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International Operations, and Bilateral
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DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

Options for Locating a Consolidated Training Facility

Statement of Michael J. Courts, Director,
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Accessible Version

Chairman Perdue, Ranking Member Kaine, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work on the Department of State (State) Bureau of Diplomatic Security's (DS) efforts to locate a consolidated training facility. State has been in the process of looking for a site suitable for its DS training facility for more than a decade. In 2011, we reported that the lack of a consolidated training facility was a significant challenge to carrying out DS's mission.¹ DS currently provides training at 12 contracted and leased sites in seven states, which DS officials believe is inefficient and more costly than a consolidated facility would be.

In 2011, State and the General Services Administration (GSA) identified Fort Pickett near Blackstone, Virginia, as the preferred site for a DS training facility, known as the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC). The initial 2012 master plan for FASTC would have consolidated training in hard skills (e.g., firearms, driving, and explosives) and soft skills (e.g., classroom-based training in counterintelligence, cybersecurity, and law) at Fort Pickett for an estimated cost of \$925 million. In 2013, State reduced the scope of FASTC to exclude facilities for soft-skills training and life support functions, such as dormitories and a cafeteria, ultimately decreasing the estimated cost of the current proposal to \$413 million. Also in 2013, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed State to work with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to assess the viability of using the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia, to accommodate DS's training. In November 2013, FLETC submitted a business case to OMB indicating that it could meet DS's requirements, including soft-skills training, for an estimated cost of \$272 million. Following this assessment, DS, FLETC, and OMB could not agree on a path forward.

Ultimately, OMB deferred to State on the decision of where to locate its training facility. In April 2014, the Administration reaffirmed the selection of Fort Pickett for FASTC. To date, State and GSA have obligated about \$71 million of the estimated \$413 million in capital costs toward FASTC at Fort Pickett, including for the purchase of land in May 2015.

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

My testimony summarizes our September 2015 report on the FASTC and FLETC proposals for accommodating DS training.² Like that report, this testimony discusses (1) key site requirements critical to providing DS training and the extent to which the FASTC and FLETC proposals meet these requirements and (2) the estimated capital and recurring costs of these proposals and the extent to which the capital cost estimates conform to leading practices for reliable cost estimates.

For our September 2015 report, we reviewed documents on the requirements for DS's training facility and proposals to meet these requirements from State, DHS, and GSA. We also reviewed the Benghazi Accountability Review Board (ARB) report and reports by two panels established as a result of recommendations by the ARB, including the Independent Panel on Best Practices. We conducted site visits to Fort Pickett, FLETC, and three of DS's current training venues, interviewed officials at State, FLETC, GSA, and OMB about the proposals, and spoke with officials from agencies that DS identified as its training partners, including the Marine Security Guards, Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Central Intelligence Agency. We focused on four requirements of the center that our analysis indicated were critical to providing basic and advanced DS training courses. While we assessed the need for these site requirements to accommodate DS's existing and planned training, we did not assess whether specific DS training courses are necessary to accomplish DS's mission of providing a safe and secure environment for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. We did, however, confirm that DS currently conducts and plans to continue to conduct training that includes elements such as nighttime training, long-range firearms, and heavy explosives. We identified the number of courses and students that use these elements, as well as the projected number of such courses at the future training center. We observed a training exercise that involved several of these elements. We also asked DS officials to explain why the elements were necessary and, to the extent possible, reviewed actual examples of incidents overseas that supported DS's identified need for specific training elements. In some cases, we discussed these elements with DS's identified training partners as well as with FLETC.

²GAO, *Diplomatic Security: Options for Locating a Consolidated Training Facility*, [GAO-15-808R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 9, 2015).

To assess the cost estimates for each proposal, we reviewed the September 2014 capital cost estimate for FASTC and the November 2013 capital cost estimate for FLETC. We evaluated whether each cost estimate was generated according to best practices outlined in GAO's *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide*.³ We reviewed data provided by State, GSA, and FLETC regarding their cost estimation practices. We also interviewed State, GSA, FLETC, and contractor staff responsible for preparing the FASTC and FLETC cost estimates. We reviewed cost data provided by State, FLETC, and GSA to determine the recurring operations and maintenance, recapitalization investment, and staffing and associated costs for each proposal. We also developed three scenarios to estimate the costs of sending students to each location, including costs for travel, lodging, meals and incidental expenses, and compensatory time for travel. We discussed assumptions regarding these costs with State, FLETC, and OMB officials and subsequently developed our own assumptions using several data sources. We provided our assumptions to State and FLETC for review and confirmation, and we revised our assumptions based on their comments where appropriate. Additional details on our scope and methodology can be found in our September 2015 report.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based 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.

Background

DS currently provides training in hard skills to a diverse student population. DS provides security familiarization training for Foreign Service and other civilian personnel and their families. It also provides advanced courses for DS agents, such as the High Threat Operations Course, an intensive 10-week course designed to provide agents with specialized training in a variety of tasks, including leadership, weapons, small unit tactics, air operations, and movement security procedures

³GAO, *GAO Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Developing and Managing Capital Program Costs*, [GAO-09-3SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 2009).

needed to operate in high-threat, high-risk posts. In addition, through the Antiterrorism Assistance program, DS provides training to foreign security personnel in areas such as crisis response, explosive incident countermeasures, post-blast investigations, and armored vehicle driving. DS has expanded its training over the last decade, and following the 2012 attack on the U.S. Special Mission compound in Benghazi, Libya, the independent ARB recommended further security training for DS agents and all other Foreign Service personnel.

