



United States Government Accountability Office

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Report to the Chairman, Committee on  
Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

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June 2023

# OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY

## State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels

Accessible Version

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105887](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Climate change and increasingly frequent and extreme weather events have caused a surge in global natural disasters over the past 50 years, according to the World Meteorological Organization. State has concluded that natural hazards pose a threat to the missions and personnel at over 290 U.S. overseas posts valued at about \$70 billion. GAO was asked to review State's efforts to address natural hazard risks to its facilities, including risks exacerbated by climate change, and the challenges associated with these efforts.

This report examines: (1) steps State has taken to enhance natural hazard resilience of its facilities overseas, (2) State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its resilience plans, and (3) the extent to which State's resources align with planned resilience efforts. GAO reviewed State documents, natural hazard risk assessment data, and OBO funding or budget information from 2019 through 2024. GAO also interviewed State officials and staff at four posts selected for their high exposure to natural hazards.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State ensure that OBO adjust its Climate Security and Resilience program plans to reflect department decisions on program staffing levels, as appropriate. State concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-23-105887](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri at (202) 512-7279 or [elhodirin@gao.gov](mailto:elhodirin@gao.gov) or Catina Latham at (312) 220-7628 or [lathamc@gao.gov](mailto:lathamc@gao.gov).

June 2023

## OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY

### State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels

#### What GAO Found

The Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has taken steps to address natural hazard risks at overseas facilities by incorporating structural improvements and analyzing and evaluating ongoing risks. OBO's construction, repair, and leasing processes help enhance the natural hazard resilience of its overseas facilities. For example, OBO's construction design standards incorporate resilience considerations from industry-recognized building codes. In addition, OBO's prioritization process for repair projects includes natural hazard risks among selection criteria. GAO also found that OBO updated some design standards and construction processes to integrate new information on natural hazards, such as flooding (see figure).

#### Flooding of the US. Embassy in Manila, Philippines in August 2022



Source: Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

In 2020, OBO created the Climate Security and Resilience program to help identify current and projected natural hazard risks at U.S. embassies and consulates. OBO is also taking steps to integrate natural hazard risk and resilience into its policies and processes for managing its assets.

According to OBO, the Climate Security and Resilience program does not have adequate staff to complete all planned program efforts in support of State's climate resilience priorities. A workforce analysis prepared by OBO's contractor recommended that OBO increase program staffing from about four to 11 positions to meet the expected demands of the program, such as helping posts identify recommended hazard resilience projects. State requested additional staff for OBO as part of the fiscal year 2024 budget process. However, OBO has yet to determine how it will allocate staff across its competing programs and priorities. By aligning program plans with the staffing level State provides, State and OBO can more clearly establish how the program can support State's climate resilience goals for its overseas properties.

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**Abbreviations**

CS&R	Climate Security and Resilience Program
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

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June 22, 2023

The Honorable Robert Menendez  
Chairman  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Climate change and increasingly frequent and extreme weather events have caused a surge in global natural disasters over the past 50 years, according to a 2021 report by the World Meteorological Organization.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of State has concluded that natural hazards, including those exacerbated by climate change, pose a threat of damage or destruction to its overseas real property assets and a threat to the safety of more than 90,000 overseas U.S. government personnel.<sup>2</sup> State has diplomatic properties in over 290 locations valued at approximately \$70 billion. According to State, the increasing number and severity of natural hazards heightens the risk of damage to its overseas embassies and consulates (posts) and related real property assets, including the office buildings, support facilities, and staff residences that comprise these posts.<sup>3</sup> The potential impacts of natural hazards on these facilities include, for example, flooding due to sea-level rise and storm surge at embassies located in coastal areas.

GAO has identified the U.S. government's fiscal exposure to climate change as a high-risk issue since 2021.<sup>4</sup> GAO has also stressed the need to make facilities more resilient to natural hazards. Because investing in resilience can reduce the need for far more costly steps to recover and reconstruct in the future, organizations including GAO have recommended enhancing buildings' climate resilience to limit fiscal

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<sup>1</sup>See World Meteorological Organization, *Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate, and Water Extremes, 1970-2019*, WMO-No. 1267 (Geneva: 2021).

<sup>2</sup>State uses the term "natural hazards" to refer to all such hazards, regardless of whether they are attributable to climate change.

<sup>3</sup>According to State, the term "post" refers only to locations in which State has real property interest and is not intended to imply operational status or purpose.

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *High Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to Be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*. [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington, DC: Apr. 20, 2023).

exposure to climate change.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2019 the National Institute for Building Sciences reported that the most dominant source of natural hazard risk is the existing building stock that predates modern building codes.<sup>6</sup> According to the same report, implementing practical resilience retrofits, such as moving a building's mechanical equipment to a higher elevation to make it less susceptible to flood damage, has a potential benefit of \$4 for every \$1 invested.

You asked us to review State's efforts to address natural hazard risks to its facilities, including risks exacerbated by climate change, and the challenges associated with implementing these efforts. This report examines: (1) steps State has taken to enhance natural hazard resilience of its new and existing facilities overseas, (2) State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its resilience plans, and (3) the extent to which State's resources align with planned resilience efforts.

To understand steps State has taken to enhance resilience of its facilities and obtain information on the cost of these efforts, we reviewed documentation on construction, repair, and leasing activities that State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has in-progress or completed between fiscal years 2017 and 2022.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we interviewed OBO officials, as well as State and local officials at four posts, to discuss past repairs to State facilities and current or planned retrofit or new construction projects to incorporate natural hazard resilience. The four posts were the U.S. embassies in Havana, Cuba; Mexico City, Mexico; Manila, Philippines; and Port Louis, Mauritius. We selected these four posts because State's natural hazard risk screening determined these posts to be at higher risk.

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<sup>5</sup>GAO, *Climate Resilience: A Strategic Investment Approach for High-Priority Projects Could Help Target Federal Resources*. [GAO-20-127](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 23, 2019).

<sup>6</sup>The National Institute of Building Sciences examined 15 retrofit measures for existing, mostly residential, private-sector buildings: five measures to reduce flood damage, two to reduce damage from hurricane winds, seven seismic retrofit measures, and one measure to reduce damage to existing buildings in the wildland-urban interface. For benefit-cost ratios assessed and other considerations, see National Institute of Building Science, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves, 2019 Report*, Washington, D.C., December 2019.

<sup>7</sup>OBO acts as State's overseas real property manager in acquiring, designing, building, operating, and maintaining the department's real property assets at U.S. posts. OBO's mission is to provide safe, secure, functional, and resilient facilities that represent the U.S. government to the host nation and support the department's achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives abroad.

To examine State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its resilience plans, we reviewed documentation provided by OBO on its recent natural hazard risk assessment and its planned program efforts to address the risks identified by this assessment. To determine the extent to which State's resources align with OBO's planned resilience efforts, we assessed information on State's workforce and past and proposed fiscal year 2024 budget data and compared this information to resource needs identified in a recent workforce analysis to complete planned program efforts. See appendix I for more information on our objectives, scope, and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2022 to June 2023 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.

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## Background

State, primarily through OBO, manages more than 25,000 owned and leased facilities at over 290 posts in 180 countries, as of fiscal year 2022.<sup>8</sup> These facilities include buildings (e.g., embassy and consulate office buildings, office annexes, ambassadorial residences and U.S. staff housing) and support facilities (e.g., perimeter security walls, utility structures, and recreational amenities).

Since 1999, OBO has spent over \$20 billion to build over 175 new diplomatic facilities and has more than 50 active projects in design or under construction worldwide. OBO's facility stewardship programs include (1) Capital Security Cost Sharing, which funds the new construction of embassies; (2) Maintenance Cost Sharing, which funds major rehabilitations and whole building modernizations, and routine maintenance and repair of existing facilities; and (3) State-funded minor

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<sup>8</sup>State's \$70 billion estimated portfolio value is associated with roughly 9,000 government-owned facilities and does not include the value of roughly 16,000 leased facilities. Those leased facilities are largely residences and apartments that house U.S. diplomatic personnel. State covers operations costs (e.g., electrical utilities) on these leases, but the property owners generally complete maintenance.

construction and improvements (e.g., building systems replacements, upgrades, and office space reconfiguration projects) to existing facilities.<sup>9</sup>

OBO constructs new facilities using current industry building codes, supplemented with OBO-specific requirements.<sup>10</sup> These codes and standards are intended to increase the safety, security, and resilience of newly constructed facilities. New facilities are generally more durable than older buildings in State's portfolio. The U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba is an example of an older facility built by State using earlier building codes and standards; the embassy was damaged by flooding from Hurricane Irma in 2017 (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: U.S. Embassy Havana, Cuba as Built in the 1950s (left), and Flooding within the Elevator Lobby from Hurricane Irma in 2017 (right)**



