessons learned from attacks and other incidents at consulates and embassies. However, DSTC cannot say for certain which of its personnel have accessed the training.

DSTC officials noted that they are pursuing access to a more robust learning management system to address some of the difficulties with their existing systems. According to State officials, DSTC and FSI are currently discussing whether DSTC will be able to use or modify FSI's learning management system for DSTC's purposes.

Diplomatic Security Faces Significant Challenges to Carrying Out Its Expanded Training Mission

Diplomatic Security faces significant ongoing challenges to carrying out its training mission, including (1) an increasing number of training missions in Iraq, (2) a potential increase in the number of students it has to train, and (3) inadequate training facilities.

Expanding Missions in Iraq Challenge DSTC's Ability to Meet Training Needs

DSTC must train Diplomatic Security personnel to perform new missions in Iraq as they take on many of the protective and security functions previously provided by the U.S. military and which Diplomatic Security has had little or no experience in providing, including downed aircraft recovery, explosives ordnance disposal, and rocket and mortar countermeasures, among others. DSTC officials pointed to a number of coordination mechanisms and other efforts to meet new training needs. For example, as of March 2011, DSTC, in coordination with the Diplomatic Security Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) armored vehicles working group, had completed the design and development of an MRAP training course. However, Diplomatic Security officials noted that the

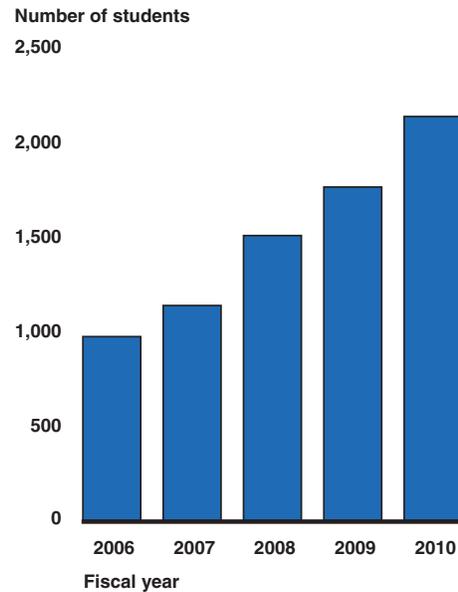
additional training will likely increase the time needed to get Diplomatic Security personnel into the field.

Proposed Increase in Number of Students Requiring Training May Further Strain DSTC Resources

DSTC faces a proposal that will dramatically increase the number of State and non-State personnel required to take high-threat training (see fig. 1), including FACT training, but State does not have an action plan and time frames to manage the proposed increases. These expanded training missions constrain DSTC's ability to meet training needs. State's 2010 *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (QDDR) stated that all personnel at high-threat posts, as well as those at critical-threat posts, will now receive FACT training.⁶ According to Diplomatic Security officials, this would increase the number of posts for which FACT is required from 23 to 178, increasing the number of students taking FACT each year from about 2,000 to over 10,000. DSTC officials noted that they lack the capacity to handle so many students and that current FACT classes are already filled to capacity. DSTC would need to locate or build additional driving tracks, firearms ranges, and explosives ranges, as well as obtain instructors and other staff to support such a dramatic increase in students. According to Diplomatic Security officials, State has not completed an action plan or established time frames to carry out the QDDR recommendation. Given these difficulties, Diplomatic Security officials noted that they did not see how the new requirement could be implemented.

⁶Department of State, *Leading through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (2010).

Figure 1: Increase in DSTC-Provided High-Threat Training from 2006 to 2010



Source: GAO analysis of DSTC data.

Existing Facilities Hamper Training Efforts and Strain Resources

In addition, DSTC's training facilities do not meet its training needs, a situation that hampers efficient and effective operations. Diplomatic Security leases, rents, or borrows all of the 16 facilities it uses, and the number of facilities in use at any given time and how they are used vary based on training requirements and facility availability. For example, Diplomatic Security uses the firearms ranges at Marine Corps Base Quantico to train with heavier weapons. However, according to Diplomatic Security officials, the Marines occasionally force Diplomatic Security to change its training schedule, sometimes with minimal notice, which increases costs and makes it difficult for DSTC staff to meet training objectives within the time available.

Several leased facilities, such as State Annex-7, are overcrowded and need various repairs, in part because of disputes between Diplomatic Security and its lessor over which party is responsible for structural repairs (see fig. 2). DSTC's main firearms ranges are in these buildings, but according to DSTC officials, the ranges are small and have some unusable firing lanes. In addition, because of the limitations of its facilities, Diplomatic Security has had to improvise with makeshift solutions to provide some types of training—for example, placing tape on the floors of its garage at

State Annex-11 to simulate walls for conducting room-entry training (see fig. 3).

Figure 2: Disrepair and Crowding at State Annex-7



Source: GAO.

Figure 3: Simulated Tape Walls Used in Training



Source: GAO.

Recognizing that its existing facilities were inadequate, DSTC developed an Interim Training Facility in 2007. Nevertheless, Diplomatic Security officials noted that the facility is a stopgap solution and cannot meet a number of Diplomatic Security's training needs such as the firing of heavier weapons, the use of more powerful explosives to train agents in incident management, and the integrated tactical use of driving and firearms training in a mock urban environment. The Interim Training Facility also lacks space for Diplomatic Security to train its personnel for many of the additional missions that they are expected to take over from the U.S. military in Iraq. In order address its inadequate facilities, State has been pursuing the development of a consolidated training facility. State was allocated \$136 million in fiscal years 2009 and 2010 to begin development of the facility and is currently in the process of identifying a suitable location.

Recommendations for Executive Action

Our report being released today includes three recommendations for the Secretary of State, the first two of which are to develop or improve the processes to obtain participant evaluations for all of DSTC required training, including distributed training efforts, and to track individual DSTC training requirements and completion of DSTC training. We also recommend that the Secretary develop an action plan and associated time frames needed to carry out the QDDR recommendation to increase the number of posts at which FACT is required. State agreed with our findings and recommendations. In addition, we found that State had not followed through on its commitment to carry out a strategic review of Diplomatic Security as recommended in our 2009 report.⁷ Given the restrained fiscal environment and growing mission in Iraq, it is even more critical today that State carry out such a review.

Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Johnson, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions regarding this testimony, please contact Jess. T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov. Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this testimony. GAO staff who made significant contributions to this testimony are Anthony Moran, Assistant Director; Thomas Costa; Anh Nguyen; David Dayton; Cheron Green; and Mark Speight.

⁷[GAO-10-156](#).

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through GAO's Web site (www.gao.gov). Each weekday afternoon, GAO posts on its Web site newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence. To have GAO e-mail you a list of newly posted products, go to www.gao.gov and select "E-mail Updates."

Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's Web site, <http://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm>.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Web site: www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm

E-mail: fraudnet@gao.gov

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

Congressional Relations

Ralph Dawn, Managing Director, dawnr@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548