In June 2015, DS projected that it would train nearly 6,300 students in hard skills in fiscal year 2015, compared to 3,500 students in 2007. DS estimates that it will provide more than 9,000 students with over 20,000 weeks of training per year once its training facility is fully operational.

Fort Pickett Fully Meets DS's Requirements While FLETC Does Not

For our September 2015 report, we analyzed four of DS's requirements that we determined were critical in the selection of a site for DS's training facility and found that Fort Pickett fully met all four while FLETC did not fully meet any.

- **Consolidation.** Building FASTC at Fort Pickett would enable DS to consolidate at one location 10 of the 12 widely scattered hard-skills training venues it is currently using.⁴ FLETC can accommodate many of these venues on its Glynco campus but would have to conduct some exercises, such as training in long-range weapons and heavy explosives, as well as some nighttime exercises, at the Townsend Bombing Range, a Marine Corps training facility about 30 miles from Glynco. FLETC did not include costs for using this facility in its 2013 proposal.
- **Proximity to Washington, D.C.** The Independent Panel on Best Practices, established as a result of the Benghazi ARB, recommended a consolidated training center, located in proximity to State's Washington, D.C., headquarters, given State's reliance on military units and other government agencies located nearby. Fort Pickett is located about 160 miles from Washington, D.C., or nearly 3

⁴State indicated that DS would continue to use a FLETC facility in Cheltenham, Maryland, for weapons requalifications for agents assigned to the Washington, D.C., area. In addition, State officials said that they will continue to use the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' National Canine Center in Front Royal, Virginia, for canine training.

hours by car one way, compared to FLETC, which is approximately 640 miles from Washington, D.C., or 5 to 6 hours by airplane one way. Over 90 partner organizations conduct training at FLETC; however, DS's primary training partners, including the Marine Corps' Security Augmentation Unit and its Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team, are based in Virginia, and an official responsible for Marine Security Guard training told us that the cost of transporting personnel and equipment to and from FLETC would be prohibitive.

- **Exclusivity of use.** The Independent Panel on Best Practices "strongly endorsed" State's efforts to develop a training facility that it could control, noting that agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, and the Drug Enforcement Administration have adopted such a policy as a best practice. At Fort Pickett, DS would control its training venues and have the flexibility to implement scheduling changes to respond to rapidly evolving security situations overseas. FLETC stated that DS would be assured of priority scheduling, but not exclusive use, for those facilities that would be built for DS and provided a detailed plan showing the facilities currently available and those that would be constructed for DS. FLETC officials stated that when DS was not using facilities prioritized for its use, other federal, state, and local agencies would be allowed to train at and benefit from the facilities.
- **24/7 availability.** DS conducts training during hours of darkness on about 190 days per year, including 140 nights that involve loud noises such as gunfire and small explosions. We found that Fort Pickett, which covers about 42,000 acres and is set in a rural area, is available for nighttime training. FLETC, which is adjacent to the town of Brunswick, Georgia, does not conduct certain types of training at night, and FLETC officials told us that exercises there currently end by 10:00 p.m. According to FLETC officials, DS could conduct such nighttime exercises at the Townsend Bombing Range.

Capital Cost Estimates for the FASTC and FLETC Proposals Are Unreliable

In our September 2015 report, we found that neither the FASTC nor the FLETC estimate for capital costs fully meets best practices for reliable cost estimates. The FASTC estimate fully or substantially meets three of the four characteristics⁵—comprehensive, well documented, and accurate—and partially meets one characteristic of reliable cost estimates—credible;⁶ the FLETC estimate partially or minimally meets all four characteristics (see table 1).⁷ FLETC officials noted that their estimate was prepared in a short period of time based on incomplete information regarding State’s requirements; more complete information would have enabled them to develop a more comprehensive estimate. Our assessment of the reliability of these cost estimates focused on the processes used to develop the estimates rather than estimates themselves, enabling us to make a more direct comparison of their reliability.⁸

⁵The four characteristics are defined as follows: (1) comprehensive—the cost estimate should include both government and contractor costs of the program over its full life cycle; (2) well documented—a good cost estimate, while taking the form of a single number, is supported by detailed documentation that describes how it was derived; (3) accurate—the cost estimate should provide for results that are unbiased, and it should not be overly conservative or optimistic; and (4) credible—the cost estimate should discuss any limitations of the analysis because of uncertainty or biases surrounding data or assumptions.

⁶“Minimally met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies a small portion of the criterion. “Partially met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies about half of the criterion. “Substantially met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies a large portion of the criterion. “Fully met” means that the agency provided complete evidence that satisfies the entire criterion.

⁷Specifically, the FLETC cost estimate partially meets three characteristics—comprehensive, well documented, and accurate—and minimally meets one characteristic—credible.