Source: Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

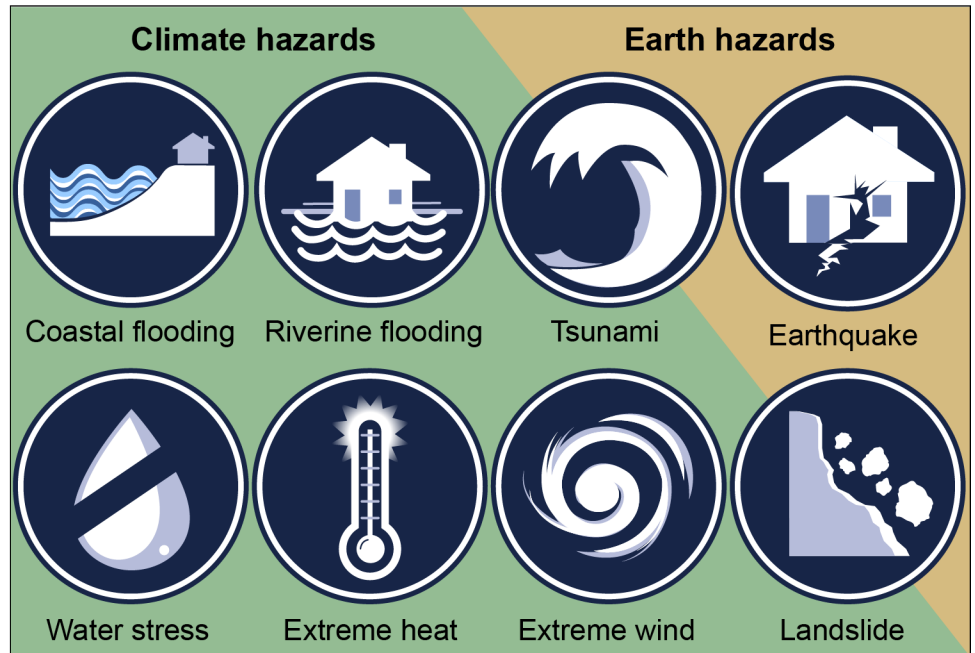
<sup>9</sup>In general, through interagency cost sharing programs and State Department appropriations, OBO receives about \$2 billion annually for construction of new embassies (the Capital Security Cost Sharing Program or CSCS), \$400 million for major building rehabilitations, maintenance, and repairs (Maintenance Cost Sharing Program or MCS), and about \$100 million for minor construction and improvements (the State Minor Construction and Improvements Program). U.S. agencies with a presence in U.S. embassies and consulates overseas also contribute funding to CSCS and MSC.

<sup>10</sup>OBO's design standards incorporate the International Code Council's model building codes---that OBO labels the International Building Code---which are a family of coordinated, modern building safety codes updated every three years. In addition, OBO annually issues supplements to its design standards to account for changing conditions, technology advances, and other factors.



OBO currently considers eight natural hazards in its global risk assessment for its facilities, some of which are exacerbated by climate change (see figure 2).<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2: Natural Hazards Identified by Department of State in May 2022 Risk Assessment**



Source: GAO (graphics), GAO based on Department of State documentation (data). | GAO-23-105887

## OBO Has Taken Some Steps to Enhance Facilities' Natural Hazard Resilience

### Construction

For several decades, OBO has considered natural hazard risks when constructing new facilities. According to OBO officials, in the 1980s, OBO established a seismic program to address risks posed by earthquakes and inform the construction of State's new facilities. In 2005, it expanded

<sup>11</sup>The eight natural hazards currently used in its natural hazard risk assessment are not a comprehensive list of all hazards that could impact State facilities. State officials said they anticipate adding additional natural hazards when making future risk assessments.

the program to consider risks posed by extreme wind, flooding, landslides, and tsunamis, although the program remained largely focused on earthquakes.<sup>12</sup> In 2020, OBO further expanded the focus, establishing its Climate Security and Resilience program to consider the additional risks posed by extreme heat, water stress, and the impact of changing climate on these hazards.

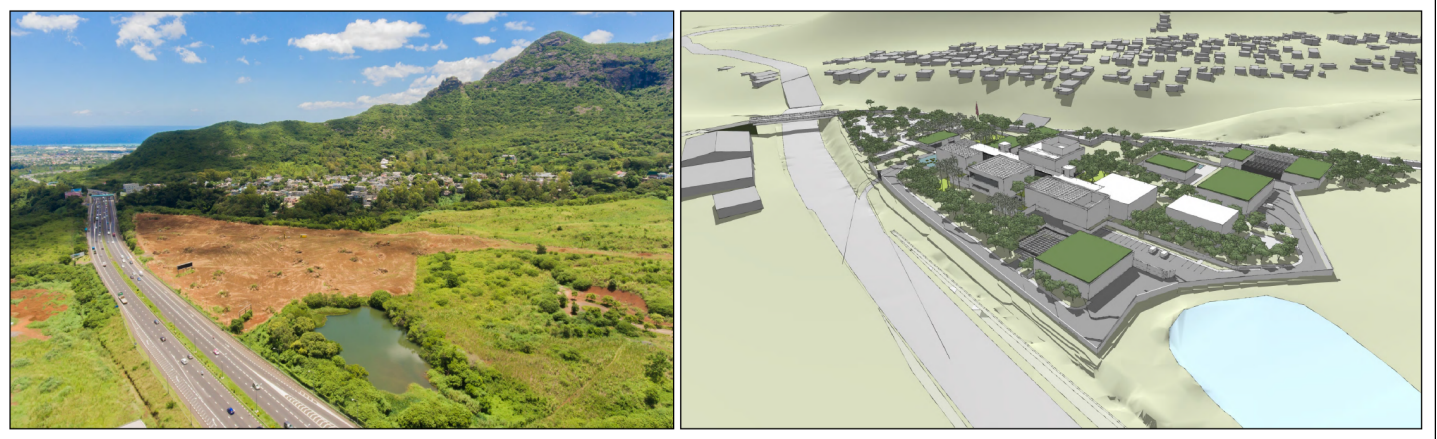
When constructing new embassies, OBO forms a site evaluation team including architects, engineers, and real estate staff to evaluate the land. OBO's site evaluation team uses a site development scorecard that allows the team to consider natural hazard risks as part of its evaluation of competing potential sites.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, the team evaluates whether there are any known site-specific risks posed by floods, tsunamis and other hazards. The team also evaluates risks posed by mudslides and sinkholes, and examines seismic considerations, including soil and foundation characteristics. As an example, OBO selected and purchased a site roughly 4 miles from the coast and at an elevation of over 800 feet above sea level for the new embassy in Mauritius. Documentation we reviewed suggests that the new embassy should be at lower risk from coastal flooding compared to the existing embassy, which is located in a leased facility directly on the coast in Port Louis (see fig. 3).

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<sup>12</sup>OBO officials reported the focus remained primarily on earthquake due to resource constraints.

<sup>13</sup>Other scoring criteria OBO uses for evaluating competing sites include: site location, security, communications, planning (e.g., what restrictions exist on building size and uses), environmental (e.g., whether on-site water wells, sewage treatment, or power generation will be needed), and acquisition (e.g., likely purchase price or number of existing owners with whom OBO may need to negotiate).

**Figure 3: New Site (left) and Design Concept (right) for the Planned New U.S. Embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius**



Source: Department of State, courtesy of Richard Kennedy Architects. | GAO-23-105887

Note: State officials reported they awarded a contract for the construction of the new embassy in fiscal year 2022. The solicitation for the project indicates that during design development the contractor will participate in technical review workshops focused on compliance with OBO standards, including security and resiliency. State estimates the new embassy will be completed by the end of fiscal year 2026.

OBO has design standards that incorporate natural hazard resilience considerations from industry-recognized building codes, such as the International Building Code.<sup>14</sup> OBO officials we spoke with view those standards and codes as minimum requirements for its contracts with design and construction companies to build new U.S. embassies. Additionally, some State security design standards contribute to buildings that are more resilient to natural hazards. For example, State's security standards require structural blast protection and hardened exterior walls to prevent damage from a terrorist attack. These security standards also improve the building's ability to withstand natural hazards, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, and thereby enhance resilience.

<sup>14</sup>The International Building Code includes multiple strategies that contribute to resilience from natural hazards such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and heat waves. For example, these strategies include provisions for considering wind and rain loads on structural strength, protecting openings from flying debris and preventing the creation of flying debris, elevating structures to mitigate flooding and storm surge, considering the contributions of soil conditions to seismic risks, and ventilating to maintain comfortable temperatures. See International Code Council, *2019 Resilience Contributions of the International Building Code*.

