

Security Fence Around Social Security Administration Headquarters A-15-13-23096



September 2013

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

Our objective was to evaluate the rationale and justification for the Agency's decision to construct a fence around the perimeter of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Headquarters complex in Woodlawn, Maryland.

Background

In 1995, the Department of Justice (DoJ) established the first set of Government-wide physical security standards for Federal facilities in its report on *Vulnerability Assessment of Federal Facilities*. Following the creation of these standards, on October 19, 1995, President Clinton established the Interagency Security Committee (ISC) per Executive Order 12977 to evaluate, develop, and publish long-term facility security standards.

ISC Standards

The ISC's mandate was to enhance the quality and effectiveness of physical security in Federal facilities. ISC standards apply to all nonmilitary Federal facilities in the United States – whether Government-owned, leased, or managed; to be constructed or modernized; or to be purchased.

In March 2011, SSA's Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness (OSEP) entered into a contract to perform a conceptual study aimed at better aligning SSA's Headquarters complex with ISC standards. The contractor initially presented SSA with four conceptual approaches for security enhancements. The General Services Administration (GSA) and SSA selected elements from several of these approaches, further refined the concepts, and prepared two alternative approaches. SSA officials selected and approved a preferred alternative, the Campus Enclosure Option (also referred to as the Secure Campus project).

Federal Climate

After the issuance of the latest ISC standard, Congress enacted the *Budget Control Act of 2011* (BCA), which caps budget authority for each Fiscal Year (FY) from 2012 to 2021. The BCA required that a Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Committee) produce legislation that would decrease the deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. The BCA stated that if the Committee failed to enact such legislation by January 15, 2012, automatic Government spending cuts would occur, referred to as sequestration. The Committee did not enact required legislation by the mandatory deadline. As such, automatic across-the-board Government spending cuts were scheduled to begin on January 2, 2013. The *American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012* postponed the automatic cuts until March 1, 2013. The reductions in spending authority are approximately \$85.4 billion in FY 2013, \$386 million of which applies to SSA, with similar cuts for FYs 2014 through 2021.

On May 22, 2013, SSA requested that we evaluate its rationale, justification, and supporting documentation for the decision to expend \$23.5 million for the perimeter fence project.

Results of Review

Our report responds to questions from SSA about the Secure Campus project. We obtained this information from Agency documents and interviews. SSA conducted threat analyses and conceptual studies to identify the highest risk areas for its Headquarters complex. However, SSA could not provide the project-specific threat assessments it used to justify the project, as the individual that prepared the assessments was no longer with the Agency.

Resulting from a conceptual study completed, a contractor presented various options to SSA and GSA to address outstanding security items. All of these options included some variation of a fence, visitor center, and Truck Inspection Facility. Outside of the conceptual approaches presented by the contractor, we noted that the Agency had not evaluated other more cost-effective security enhancement options such as an increased armed guard force. We also noted that the estimated costs of the project did not include specific life-cycle costs beyond the project's design and construction. Specifically, SSA had not developed any on-going, future, or maintenance costs resulting from the Secure Campus project.

Our Conclusions

Because SSA could not provide the project-specific threat assessments to support the threat analysis, we were unable to evaluate the reasonableness of SSA's justification for the Secure Campus project. We believe SSA should determine what project-specific threat assessments were previously completed and ensure they are still applicable in today's climate.

The Agency has not determined whether other options, such as increased guard force or blocking off only sections of the campus, such as parking lots, are more cost-effective or will similarly enhance security. At a minimum, we believe SSA should evaluate and document these items. After its review and taking the fiscal outlook for SSA into consideration, we believe the Agency should make a determination whether the Secure Campus project is the most cost-effective, operational method of ensuring employee safety and meeting required guidelines.

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