⁸More detail on our assessment of each cost estimate is provided in encl. V of [GAO-15-808R](#).

Table 1: Extent to Which the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC) and Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) Acquisition and Construction Cost Estimates Meet the Characteristics of Reliable Cost Estimates

Characteristic	FASTC	FLETC
Comprehensive	Fully met	Partially met
Well documented	Substantially met	Partially met
Accurate	Substantially met	Partially met
Credible	Partially met	Minimally met

Source: GAO analysis of data provided by the Department of State, FLETC, and General Services Administration. | GAO-16-139T

Notes: “Minimally met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies a small portion of the criterion. “Partially met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies about half of the criterion. “Substantially met” means that the agency provided evidence that satisfies a large portion of the criterion. “Fully met” means that the agency provided complete evidence that satisfies the entire criterion.

In September 2014, State and GSA estimated that acquisition and construction costs for the reduced-scope plan for FASTC would be \$413 million. FLETC’s November 2013 proposal included a cost estimate comparable to the full-scope plan for FASTC; however, FLETC officials said that because they did not have complete information regarding the reduced-scope plan for FASTC, they were unable to develop a comparable cost estimate. For example, these officials said that State did not tell them which venues had been removed from the plan and that they were unaware of some of DS’s training exercises. These officials said that they subtracted the costs of some facilities from the FLETC full-scope estimate to arrive at a reduced-scope estimate of \$243 million. FLETC has not refined its cost estimate since OMB notified it that the administration had selected the FASTC proposal in April 2014.

In addition to capital costs for acquisition and construction of a DS training center, the analysis in our September 2015 report included projections for recurring costs for operations and maintenance (O&M) and for recapitalization investment—the costs of replacing broken systems and equipment.⁹ Our analysis also included recurring staffing and associated costs for each proposal. Using data provided by State, GSA, and FLETC, we projected these costs over 10, 25, and 50 years. We projected the capital and recurring O&M, recapitalization investment, and

⁹Because these recurring costs are based on capital costs that we determined were unreliable, these projections may also be unreliable. Thus, such projections should be used with caution.

staffing costs to be \$201 million more, in net present value, for FASTC over 10 years, \$266 million more for FASTC over 25 years, and \$372 million more for FASTC over 50 years (see table 2).¹⁰

Table 2: Projected Capital, Operations and Maintenance, Recapitalization Investment, and Staffing Costs over 10, 25, and 50 Years for the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC) and Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)

	FASTC	FLETC	Difference
Costs over 10 years	\$1.067 billion	\$866 million	\$201 million
Costs over 25 years	\$2.177 billion	\$1.911 billion	\$266 million
Costs over 50 years	\$4.090 billion	\$3.719 billion	\$372 million

Source: GAO analysis of data provided by the Department of State, FLETC, and General Services Administration. | GAO-16-139T

Notes: Costs shown in net present value. Figures are rounded.

Finally, the government is expected to incur costs of sending students to training. These recurring student costs include travel, lodging, meals and incidental expenses, and compensation for time spent traveling. We projected these costs over 10, 25, and 50 years in three different scenarios for both the FASTC and FLETC proposals. We estimated that the costs of sending students to FASTC over 10 years would be \$43 million to \$121 million less, in net present value, than sending students to FLETC. The difference in student costs between FASTC and FLETC increases over time, from between \$122 million and \$323 million less for FASTC after 25 years, to between \$309 and \$736 million after 50 years (see table 3).¹¹

¹⁰Net present value shows, in today's dollars, the relative net cash flow of various alternatives over a long period of time.

¹¹We determined that these data were reliable for the purposes of developing a range of estimates of student costs. More details on our scope and methodology, including the assumptions we used in each of these scenarios, are provided in encl. III of [GAO-15-808R](#).

Table 3: GAO’s Estimates of Recurring Student Costs over 10, 25, and 50 Years for the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC) and Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)

		FASTC	FLETC	Difference
Costs over 10 years	Low scenario	\$184 million	\$227 million	\$43 million
	Mid scenario	\$189 million	\$260 million	\$71 million
	High scenario	\$200 million	\$322 million	\$121 million
Costs over 25 years	Low scenario	\$463 million	\$585 million	\$122 million
	Mid scenario	\$470 million	\$670 million	\$200 million
	High scenario	\$504 million	\$828 million	\$323 million
Costs over 50 years	Low scenario	\$942 million	\$1.3 billion	\$309 million
	Mid scenario	\$954 million	\$1.4 billion	\$471 million
	High scenario	\$1.0 billion	\$1.8 billion	\$736 million

Source: GAO analysis of data provided by the Department of State, FLETC, and General Services Administration. | GAO-16-139T

Notes: Costs shown in net present value. Figures are rounded.

Chairman Perdue, Ranking Member Kaine, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact Michael J. Courts, Director, International Affairs and Trade, at (202) 512-8980 or courtsm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this testimony are Thomas Costa (Assistant Director), Robert Ball (Analyst-in-Charge), Brian Bothwell, Juaná Collymore, David Dayton, Grace Lui, Manuel Valverde, and Nancy Zearfoss.

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