### State Designs Posts in Part to Be Resilient to Natural Disasters

#### **Backup Power Systems –**

State designs embassies with generator and uninterruptible power systems to increase the likelihood that posts can continue operations after disruptions, including a natural disaster. Many embassies also have fuel storage capacity on-site (for both generators and official vehicles), should local fuel deliveries become unavailable during an outage.

#### **Cooling and air-conditioning systems –**

State designs building cooling systems within new facilities to have redundancy capabilities, comply with indoor air quality codes, and meet State chemical and biological security standards. Additionally, State design standards specify high performance building system components (e.g., chillers, air-handlers, fans, pumps, piping) and materials to increase the likelihood they will perform and withstand, among other things, adverse climates and natural disaster events.

#### **Water systems –**

At some posts, water availability and outages are a concern. In some locations, State designs new embassies with on-site water cisterns that provide posts with water storage capabilities to protect against disruptions. Some posts have on-site wells to provide a more reliable water supply in countries already experiencing water stress, among other reasons. State designs some embassies to use repurposed greywater for landscape irrigation and other non-potable water uses (e.g., in restrooms and building cooling systems) to conserve water and reduce reliance on local providers. Some embassies have on-site water and wastewater treatment plants to bolster the resilience of State's facilities and reduce burden on local treatment systems.

Source: GAO analysis of State documentation. | GAO-23-105887

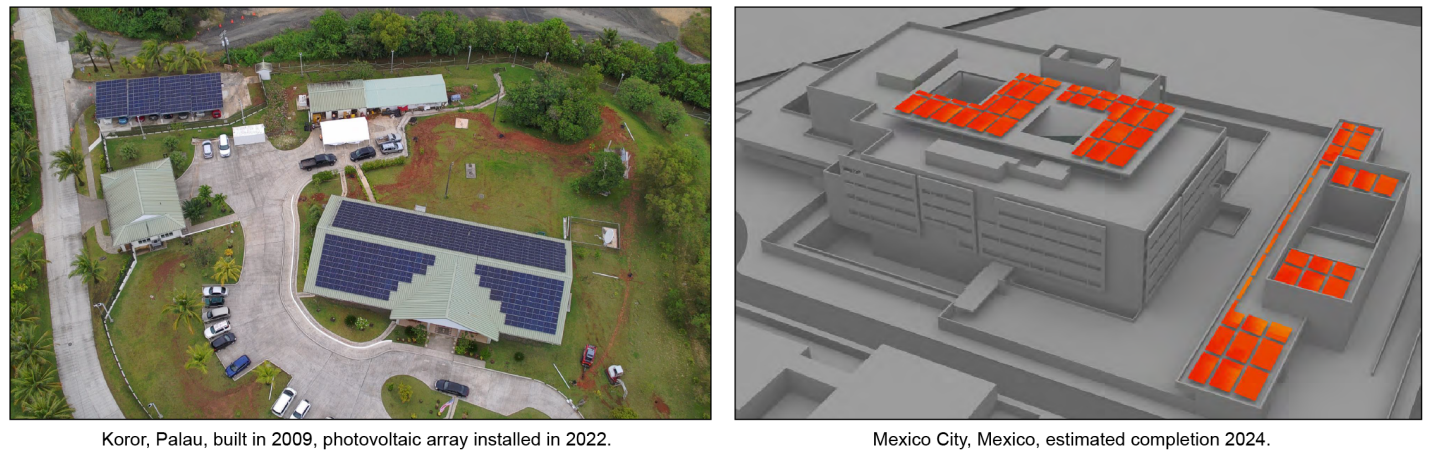
OBO design standards also specify high performance building systems (e.g., reliable generators) to increase the likelihood buildings will withstand natural hazard events. For example, in 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti caused widespread damage to buildings and supporting infrastructure throughout the country. However, the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince (constructed in 2008), which sustained minimal damage, was one of the few buildings operating—with both generator power and a water treatment system—after the earthquake, according to OBO's director.

OBO officials told us they have revised, and will continue to supplement, OBO's design policies to address natural hazard risks based on the latest and best information about natural hazards. For example, in 2016 and again in 2021, OBO revised its design standards. The revisions were intended to improve flood risk mitigation for new construction projects, and include post-specific flood studies OBO has been developing. Further, building power, cooling, and water systems in new State facilities are designed to have emergency backup capabilities and bolster the resilience of facilities against natural hazards (see sidebar).

One OBO official also said that State is increasing the use of on-site photovoltaic power, which converts energy from sunlight into electricity, as a long-term resilience strategy for facilities at posts where the electric utility grids may be at high risk for disruption by natural hazards.<sup>15</sup> As of January 2023, there were 122 new embassies or consulates completed or under construction that have incorporated photovoltaic arrays to generate some on-site electricity and provide power after a natural disaster event (see fig. 4). In August 2022, OBO installed its first large-scale battery storage system at the new U.S. embassy in Niamey, Niger.

<sup>15</sup>Energy from photovoltaic arrays can be stored in batteries and then used as a backup power source during a grid outage.

**Figure 4: Photovoltaic Arrays Installed in New Embassies**



Koror, Palau, built in 2009, photovoltaic array installed in 2022.

Mexico City, Mexico, estimated completion 2024.

Source: (left) Department of State, (right) Department of State, courtesy of Tod Williams Billie Tsien/Davis Brody Bond Architects with Built Ecology. | GAO-23-105887

While OBO tracks the number of photovoltaic arrays incorporated into State’s new facilities, OBO does not have data on all types and numbers of other disaster resilience features, such as on-site water wells for existing facilities.<sup>16</sup> However, OBO officials indicated that in the future they intend to systematically collect and report data on posts and projects featuring primary climate resilience adaptations, including those that may contribute to related federal government sustainability efforts, such as conserving water and optimizing energy use.<sup>17</sup>

As part of our review, we found examples of other design features that OBO has incorporated into new embassies to bolster facilities’ natural hazard resilience. For example, in Maputo, Mozambique, the new embassy includes extensive landscaping and stormwater retention basins to mitigate the risk of flooding. The new embassy also uses an innovative

<sup>16</sup>OBO officials report that OBO design standards require secondary water systems, which are typically on-site wells. According to these officials, while OBO would have data on new capital construction projects complying with this requirement, it does not necessarily have that information for existing facilities.

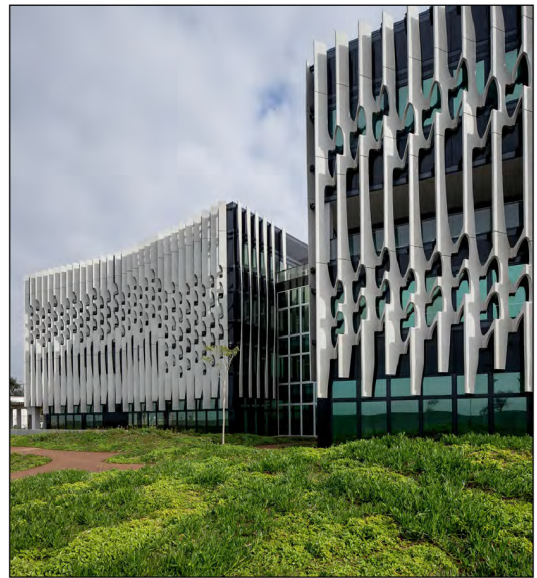
<sup>17</sup>OBO notes that some building system design features may not be intended by OBO for their resilience-related impacts. For example, if OBO uses a photovoltaic array in a new building primarily as a utility cost-reduction measure where the local electric grid is reliable and not threatened by any natural hazards, OBO would not consider this feature to substantially enhance resilience. Similarly, if OBO uses rainwater harvesting design features to conserve water but a new buildings’ location is not subject to substantial water stress, it would not be considered a resilience-related feature.

exterior façade and window design that reduces solar heat gain into the building and mitigates the risk of extreme heat (see fig. 5).

Figure 5: Views of Flood Risk Design Features of New U.S. Embassy in Maputo, Mozambique



Exterior facade to reduce building heat gain.



Natural vegetation.



Storm water retention basins.



Landscape berms.

Source: (top) Department of State, © Jeremy Bittermann, (bottom) Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

OBO conducts life-cycle cost analyses of proposed new embassy designs with a focus on proposed energy and water conservation measures, including those related to building resilience, such as installing photovoltaic arrays and capturing and treating rainwater for reuse onsite. Those analyses examine estimated costs and savings for these design features. For example, the analysis for the planned new embassy in Port Louis, Mauritius, indicated that the local electricity distribution network is vulnerable to extended outages during disasters. According to the analysis, the proposed photovoltaic array will improve both building energy efficiency and resilience. It also indicated that while there is an abundance of water in the region, there are typical periods of relatively lower rainfall volumes and a precedence for drought. The analysis noted the proposed design's water conservation measures will reduce dependence on the local water supply and strengthen building resilience. Based on the energy and water conservation measures proposed by the Port Louis design team, the report showed there would be an estimated \$3.1 million in higher front-end construction costs to exceed baseline design standards; however, doing so would result in an estimated operating costs savings of \$242,000 annually and a return on investment in roughly 13 to 14 years.

