



HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General
United States Department of State

AUD-MERO-19-40

What OIG Audited

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, has faced increasing security threats since the drawdown of the U.S.-led combat mission in 2014. In response to the threats, the Department of State (Department) executed a range of security-related construction projects at the embassy and other U.S. Government facilities in Kabul. Previous Office of Inspector General (OIG) and Government Accountability Office reports identified limitations and challenges facing the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) and Diplomatic Security (DS) in the timely completion of security-related construction projects.

The objective of the audit was to determine whether OBO and DS had addressed previously identified limitations in executing security-related construction projects at U.S. Embassy Kabul.

What OIG Recommends

OIG made 13 recommendations to address the deficiencies identified in this report. OBO and the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services provided written responses to a draft of this report. DS did not respond within the time allotted, even though OIG agreed to a request for an extension. Embassy Kabul agreed with the recommendations but did not provide an official response due to the need to focus on emerging security threats. On the basis of the responses received, OIG considers five recommendations unresolved and eight recommendations resolved, pending further action. A synopsis of management's comments and OIG's reply follow each recommendation in the Audit Results section. Management responses to a draft of this report are reprinted in their entirety in Appendices B and C.

September 2019

OFFICE OF AUDITS

MIDDLE EAST REGION OPERATIONS

Audit of the Execution of Security-Related Construction Projects at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan

What OIG Found

In response to prior OIG recommendations, OBO took steps to respond to the needs of high-threat posts, including establishing mechanisms to increase collaboration with DS on urgent physical security upgrade projects. However, OBO continues to face challenges in expediting physical security projects in Kabul. Specifically, OIG found that physical security projects managed by OBO faced long timelines and DS officials, contractors, and embassy personnel have observed that OBO-managed projects are subject to multiple levels of review and approval that contribute to long delays in project execution. The Regional Security Office (RSO), acting under the authority of DS, has also managed some security-related construction projects in Kabul, in part, because of the need to complete physical security upgrades quickly. However, despite successes with relatively simple security projects, OIG found that the RSO lacks construction expertise and that some projects undertaken have faced deficiencies as a result. OIG also found the Department has not developed standardized designs for temporary physical security structures in conflict environments. This has also contributed to long project timelines for some physical security projects executed in Kabul.

Finally, OIG found that the Department has been inconsistent in its approach to planning for the development of the Embassy Kabul compound and surrounding properties since 2010. The need for a comprehensive master plan for the Embassy Kabul compound and surrounding properties is underscored by the significant cost, complexity, and size of a post with major construction efforts on multiple properties occurring in a dynamic and dangerous environment. Because of the challenges identified in this audit, OIG concludes that the Department must take additional steps to improve its ability to expedite urgent security projects at Embassy Kabul and other volatile posts in high-threat, high-risk areas around the world.