House Appropriations Subcommittee
On State/Foreign Operations
February 14, 2013
Hearing on Embassy Security

Good morning Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for your invitation to appear today to discuss embassy security and, Madame Chairwoman, for your letter of February 5 on that subject.

Today, I will address how embassy security has been implemented since the Tanzania/Kenya bombings in 1998, and steps we are taking now to further improve our security.

The State Department maintains a robust presence around the world -- at 283 locations, many in challenging security environments where vital U.S. national security interests are at stake. We work every day to protect our people and our missions, by constantly assessing our security posture in view of rapidly changing operating environments and the threats they present.

While the 1998 bombings in East Africa were a watershed moment in embassy security, violence against our embassies goes back many years, particularly by those who dislike the policies and actions of the United States. For example, in 1920, two anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were tried, found guilty, and condemned to death for robbery and murder at a shoe factory in Massachusetts. A fervent supporter of Sacco and Vanzetti, who lived in Argentina, bombed the American embassy in Buenos Aires a few hours after the verdict.

Fifty-five years ago, on January 27, 1958, the U.S. Embassy in Ankara was attacked a few days before then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was set to visit. As

you know, our embassy in Ankara was attacked by a suicide bomber just 2 weeks ago on February 1.

I want to assure you that we are never resigned to such attacks. Each incident is painful for us as individuals, as an institution, and for the United States. From demonstrators, to terrorists with car bombs, to lone actors with malicious intent, we know we must remain vigilant against threats.

The Department has two primary embassy security programs – physical security and construction of our facilities carried out by the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, or OBO, and the security programs implemented by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, or DS.

OBO's highest priority is moving U.S. Government personnel overseas into safe and secure facilities. Since the 1999 enactment of the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act, or SECCA, the Department has completed 97 new secure, safe, and functional diplomatic facilities and has an additional 37 projects in design or construction. As your letter notes, Madame Chairwoman, this Committee, under your and Chairman Rogers' leadership and with the support of the entire membership, has appropriated about $10 billion for this effort; this support started under the direction of past Chairs, Ms. Lowey and Mr. Wolf. We could not have done this without all of your support, and I thank you.

Of the 97 completed projects, 70 were full replacements for an embassy or consulate facility, while others included construction of Marine Security Guard Quarters, office annexes and other functional buildings. These new facilities provide a safe and secure work environment for over 27,000 U.S. Government employees.

All of these buildings were constructed to security standards in effect at the time of construction. Security standards are continually reviewed and revised, and new buildings are designed and constructed to the most current standards. In those instances where standards have been increased to meet emergency threats, we go back and assess previously constructed buildings and prioritize projects to bring buildings up to the most current standards.

Prior to SECCA, the Department completed 19 Inman projects and 8 Pre-Inman projects that incorporated the new standards to the extent possible. With our completed Inman and post-SECCA construction, there remain approximately 158 posts that have facilities that may not fully meet current security standards. Many of these facilities were built or acquired prior to the establishment of the current security standards, and others are subject to authorized waivers and/or exceptions.

Each year, DS ranks all posts worldwide according to their security vulnerability and OBO uses this list to develop its top 80 Posts for the Department's Capital Security Construction Program. These posts span all regions of the world. Replacement of these most vulnerable facilities is an ongoing effort.

Our construction program has saved lives. Last September, we also saw violent attacks on our embassies in Cairo, Sanaa, Tunis, and Khartoum, as well as large protests outside many other posts where thousands of our diplomats serve.

Our posts in Cairo and Sanaa were completed during the Inman building phase between 1986 and 1998, while Embassy Tunis was completed in November 2002 and Embassy Khartoum in March 2010, both post-SECCA. All of these facilities ably withstood attack. The perimeter walls and controlled entrances provided time for our staff to reach safety inside the buildings and for the host government to respond. While the perimeters were penetrated resulting in property damage, the physical security

countermeasures at these facilities prevented any loss of life. We are seeking reimbursement from the host governments for these damages.

Posts not scheduled for new embassy construction in the near term receive compound security upgrades to protect our overseas staff and facilities. Since 2005, the Department has completed 46 major compound security projects at existing compounds to bring them up to the most current security standards to the extent possible. Additionally, hundreds of smaller security upgrade projects have been completed worldwide since 1998. A compound security upgrade project in Sana'a, which constructed a new entrance hardline with reinforced doors and windows, and a forced entry and ballistic resistant door and window replacement project in Tunis had just been completed prior to the attacks.

In 2010, the Department established a Design Excellence initiative for U.S. diplomatic facilities to leverage the very best in American architecture, design, engineering, technology, sustainability, art, culture, and construction execution. This program does not compromise security – security and safety for staff and visitors remains our paramount objective. "Green" concerns are considered as an element to reduce operating expenses, but are not the primary focus. Through Design Excellence and sustainability practices, we are seeking to reduce our operating and maintenance costs at our new compounds, which I know has also been a concern to the Committee.

DS is responsible for the overall safety and security of U.S. diplomatic personnel abroad. DS implements a security approach using host government resources and strong physical security programs, which is designed to allow time for host government and Chief of Mission security forces to respond in the event of an attack.

Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, host governments are obligated to protect diplomatic missions on their sovereign territory.

In addition to host government protection, the department protects its facilities with concentric rings of security.