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## Repairs and Improvements

OBO's annual prioritization process for facility repair and improvement projects proposed by posts involves applying 14 criteria, including natural hazard risks, to ensure OBO selects the most critical projects for funding.<sup>18</sup> OBO requires posts to identify the threat to personnel or property that will be addressed by a proposed repair project. These threats include some related to natural hazards risks, such as landslide risk, flood risk, severe storm or wind risk, seismic risk, or corrosion risk posed by coastal environments (e.g., corrosion damage to a building's electrical, mechanical, and structural systems).<sup>19</sup> In Manila and Havana,

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<sup>18</sup>Other prioritization criteria are (1) cost avoidance (e.g., payback period in years), (2) facility replacement; (3) strategic priority; (4) sustainability; (5) system condition index (on a scale of poor to excellent); (6) accessibility; (7) condition (e.g., risk of system failure); (8) functional improvement; (9) operational impact; (10) number of persons directly affected; (11) building system; (12) risk index; and (13) facility condition index.

<sup>19</sup>Other vulnerability threats posts may identify when proposing a project include acoustic quality or noise issues; dangerous materials (e.g., fuel, combustibles, dangerous chemicals); fire safety risk; hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos); physical hazards (e.g., risk to persons of falling, falling objects, structural failure); septic hazards (e.g., sewage); swimming pool hazard; water damage (not associated with flooding); and "not applicable."

we found OBO and posts have taken some action to repair and adapt existing facilities in response to past climate events.

- **Manila, Philippines** - OBO and the embassy's facilities maintenance section have implemented projects since fiscal year 2016 to mitigate flooding from Manila Bay onto the embassy compound from recurring severe rain and typhoon events. To mitigate future flooding risks, the post proposed a repair and rehabilitation of the perimeter seawall located immediately behind the embassy. The project justification indicated past storms had damaged the seawall and a breach could result in severe water intrusion and destabilization of the ground where the chancery office building is situated. In 2016, the post received about \$6 million in funding to complete this project. In addition to the seawall repair project, the post also increased the size of the compound's stormwater retention basin and installed larger capacity pumps to direct water into Manila Bay. Lastly, the post also relocated the backup generators from the chancery basement to a new elevated utility building (see fig. 6). The embassy compound flooded most recently in August 2022, and the increased pumping capacity and the new generator location helped the embassy recover more quickly compared to past flooding events.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Embassy staff reported to us that the August 2022 flooding onto the compound was likely exacerbated by a nearby city road and storm sewer upgrade project.



Figure 6: U.S. Embassy Manila Flooding Adaptation Measures



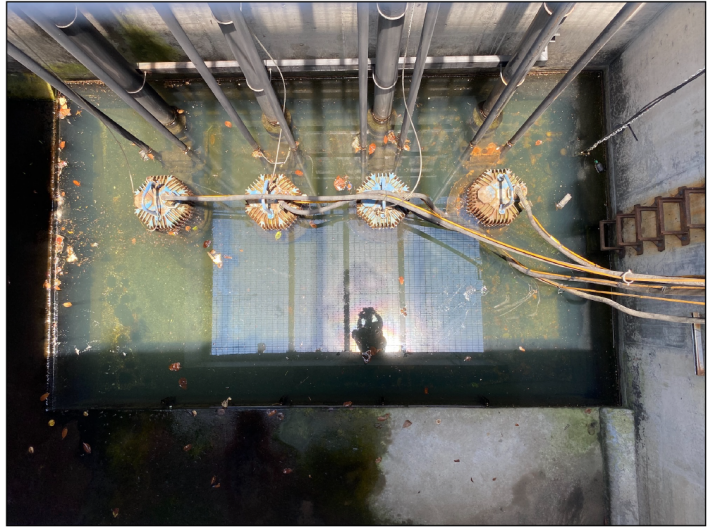
Chancery basement, subject to flooding, formerly housed generators.



Chancery generators relocated and elevated.



Manila Bay sea wall and stormwater outlet.



Stormwater basin lowered on compound to improve drainage.

Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105887

**Actions State is Taking to Repair or Assess Natural Hazard Risks Facing Residential Facilities in Manila, Philippines.**

OBO and the U.S. Embassy Manila facilities management section are implementing a project to repair erosion and landslide damage on the historic Ambassador's residential compound in Baguio, Philippines. The project will also protect a public hiking trail below the property.



Additionally, OBO and U.S. Embassy Manila officials reported they are conducting a seismic study for a post-owned staff apartment building—built in the 1960's prior to current seismic codes—to determine if seismic adaptation upgrades are needed and can be implemented, or if the building should be demolished.



Source: GAO photos and analysis. | GAO-23-105887

While OBO has taken actions to implement repairs and lessen future flooding risk to the embassy in Manila, OBO officials told us that based on their assessment of alternatives, they have concluded that these repairs and adaptation actions are interim measures and a new embassy should be constructed on a new site.<sup>21</sup> We found Manila listed on State's most recent capital security construction plan, which outlines for Congress State's proposal for construction of future replacement facilities. Preliminary planning estimates suggest the cost to construct a new embassy in Manila—excluding costs to purchase a

<sup>21</sup>Other alternatives OBO considered included upgrading the existing facilities and building a new office building on the existing compound.

new site—could exceed \$1 billion.<sup>22</sup> In addition to addressing flooding risks to the embassy compound in Manila, OBO and the post are working to mitigate natural hazard risks posed to U.S.-owned housing in the Philippines (see sidebar).

- **Havana, Cuba** - OBO is funding two repair projects to the embassy's perimeter security fence and chancery façade, both damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017. According to OBO officials, following delays related to importing construction materials into Cuba, repairs began in 2022. OBO estimates the repairs will be completed by 2024 at an estimated total cost of roughly \$18 million (see fig. 7). OBO project documentation indicated the chancery's stone façade panels had been damaged during the hurricane and were at risk of further deterioration. Additionally, according to OBO officials, they are also conducting an engineering study of the chancery office building to determine whether there are additional actions OBO can take to address past flooding damage and protect the facility from future hurricanes and flooding.

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<sup>22</sup>OBO completed a planning study in 2020 which evaluated post's properties in terms of security, stewardship, and resiliency. The study outlined a long-term solution that recommended State construct a New Embassy Compound (NEC) that would address the post's aging facilities, as well as the resiliency issues present at both the existing chancery and the seafront compounds. Manila is one of the Department's largest posts and preliminary cost estimates reflect the replacement of all existing facilities including the only U.S. Veterans Affairs' medical clinic outside the United States, which is located on the supporting seafront compound. Final project requirements will develop during subsequent phases leading to project design and construction.

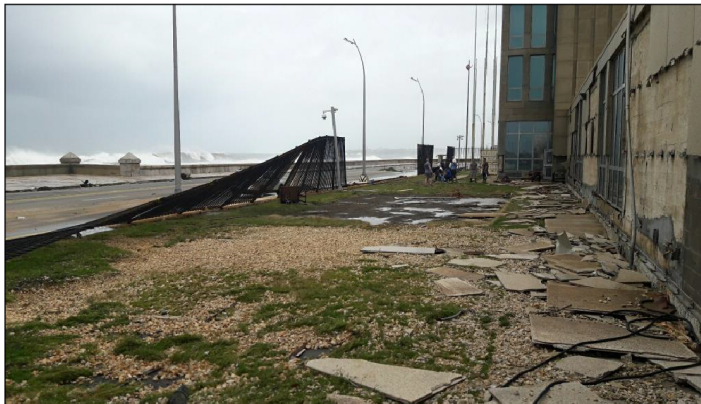
Figure 7: Damage to the U.S. Embassy Havana from Hurricane Irma in 2017 and Repairs in August 2022



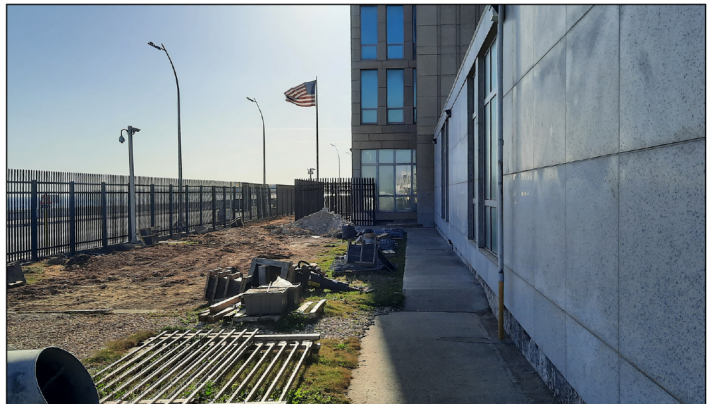
Damage to exterior walls.



