

TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

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Operations, and Bilateral International Development
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Chairman Perdue, Ranking Member Kaine, and distinguished members of the committee – good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department’s plan for a Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC) at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

Improved training was a key finding of the Benghazi Accountability Review Board (ARB) in December 2012. The Diplomatic Security Organization and Management Review Panel and Best Practices Panel, both convened as a result of the ARB, recommended that the Department establish a consolidated training facility in close proximity to Washington, D.C.

Since that time, attacks on State Department facilities and personnel in Herat, Afghanistan; Erbil, Iraq; and Ankara, Turkey – plus the need for evacuations from Libya and Yemen – have highlighted the danger our employees face while fulfilling our diplomatic responsibilities abroad. We have learned from these events and continue to modify our training as needed.

The Department had initiated efforts to combine numerous hard skills training venues into one consolidated site even prior to the Benghazi-related recommendations. In 2009-2010, the Department and the General Services Administration (GSA) reviewed over 70 properties before selecting Fort Pickett in Blackstone, Virginia. In 2013, we reduced the scope of the project to focus solely on the consolidation of hard skills training, cutting the project’s cost from over

\$900 million to \$413 million, an estimate which has been verified by two engineering firms.

In searching for a consolidated training center, proximity to Washington, D.C. has been a priority for two primary reasons. First, Washington is the hub for Department of State and other federal agency personnel preparing to go overseas. Having a closer training facility will cut travel costs, provide more training opportunities to family members, and improve logistics. Second, staying in the mid-Atlantic region allows us to continue to train with our critical security partners, especially the Marine Corps. This collaboration is essential, as we have seen in Yemen, Libya, and Burundi. According to the recently released Government Accountability Office (GAO) study, Marine units stationed in Quantico, Virginia, have already determined that their budget will not support travel to facilities located outside of the Washington region.

Consolidation is critical because it increases the effectiveness of the training itself by allowing students to seamlessly transfer from one real world scenario to another. Threats often emerge quickly and require immediate action to counter. Having a dedicated and consolidated training center will provide the flexibility necessary to immediately train for emerging threats and major events.

Our specialized training for high threat environments includes heavy weapons, explosives demonstrations, armored vehicle driving, helicopter landings,

and extensive night training. Finding a single site that can accommodate all of these elements without disrupting the surrounding area has been challenging. A low population density region is critical to ensuring that current and foreseeable real-world training requirements can be met 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) has its strong core competencies in training federal law enforcement agencies, which is why we send our own agents there for basic investigative training. But with FASTC, we are not training solely for law enforcement. We are preparing Diplomatic Security agents for service at critical threat overseas posts, which requires an extremely specific skill set, working with our DoD partners, rather than our domestic law enforcement partners.

In April 2013, the Department was asked to suspend project efforts for Fort Pickett and re-evaluate the feasibility of locating FASTC at FLETC in Glynco, Georgia. Over the next year, the Department worked collaboratively with FLETC through multiple site visits and the exchange of information to further evaluate this possibility. After an extensive review, the Administration supports the State Department's decision to locate FASTC at Fort Pickett, as reflected by the Administration's request for \$99 million in FASTC funding for FY 2016.

That said, the Department recognizes the concerns Congress has raised about this plan. To that end, we have temporarily put this project on hold again and

arranged for an independent Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) comparing FASTC at Fort Pickett, FLETC at Glynco, and the Interim Training Facility (ITF) at Summit Point, West Virginia. The CBA is being conducted by Deloitte under contract to GSA and is slated for completion by mid-December.

While we look forward to receiving the CBA, the Department remains confident that Fort Pickett is the best option for an effective and cost efficient consolidated training facility. We appreciate the time and effort on the part of Director Courts and his team at GAO in examining this issue.

As for the current status and timeline for future development of FASTC at Fort Pickett, we are hoping to move forward with construction after the completion of the CBA so that we are on track to be fully operational in early 2019.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to answering any questions you have.