Regional Security Officers –The Regional Security Officer, or RSO, is a Special Agent of the Diplomatic Security Service, who manages security operations at U.S. missions abroad. These federal law enforcement officers also serve as an ambassador's principal advisor on all security matters. By law, the ambassador is ultimately responsible for security issues at post; every day the RSO coordinates with the ambassador and manages the functions of local- and U.S.-supplied security personnel. When the security situation in a country or region deteriorates, the ambassador and RSO coordinate even more closely and seek input from Washington.

Local Guard Forces – The Department relies on local national staff and commercial security contractors to provide routine static guard services at our embassies and consulates in accordance with host country laws and regulations. These guard services are generally unarmed and are similar to guard services for U.S. Government and commercial entities around the United States.

The primary mission of the local guard force is to provide protection for U.S. Government personnel and to protect U.S. facilities from damage or loss due to violent attack and theft, by providing notice of emerging security problems to State's RSOs and host country security personnel protecting our missions. They also provide situational reports of ongoing security incidents to our post management/security teams so they can make well-informed crisis management decisions. As the manager of security operations at U.S. missions abroad, the Regional Security Officer's duties include the vetting, hiring, training, and overall management of local guard personnel.

Marine Security Guards (MSGs) – The Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCESG) provides 152 security detachments in 141 countries worldwide, at permanent facilities with classified processing. Not every U.S. diplomatic facility has a MSG; 126 do not. MSGs have as their primary mission the protection of classified material. As a secondary mission, in exigent circumstances, they provide protection to U.S. personnel and property inside the diplomatic facility. The RSO is the immediate operational supervisor of the MSG detachment.

Fleet Antiterrorism Security Teams – When security augmentation is required, the Department of State may request additional resources from the Department of Defense. In response to the violence in Libya and Yemen, for example, the Department of Defense deployed two Fleet Antiterrorism Security Teams – or FAST teams – to both countries. These specially trained and selected Marines were deployed to reinforce the physical security of diplomats and diplomatic facilities in each country.

In 1985, State had about 150 RSOs assigned to overseas posts. They were called Regional Security Officers because they covered more than one country. Our RSOs are highly skilled law enforcement professionals, trained to operate in overseas environments. DS currently has approximately 800 RSOs serving overseas; this increase was due in part to recommendations of previous Accountability Review Boards (ARBs). The Benghazi ARB found that we needed to further increase DS coverage. We have proposed to hire and equip additional DS personnel, increasing our overseas deployment capacity and allowing us to expand the number of Mobile Security Teams, which consist of DS Agents who receive specialized training to provide emergency security support to posts during periods of high threat, crisis, or natural disaster. Along with local guards, U.S. Marines, and host country resources, our DS agents have protected our missions abroad under extremely challenging conditions, and in the face of ever-evolving threats.

We are also working with DOD to establish 35 additional Marine Security Guard Detachments at certain posts that currently do not have assigned Marines, at an estimated cost of less than $555 million. This will add approximately 350 Marines to the Embassy Security Group, and require the Defense Department to make corresponding adjustments to their training and sustainment programs to support the increased requirement. OBO has a plan to accelerate construction of new, secure embassy compounds, and to upgrade embassy security systems, including compound access controls, bollards, vehicle barriers, emergency sanctuaries, security lighting, and other improvements (at an estimated cost of around $736 million to the Department).

These efforts are contingent on our ability to transfer Overseas Contingency Operations funds between the Diplomatic and Consular Programs (D&CP) and Embassy Security Construction and Maintenance (ESCM) accounts, which would allow us to use available prior year funds. Madam Chairwoman, you had discussed this in your February 5 letter, and I look forward to discussing this matter today.

Looking forward, in addition to implementing the 29 Benghazi ARB recommendations, we are taking steps to proactively anticipate and address threats to our presence abroad.

- We have developed a process to identify High Threat Posts. Ongoing reviews will be undertaken by senior agency officials to ensure critical security issues receive appropriate attention.

- The new Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for High Threat Posts in DS is focusing attention on our missions in these dangerous places.

- We will continue periodic reviews of the Department's high threat posts by Interagency Security Assessment Teams.

- The ARB report recommended expanding our security training courses and increasing the number of employees trained, particularly those being sent to High Threat Posts. We are looking at the resource impact of expanding security training, including plans for a consolidated DS training center that has been under consideration and study for several years now.

- We will continue to share with Congress information about significant security events involving or against Department personnel or facilities.

We have submitted an Increased Security Proposal with high-level cost estimates. Over the coming weeks and months, we will work to refine our cost estimates and plans, and will brief you as we move forward.

During the past months, while we have heard many differing viewpoints from the press, from Congress, from the public – perhaps the only principle that everyone agrees on is that America needs to have a robust diplomatic presence abroad. We need to be in dangerous places in order to advance our national security interests. And America cannot defend those interests unless it actively engages on the ground. The world looks to America for leadership.

From the time the United States decides to build a new embassy – including site acquisition, design and contract award, and construction – to when the doors open, it takes about four years. We do not have that time when U.S. national interests require our immediate presence. In these circumstances, we must find a suitable facility, and enhance security to the maximum extent possible. Time and the laws of physics limit our ability to retrofit an existing structure to meet our full standards. In the future, secure expedient facilities will likely remain a critical need, and we continue to examine how to

best meet this need based on the totality of the operating environment and host country capabilities. This is a challenge we will continue to face.

The Department works every day to balance security with the ability of our diplomats to get out and do their jobs, and the accessibility of our embassies to those with legitimate business. We realize that we cannot provide a 100 percent risk-free operating environment; however, we strive to be proactive in mitigating risk to the maximum extent possible, to allow our diplomats the security and freedom to do their jobs.