Ongoing repairs.



Damage to perimeter fence.



Ongoing repairs.

Source: Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

## Leasing

OBO officials said they plan to begin providing improved guidance to posts in 2023 for considering other natural hazard risks when leasing buildings. This guidance will apply to the nearly 16,000 facilities State leases, most of which are staff housing. State's Foreign Affairs Manual instructs posts to seek suitable housing for staff with the lowest possible risk from natural hazards. While the manual provides detailed guidance on approaches posts can take to assess seismic risk, there is less detailed guidance on how posts should assess other natural hazard risks to leased facilities, such as risks from flooding. We found that OBO has

begun to conduct a few post-specific flooding and tsunami studies that consider the location of posts' facilities, including leased housing, and examine exposure from these natural hazards based on climate data projections. These studies may inform future post-specific studies that OBO could conduct to evaluate risks from natural hazards to existing and prospective leased facilities.

We also found OBO has worked with some posts to identify existing leased properties within State's real property portfolio that may pose seismic risks. For example, both Manila and Mexico City facility managers reported working with OBO to phase out existing residential leases that OBO and the posts identified as vulnerable to an unacceptable seismic risk. They said OBO and posts have conducted seismic surveys of various residences and the posts have moved out of residences that they determined were lacking in seismic resilience characteristics compared to alternative housing options. Embassy officials in Mexico City said that the embassy has had success acquiring housing on the leased market with acceptable seismic risk, while some posts in other countries may struggle to find acceptable lease housing.

We also found that OBO supported the Mexico City embassy's request to assess damage to leased and owned facilities following an earthquake in 2017. OBO contracted with an outside engineering firm to assist with the assessment. While local building officials and other entities had already surveyed many buildings before OBO's team arrived, OBO's team conducted additional surveys and reviewed many of those earlier inspection findings to assess whether leased properties sustained any significant damage. OBO's team also held a town hall meeting with embassy staff to discuss general findings and address questions. In general, the team's assessment found that assessed buildings containing 75 percent of the post's properties had not sustained any damage and that assessed buildings containing 25 percent had sustained minor damage and required minor repairs. OBO requested that the embassy work with landlords to ensure they made recommended repairs, which OBO generally believed to be cosmetic damage such as cracks in wall finishes.

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## OBO Has Assessed Natural Hazard Risks to its Facilities and Plans to Further Address Resilience Needs

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### OBO's Climate Resilience Program Assessed Natural Hazard Risks to Posts

OBO has taken steps to build its climate resilience program, which seeks to address natural hazard risk and climate effects on State facilities. In 2020, OBO developed an initial climate hazard dashboard to map current and projected climate exposure data worldwide. The dashboard shows estimates of projected regional temperatures and sea levels, among other potential hazards, in relation to State's overseas locations. OBO also created the Climate Security and Resilience (CS&R) program to extend its capacity to assess natural hazard risks to posts and integrate risk and resilience considerations into its capital planning.

OBO has allocated increasing funding to the new CS&R program over the past three fiscal years, from \$5.6 million in fiscal year 2020 to \$9.2 million in fiscal year 2022. OBO officials told us that the CS&R program does not have its own dedicated funding, and from fiscal years 2020 to 2022, OBO reallocated a total of \$21 million for CS&R from other OBO programs.<sup>23</sup>

In 2021, State developed its Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan in response to Executive Order 14008 from the same year.<sup>24</sup> The order called on agencies to develop strategies and implementation plans for integrating climate considerations into their international work, including climate impacts on their agency-managed infrastructure abroad. State's plan identifies facility climate security and resilience as one of the

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<sup>23</sup>OBO officials reported that OBO allocated \$7.8 million for the CS&R program from its Operations Program Support account, \$13 million from the Capital Security Cost Sharing program's project development account, and \$169,000 from the Minor Construction and Improvement program. CS&R used that funding for activities such as: (1) post-specific flood and tsunami studies; (2) hiring contractors to help CS&R assess natural hazards exposure data and evaluate risks to posts; (3) improvements to OBO's climate dashboard and data; and (4) an organizational needs assessment of CS&R's current and future staffing needs.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Department of State, Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan, 2021. *Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, Exec. Order No. 14008, 86 Fed. Reg. 7,619 (Jan. 27, 2021).

Department's top strategic priorities and encourages all State entities to implement related actions. The plan outlines priority actions needed to protect the health and safety of personnel and adapt facilities, operations, and mission-critical services to be more resilient to natural hazards.<sup>25</sup>

One of these priority actions is to identify the most at-risk facilities that require further assessment and intervention. OBO began this process in 2019. The CS&R program completed a preliminary screening of all 294 posts in May 2022, using natural hazard exposure data from its climate hazard dashboard and real property data. The assessment identified total and hazard-specific risk for each post. See figure 8 for a map showing the level of risk, from low to high, for each of the 294 posts.<sup>26</sup> Officials stated that this preliminary natural hazard risk assessment would help determine which overseas posts are at comparatively higher risk.<sup>27</sup>

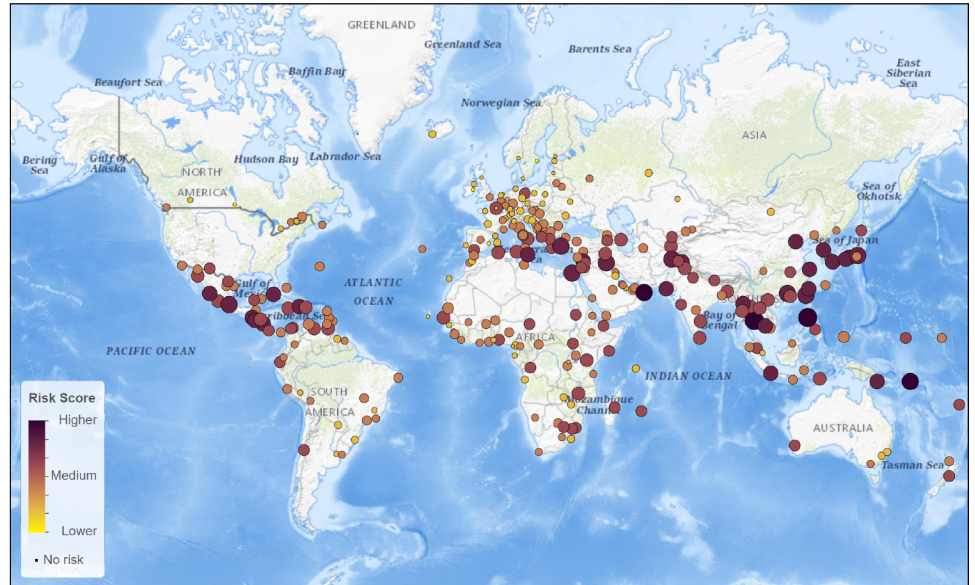
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<sup>25</sup>OBO has defined the following two terms in relation to managing State's real property portfolio: (1) *climate resilience*, defined as the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to changing climate conditions and withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from climate-related disruptions; and (2) *adaptation*, defined as the process or outcome of a process that leads to a reduction in harm or risk. U.S. Department of State, *Natural Hazards Risk Assessment for Overseas Asset Portfolio*. May 2022.

<sup>26</sup>Total risk represents the aggregate score of a post for risk across all eight natural hazards. Posts were also assessed risk scores for each of the eight natural hazards. See GAO, *Overseas Real Property: State's Initial Assessment of Natural Hazard Risks Faced By its Posts*. [GAO-23-105452](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 18, 2022). The report includes an interactive version of the map shown in figure 8.

<sup>27</sup>According to OBO, this preliminary assessment does not take into account (1) city or regional mitigation measures completed, under construction, or planned by local host governments or (2) risk mitigation projects completed, under construction, or planned by OBO.

**Figure 8: GAO Map of Department of State Natural Hazard Assessment, Total Risk Scores, as of May 2022**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documentation. | GAO-23-105887

Note: These scores represent State's initial assessment of the total risk natural hazards pose to its specific facilities and properties in these locations.

OBO officials told us that this preliminary risk assessment will be updated as more data become available and as OBO continues to update and enhance the data sources used. OBO officials also plan to expand the climate hazard dashboard to include additional hazards, such as wildfires and volcanic eruptions. OBO continues to coordinate with other federal agencies to collect and analyze hazard risk data.<sup>28</sup>

## OBO Plans to Identify Priority Adaptation Needs at High Risk Posts

OBO officials said they plan to use the results of their initial natural hazard risk assessment to address risks to posts and focus adaptation efforts across its portfolio. These officials said the assessment will initially help inform OBO's decisions about new capital projects (i.e. new

<sup>28</sup>These agencies include the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and U.S. Agency for International Development.



