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State Department

Stalking a Perfect Embassy and Money to Build It

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 — Secretary of State George P. Shultz said recently that in the wake of the Beirut bombings and other attacks on Americans, United States diplomats and their families "are on the front lines — they are being shot at, they get killed and we owe it to them to do all we possibly can to see that a secure environment is created."

With that in mind, and despite the budget-cutting mood in Washington these days, the Reagan Administration is asking Congress to approve a \$2.8 billion program to replace many American embassies abroad with what officials say will be the most bomb-resistant, spy-proof buildings ever constructed. Other structures will be strengthened.

Robert Lamb, who heads the State Department's new Bureau of Diplomatic Security, says the new structures will have extra-heavy floor supports, reinforced concrete walls with fewer windows, full sprinkler fire protection and special computer and communications facilities.

The buildings will also be set back from the street at least 100 feet and will be surrounded by walls, he said. None will have underground parking garages. And lobbies will be designed so that detection devices are unobtrusive but more effective than those now in place.

Part of a \$4.4 Billion Request

The State Department has already been strengthening security at existing embassies. In fact, officials today credited special security guards at the American Embassy in Lisbon for finding a bomb in a diplomat's car before it went off, thus preventing extensive damage or injuries.

The construction program would start in the current fiscal year, and is part of a request for \$4.4 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations that the department wants to spend on security over the next five years, some of it for salaries for more new guards and for special protection equipment and devices.

Will a cost-conscious Congress go along with such an ambitious plan?

Representative Daniel A. Mica, Democrat of Florida, who heads the Foreign Affairs subcommittee charged with approving the requests, said "it is going to be very hard" to find the money "while we're cutting possibly pensions and domestic programs at home."

"I don't know the way out," he added, "but the concern is real."

Even some of the program's most ardent supporters on Capitol Hill say

that the goal of having what are, in effect, perfect embassies may have to be scaled down. Nevertheless, at this stage in the debate, when the State Department has just informed Congress of the confidential details of the program, the Administration does not seem disposed to accept less.

Mr. Lamb fiercely defends the costs. In an interview, he characterized the proposal as "a Presidential priority," not just a State Department request.

"We are going to argue for the entire amount on the Hill," he said, "and frankly our support has been encouraging."

According to Mr. Lamb, special task forces from the National Academy of Sciences have been asked to provide specifications for the new buildings to prevent takeovers of the type that occurred in Teheran and bomb blasts of the type that destroyed the American Embassy in Beirut, and to give embassies in Soviet-bloc countries such advanced shielding technology as to frustrate spies' efforts to penetrate the walls electronically.

"We found that no one has the same kinds of security requirements as an embassy," Mr. Lamb said. "We're in an environment which, in many cases, is totally hostile. But we're not forts like the military. We can't close off our base. We have to provide services to the public."

"In some cases, thousands of people a day come into our embassy for service. We have to be able to deal with them efficiently and courteously while screening out the handful of people who might do harm."

Following are estimated costs for some of the more expensive new embassies and other buildings, as described in a project list the State Department provided Congress last week:

1986 — Santiago, Chile, \$51 million; Kingston, Jamaica, \$55 million; Amman, Jordan, \$45 million; Muscat, Oman, \$31 million; Mogadishu, Somalia, \$34 million; Khartoum, Sudan, \$36 million; a building for arms control delegations in Geneva, \$59 million; Istanbul, Turkey, \$46 million; Caracas, Venezuela, \$45 million.

1987 — Vienna, \$89 million; Brussels, \$53 million; Sofia, Bulgaria, \$38 million; Bogotá, Colombia, \$58 million; Prague, \$71 million; Budapest, \$52 million; Tel Aviv, \$83 million; Jerusalem, for the consulate, \$41 million; Lima, Peru, \$68 million.

1988 — Algiers, \$39 million; Rangoon, Burma, \$39 million; Copenhagen, \$54 million; Quito, Ecuador, \$63 million; Panama, \$65 million; Madrid, \$51 million; Bangkok, Thailand, \$61 million.

Mr. Lamb says that to build the "perfect" embassy in the Washington area would cost a minimum of \$158 a square foot, or \$15.8 million for a modest 100,000-square-foot structure, but that to build the same structure overseas would cost about three times as much.

Asked why, he replied, "We go into places where we don't even have basic services, like our own electricity, places that don't have sewage."

"We have to provide things done by civil authorities in other countries," he said. And because of security requirements, he added, there are "portions of the embassy that we have to bring in American laborers, with security clearances, and this adds appreciably to the task."

Mr. Shultz, in talking recently about the security needs, said, "Many of our overseas posts front onto busy streets."

"Some have extensive glass facades," he said. "Some share walls with non-U.S. Government tenants. All this is generally undesirable and simply unacceptable in a great many situations. The program places its highest priority on buildings at locations where the security threat is greatest and which are substantially below the new standards."

Buying a Gas Station

In one country, which Mr. Lamb would not name, the United States plans to spend \$6 million to buy a gas station next to the embassy because of concerns that the station might become a staging area for an attack. In Athens, it plans to spend \$10 million to buy property near the embassy to give it more isolation.

In addition to \$2.8 billion for construction projects through 1990, the State Department is seeking \$1.6 billion in salaries and expenses for new security personnel, bringing the total in emergency supplemental appropriations being sought to \$4.4 billion. But the department's regular budget also includes an additional \$6.2 billion for security for those years, making the overall total \$10.6 billion.

Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, asked Mr. Shultz at a recent hearing what he was doing to bring other costs down. He replied: "I think we have to look at whether we need all the posts there are, whether the posts need to be staffed in the way they are staffed."