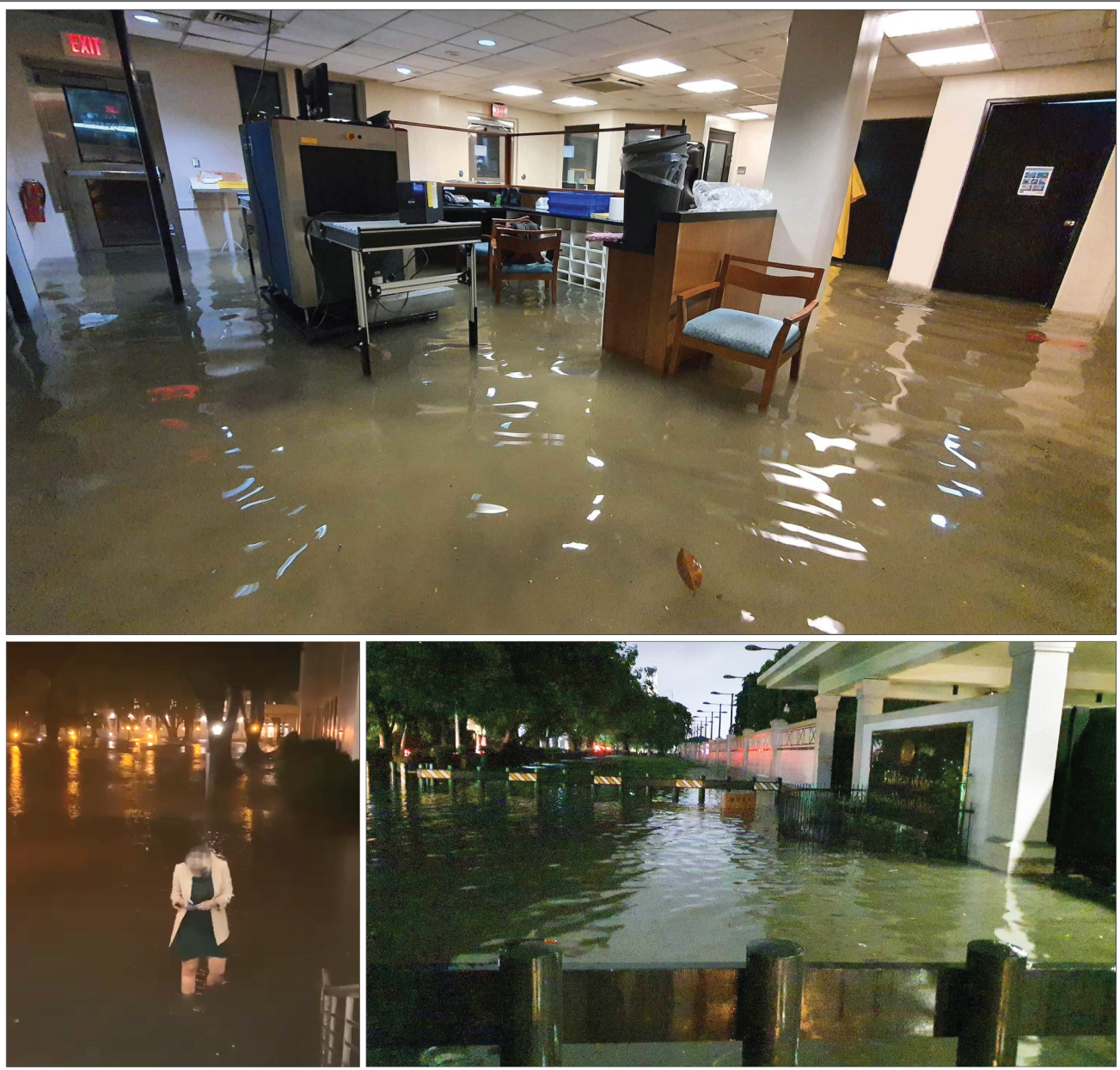
embassies or consulate compounds) and could later inform OBO decisions about smaller adaptation upgrades at posts.<sup>29</sup> For example, OBO officials said the 2022 preliminary natural hazards risk assessment is consistent with OBO's recent recommendation to build a new embassy in Manila, Philippines, due to the seismic and coastal flooding risks posed to the existing embassy compound (see fig. 9), which includes a historic chancery office building adjacent to Manila Bay.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Small upgrades, such as the installation of photovoltaic solar arrays or flood mitigation measures, could be sufficient to address some posts' risks.

<sup>30</sup>In July 2022, post officials reported that a magnitude 7 earthquake occurred on the northern Philippine island of Luzon, and embassy staff located in Manila experienced tremors. In August 2022, the embassy in Manila was flooded due to heavy rainfall.

Figure 9: Flooding of the US. Embassy Compound in Manila, Philippines in August 2022



Source: Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

OBO officials said that CS&R plans to conduct in-depth studies of posts with high percentile risk scores in the natural hazard risk assessment. According to officials, OBO has selected two of these posts—San

Salvador, El Salvador and Tunis, Tunisia—for pilot studies in 2023 to inform its follow-on approach for identifying building-specific natural hazard adaptation projects.<sup>31</sup> Officials stated that they plan to create an adaptation plan for both posts by evaluating the various facilities at each post to determine what would be required to make them more resilient to natural hazards.<sup>32</sup> These studies are intended to help OBO better evaluate the accuracy and application of hazard risk data it has collected and the extent to which OBO can identify potential scope and cost of building-specific adaptation projects. According to officials, this information will inform OBO's budget proposals and prioritization of future long-term adaptation efforts.<sup>33</sup>

OBO also plans to adapt CS&R's natural hazard risk assessment methodology to help prioritize capital projects.<sup>34</sup> OBO will consider natural hazard risks to State's facilities, rather than posts, using a scoring process similar to its initial assessment of posts. Officials stated that this adapted assessment, alongside other OBO factors, will further inform OBO's annual capital project decisions in conjunction with State's existing Security Environment Threat List, which identifies posts at a high security risk.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>OBO officials stated both pilot project studies will cost about \$500,000. OBO officials reported that CS&R program activities, such as conducting specific climate resilience studies at high-risk posts, will also be subject to future available funding and compete among other OBO programs and priorities.

<sup>32</sup>In general, the pilots would also examine other State real property assets at those posts, such as staff housing.

<sup>33</sup>As part of those two studies, OBO has tasked a contractor to develop rough order-of-magnitude cost estimates and potential return on investment for any identified adaptation project needs.

<sup>34</sup>According to OBO officials, this adapted methodology will further refine OBO's understanding of the risk to functional buildings typically associated with capital projects. It will filter out many assets constructed within the past 20 years given updated designs for such facilities appropriate for natural hazard risk. The assessment will not consider three hazard categories—extreme heat, water stress, and landslides.

<sup>35</sup>The Security Environment Threat List addresses potential acts of international terrorism against United States diplomatic facilities and identifies posts at greatest security risk. See 22 U.S.C. § 4865.

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## OBO Is Reviewing Policies and Processes to Integrate Natural Hazard Risk and Resilience Considerations

OBO is taking steps to integrate natural hazard risk and resilience into its policies and processes for managing its facilities by reviewing recommendations from the CS&R program.<sup>36</sup> In May 2022, CS&R began identifying OBO policies and procedures for updates to support and reflect CS&R considerations.<sup>37</sup> For example, CS&R identified several ways that OBO can incorporate natural hazard risk and resilience considerations into capital project management. One of these recommendations is that OBO planners and designers consult with the CS&R program and incorporate its climate hazard dashboard or detailed studies into decisions about the location and design of future construction under its capital projects program.

CS&R officials noted that OBO has begun adapting some policies to integrate new information on natural hazards as it becomes available. For example, ongoing and completed project-specific flood data studies have prompted updates to OBO's zoning design code to reflect flood risk mitigation. Further, according to CS&R officials, they are currently reviewing OBO policies, procedures, scoring tools, and design guides for possible updates related to the CS&R program or its recommendations.

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## OBO May Need to Further Adjust Program Plans to Align with Staffing Decisions

According to OBO, the CS&R program lacks sufficient staff to fully implement its current program plans, as outlined in its 2021 change management plan.<sup>38</sup> The change management plan, developed by a contractor in 2021, lists the steps needed to make the CS&R program functional over a 6-year period (2021 through 2027). These steps include

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<sup>36</sup>The Disaster Resiliency Planning Act requires government agencies to incorporate natural disaster resilience into real property asset management and investment decisions made by the agency. Pub. L. No. 117-221, 136 Stat. 2277 (Dec. 2022).

<sup>37</sup>CS&R officials worked with a contractor to develop nine general natural hazard-related recommendations for capital project planning and implementation and several sub-recommendations for each of the four phases of the capital project planning lifecycle: master plan, site selection, due diligence, and conceptual design.

<sup>38</sup>Tower Strategy Group, *CS&R Capacity Building Phase – Change Management Services, Executive Summary*. April 2, 2021.

developing, maintaining, and building on CS&R's climate risk dashboard, and identifying and recommending specific hazard resilience projects for posts. However, the CS&R program does not have adequate staff to carry out its roles and responsibilities within the specified period, according to OBO's functional bureau strategy for fiscal years 2022-2026.

As of March 2023, the CS&R program had made limited progress in revising policy and procedures due to vacancies in key positions in the program, according to officials. The change management plan is contingent on an expansion of program staff and contracting capacity; however, the CS&R program has not received this increased capacity. In April 2022, the CS&R program updated its plan, extending the timeframe for implementation from 6 to 12 years (April 2021 - April 2033).<sup>39</sup> According to the change management plan, while the extension allows the program to perform basic functions at current staffing levels, those staffing levels will continue to limit its operations and its ability to address the needs of its stakeholders.<sup>40</sup>

The updated plan included a workforce analysis to determine the CS&R program's staffing needs to implement and sustain its future planned efforts. This analysis found that demand for the program's data analysis and products across State has increased, with multiple stakeholders within OBO and across the department benefiting from the program's assistance.<sup>41</sup>

The workforce analysis recommended that OBO increase staffing from 4.33 to 11 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to meet the increased demands of the CS&R program. The 11 positions include additional subject matter experts, including hazard and data specialists, and an integration and monitoring policy lead (see fig. 10). The analysis concluded that the 11 FTEs recommended would allow OBO to maintain

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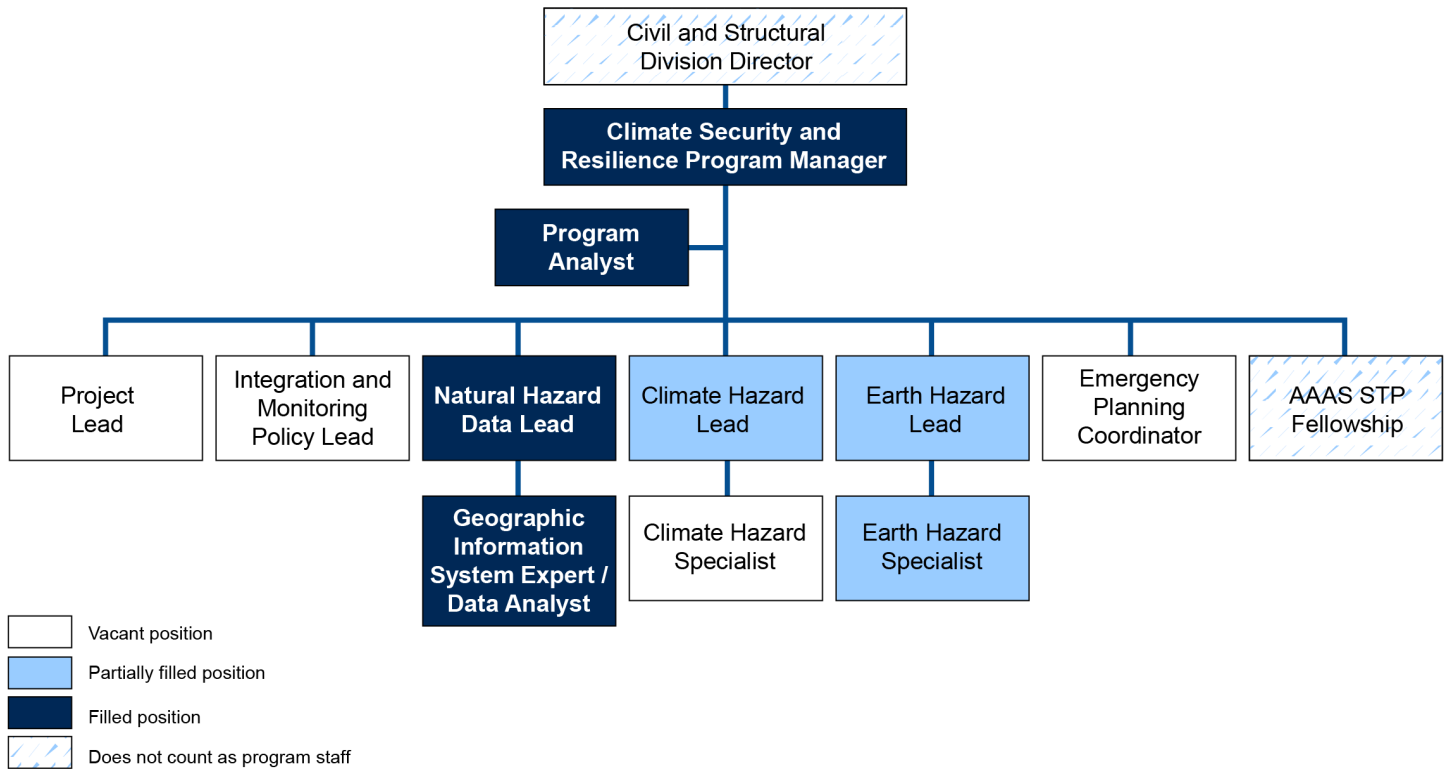
<sup>39</sup>The updated change management plan from April 2022 included a workforce analysis showing the staff positions needed to implement the plan. Tower Strategy Group, *CS&R Capacity Building Phase – Change Management Services Support and Work, Executive Summary*. April 22, 2022.

<sup>40</sup>The CS&R program's change management plan noted that with current staffing levels at 4.33 FTEs, the CS&R program's current planned tasks are estimated to be complete in September 2033. However, the program would not be fully operational at this resource level, according to the plan.

<sup>41</sup>For example, the analysis shows that CS&R could assist OBO's master planning and evaluation office with early insight into hazard exposure and risk for its activities, or State's Foreign Service Institute with its training on crisis management.

the CS&R program and meet current mission critical needs, such as updating State policies and identifying possible adaptation projects.

**Figure 10: Current Hiring Status and Staffing Structure Proposed by CS&R Program Workforce Analysis**



Legend: American Association for the Advancement of Science, Science and Technology Policy Fellowship = AAAS STP.  
 Source: GAO based on Department of State documentation. | GAO-23-105887

Note: While each position would be one full-time equivalent (FTE) per the workforce analysis, some positions are currently partially filled at less than one FTE. According to a contractor study for State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, the AAAS STP fellows are not a guaranteed or dedicated role for the Climate Security and Resilience (CS&R) program, so they are not included in the FTE calculation. The Civil and Structural Division Director also exists outside the program's FTE calculation.

Multiple State documents—CS&R's workforce analysis, CS&R's change management plan, and OBO's functional bureau strategy—highlighted that the program would be unable to fully support the agency's facility climate resilience priorities at current staff levels.

- CS&R's workforce analysis concluded that inadequate staffing could limit OBO's ability to drive meaningful climate adaptation at its posts, diminish the quality of outputs delivered by the CS&R program, and erode stakeholder trust and willingness to engage with the program.

- The CS&R program's updated change management plan indicates that CS&R could have the program infrastructure running by 2033, but without increased staffing, implementation efforts would be further delayed. In addition, the plan notes, without additional staff, CS&R might not complete planned work or meet stakeholder needs, such as crisis management training and additional hazard data analyses.
- OBO's functional bureau strategy reinforced this concern, noting that at current staffing levels, OBO would not be able to effectively support responses to natural hazard risk.

Officials stressed that if the CS&R program fills identified roles, State would be better positioned to achieve the key resilience goals for its facilities set out in its 2021 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan. According to CS&R officials, moving forward at current staffing levels may compromise their ability to: (1) establish new relationships with State bureaus outside of OBO, such as the Bureau of Energy Resources, (2) perform functions such as emergency action preparedness, and (3) inform and participate in crisis management training with State's Foreign Service Institute and posts.

As part of the Administration's fiscal year 2024 budget request, State requested 11 additional staff for OBO's Energy Program.<sup>42</sup> In March 2023, State officials, including the Budget and Planning staff, told us that the requested positions were all going to be allocated to the Energy Program. However, they later told us that some of the positions may be allocated to CS&R and further said that staff working on energy issues can reinforce and enhance CS&R's objectives. Because appropriations decisions in response to the 2024 budget request are pending, OBO has yet to determine how many new staff, if any, it will be able to allocate to its programs, according to officials. Officials from State's Bureau of Budget and Planning told us that CS&R initiatives are a priority for State, and an increase in the number of staff is merited. However, those officials also noted that State has many competing priorities to address with a single budget, necessitating tradeoffs during the process. State's request for 11 positions for OBO's Energy Program indicates that CS&R may not

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<sup>42</sup>OBO's Energy Program is focused on the design, deployment, and analysis of efficient and renewable energy systems in State's overseas facilities in support of sustainability goals. As of April 2023, OBO's energy program has three FTE positions staffed and one vacancy. We did not review staffing or responsibilities of OBO's Energy Program as it was outside our scope.

receive the additional dedicated staff needed to implement its workforce plan.

Federal best practices for workforce planning indicate the need to align staffing capacity and program plans. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management published a five-step model that suggests agencies should define their strategic direction, assess their current and future workforces, and develop and implement action plans for closing identified gaps in future workforce needs.<sup>43</sup> Further, according to GAO human capital best practices, strategic workforce planning addresses critical needs such as aligning an organization's human capital program and its mission and programmatic goals.<sup>44</sup> OBO's current plans for CS&R and corresponding timeframes rely on 11 full-time positions, which the program currently does not have. Once State determines its staffing resource allocation for the program as part of the 2024 budget appropriation, it will be important for CS&R to ensure its program plans and timeframes are aligned with the number of staff assigned to the program. By making this alignment, State will be better informed about how the CS&R program can meet the agency's natural hazard resilience goals.

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## Conclusions

Natural hazards and extreme weather pose severe and costly risks to government infrastructure and personnel. State's 2021 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan establishes that natural hazard resilience is a priority for State and sets goals to enhance the resilience of its facilities overseas. OBO created the CS&R program to help meet these goals. In addition, OBO has begun funding adaptation projects and identifying opportunities to integrate resilience into its policies and processes. However, according to the CS&R program's change management plans, at its current staffing levels the program risks being unable to fully implement its plans to support other OBO offices, State bureaus, overseas posts, and State's own Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan. Federal best practices for strategic workforce planning state that an agency should align its human capital program with needs

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<sup>43</sup>In October 2002, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management released a Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework that expands on and integrates previous guidance on workforce planning, such as the five-step model, and other human capital elements of the President's Management Agenda.

<sup>44</sup>GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).



determined by its mission and programmatic goals. If OBO does not align the CS&R program's staffing and plans, as appropriate, the program may be unable to fully support the agency's climate resilience priorities and its facilities' resilience needs. By aligning the provided program staffing and plans, State and OBO can more clearly establish how they can support State's climate resilience goals for its overseas properties.

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## Recommendation for Executive Action

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of OBO, following the final staffing and resource decisions based on the agency's fiscal year 2024 appropriations, revisits the Climate Security and Resilience Program plans, including goals and timeframes, and adjusts the plans as appropriate. (Recommendation 1)

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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of State for review and comment. In its formal comments, reproduced in appendix II, State concurred with our recommendation. State also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of State. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact Nagla'a El Hodiri at (202) 512-7279 or [elhodirin@gao.gov](mailto:elhodirin@gao.gov), or Catina B. Latham at (202) 512-2834 or [lathamc@gao.gov](mailto:lathamc@gao.gov). Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs maybe found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

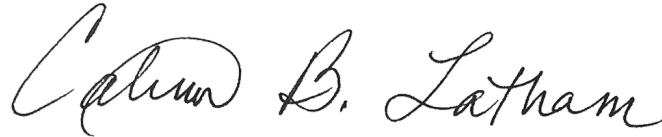


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Letter

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Nagla'a El Hodiri  
Acting Director, International Affairs and Trade

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catina B. Latham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "C".

Catina B. Latham  
Director, Physical Infrastructure

## Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We were asked to review the Department of State's efforts to address natural hazard risks to its facilities, including risks exacerbated by climate change, and the costs and challenges associated with these efforts. This report examines: (1) steps State has taken to enhance natural hazard resilience of its new and existing facilities overseas, (2) State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its resilience plans, and (3) the extent to which State's resources align with planned resilience efforts.

To determine steps that State has taken to enhance natural hazard resilience of its new and existing facilities overseas, we examined State and contractor documentation, including State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operation's (OBO) design standards for constructing and repairing overseas facilities and OBO's process for prioritizing construction and repair efforts. We spoke with State officials at headquarters, including officials from OBO's Climate Security and Resilience (CS&R) program. We also spoke with the principal investigator of the *National Institute of Building Sciences' Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report* on designing and constructing buildings for natural hazard resilience.

To obtain information on State's efforts to address resilience needs at selected posts, we used State's Climate Dashboard natural hazard risk scoring data to identify four posts at higher risk as case studies. We selected two posts with existing facilities—Havana, Cuba, and Manila, Philippines—to examine repair projects associated with past natural disasters as well as proposed retrofit projects that would add climate resilience features to these facilities. We also selected Port Louis, Mauritius, which has a new embassy project in the design phase, and Mexico City, Mexico, which has a new embassy under construction, to determine the extent to which State is incorporating natural hazard resilience features as they design and construct new facilities. We visited the posts in Manila and Mexico City, where we toured facilities and examined natural hazard-related damage and measures taken to strengthen facility resilience. We conducted semi-structured interviews with various officials at these posts, including post management, facility

management officials, and maintenance staff. The information we gained during these interviews is not generalizable.

To examine State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its plans, we analyzed State documentation, including State's 2021 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan and OBO's Functional Bureau Strategy for fiscal years 2022 through 2026.<sup>1</sup> We also reviewed OBO's contractor documentation, including statements of work, recommendations, and management plans related to the CS&R program. Additionally, we interviewed OBO officials to further understand its plans for the CS&R office.

To assess the extent to which resources aligned with planned resilience efforts, we reviewed information on State's workforce and budget and compared this to resource needs identified in a recent workforce analysis to complete planned program efforts. We reviewed State's fiscal year 2022 Functional Bureau Strategy, fiscal year 2022 through 2024 budget requests, and CS&R's change management plan, including a staffing workforce plan. We also spoke with officials from OBO and State's Bureau of Budget and Planning to discuss OBO's staffing levels in its CS&R office.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2022 to June 2023 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.

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<sup>1</sup>State developed its Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan in response to Executive Order 14008. *Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, Exec. Order No. 14008, 86 Fed. Reg. 7,619 (Jan. 27, 2021)

## Appendix II: Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State  
*Comptroller*  
Washington, DC 20520

JUN - 6 2023

Jason Bair  
Managing Director  
International Affairs and Trade  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Bair:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY: State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels" GAO Job Code 105887.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. A. Walsh".

James A. Walsh

Enclosure:

As stated

cc: GAO – Nagla'a El-Hodiri (Acting)  
Catina Latham  
OBO – William Moser  
OIG - Norman Brown

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**Department of State Response to GAO Draft Report**

**OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY: State Has Not Aligned  
Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels**  
**(GAO-23-105887, GAO Code 105887)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report, *Overseas Real Property: State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels*.

**Recommendation 1:** The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of OBO, following the final staffing and resource decisions based on the agency's fiscal year 2024 appropriations, revisits the Climate Security and Resilience Program plans, including goals and timeframes, and adjusts the plans as appropriate.

**Department Response:** The Department concurs with this recommendation. We appreciate the GAO's attention to the Department's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) Climate Security & Resilience (CS&R) Program. CS&R is developing the Department's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt facilities to natural hazard impacts.

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## Text of Appendix II: Comments from the Department of State

Jason Bair Managing Director

International Affairs and Trade

Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Bair:

United States Department of State

Comptroller

Washington, DC 20520

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "OVERSEAS REAL  
PROPERTY: State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing  
Levels" GAO Job Code 105887.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this  
letter as an appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

James A. Walsh

Enclosure:

As stated

cc: GAO - Nagla'a El-Hodiri (Acting)

Catina Latham OBO - William Moser OIG - Norman Brown

Department of State Response to GAO Draft Report

**OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY: State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels (GAO-23-105887, GAO Code 105887)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report, Overseas Real Property: State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels.

Recommendation 1: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of OBO, following the final staffing and resource decisions based on the agency's fiscal year 2024 appropriations, revisits the Climate Security and Resilience Program plans, including goals and timeframes, and adjusts the plans as appropriate.

**Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. We appreciate the GAO's attention to the Department's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) Climate Security & Resilience (CS&R) Program.**

CS&R is developing the Department's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt facilities to natural hazard impacts.



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## Appendix III: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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### GAO Contacts

Nagla'a El Hodiri at (202) 512-7279 or [elhodirin@gao.gov](mailto:elhodirin@gao.gov)

Catina B. Latham at (202) 512-2834 or [lathamc@gao.gov](mailto:lathamc@gao.gov)

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### Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contacts named above, Leslie Holen (Assistant Director), Michael Armes (Assistant Director), Julia Jebo Grant (Analyst-in-Charge), John Bauckman, Katie Bassion, Larissa Barrett, Neil Doherty, Gina Hoover, and Mark Dowling made key contributions to this report.