UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

UNITED STATES MARINE SECURITY GUARDS

SAFEGUARDING AMERICAN MISSIONS AROUND THE WORLD

A Marine Security Guard mans his Post 1 station at the U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi.

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Introduction

For over six decades, U.S. Marine Security Guards (MSGs) have worked closely with the U.S. Department of State and its Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) to protect and safeguard American diplomacy.

The primary mission of MSGs is to protect U.S. citizens and property as well as to prevent the compromise of classified U.S. Government information under a range of circumstances, including hostile assaults. They respond immediately to crises large and small, including demonstrations, bomb threats, fires, nuclear/biological/chemical threats, and facility intrusion attempts. As such, MSGs stand as a solid line of defense for American diplomacy.

In fact, the Marine Security Guard program is a successful partnership between two great organizations. The U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Department of State each has its own unique heritage, operational culture, and distinct traditions. Jointly funded, this program has dual chains of authority – operational and administrative – as well as separate applicable regulations.

Marine Security Guards stationed at an embassy entrance literally represent the face of America to members of the diplomatic community and citizens of the host country. To everyone who enters the embassy, they are looked upon as a symbol of American values of integrity, courage, loyalty, and commitment. As a Marine Security Guard at a U.S. embassy or consulate, they do not just stand at "Post." They stand for America.

At the MSG training facility in Quantico, Virginia, a seasoned MSG trains a new Marine on the Imminent Danger Notification System in a mock-up of a typical Post 1 communication center found at all U.S. embassies.

The State Department's Director of the Diplomatic Security Service oversees the Marine Security Guard program. Working together, DS and the MSGs operate as a team to ensure that the United States can conduct diplomacy safely and securely around the world.

DS Regional Security Officers (RSOs) in charge of the embassies' security programs are highly trained, seasoned professionals and special agents of the Diplomatic Security Service. The security programs that RSOs implement are advanced and well-designed efforts to protect people and safeguard property and information from terrorists, foreign intelligence agents, and criminals.

MSGs are a critical part of this security program. DS agents, engineers, technical specialists, and other personnel at each post work with the MSGs on a daily basis. DS relies on MSGs to maintain their skills by regularly attending guard schools, response drills, familiarization firing, and other training programs. A Memorandum of Agreement between the organizations governs the many details of the program, including fiscal responsibilities, housing, training, duties, discipline, logistical and medical support, and many other areas.

History

The United States Marine Corps and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security have had a long and mutually beneficial relationship for more than 60 years. The Marine Security Guard program was formally established in December 1948, and since that time, the two organizations have faced many challenges together. In fact, this unique partnership has developed into one of the strongest in the history of U.S. civilian-military relations.

During the winter of 1948-1949, the Marine Security Guard program was established with volunteers from the United States Marine Corps. When the MSG program became operational in 1949, only 83 Marines were deployed. With a stroke of a pen, President Barack Obama authorized the addition of 1,000 MSGs as part of the 2013 Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to increase the number of MSGs to approximately 2,450 at more than 150 MSG detachments worldwide by 2016. In a broader sense, the State Department's relationship with the Marine Corps goes back to 1798. For more than 200 years, Marines have been engaged in some way with American diplomacy. U.S. Marines have been detailed as a security force escorting diplomatic personnel; they have rescued and defended American embassies and consulates around the globe; and in some very notable and historic actions, they have provided unique forms of support for diplomacy in various places throughout the world.

During World War I, for example, Marine noncommissioned officers acted as diplomatic couriers safeguarding the delivery of diplomatic and confidential mail for the Department of State, operating in hazardous locations like revolution-torn Russia, often with little protection other than their sidearms.

The origins of the present-day MSG program are rooted in World War II, when a sixty-man Marine detachment was assigned to guard the U.S. Embassy in war-torn London.

July 28, 1937: U.S. Marines guard the entrance to the U.S. Embassy compound in Beijing, China.

After World War II, it was decided that an alert, disciplined force was needed to protect U.S. diplomatic missions throughout the world. Volunteers from the Marine Corps were identified to fill these assignments, and the Marine Security Guard program was formed, ultimately becoming a prestigious assignment in the Corps.

December 1959: President Dwight Eisenhower (left) takes a salute from the Marine Security Guards as he leaves with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker after visiting the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

As a reliable line of defense and support in U.S. embassy emergencies overseas, Marine Security Guards have protected State Department facilities against anti-American riots and demonstrations, and have helped evacuate U.S. diplomats and their families during times of crisis. MSGs have extinguished fires in U.S. embassies and saved countless lives of personnel threatened by civil unrest, earthquakes, and floods. The courage and support of the MSGs has been constant in every situation.

They stood side-by-side with the State Department through horrific events like the bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. They proved their indispensability again when terrorists attacked the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 2004. The MSG response to that attack was focused, fast, and professional; it helped stop the attackers from entering the consulate building, undoubtedly saving many lives. They continue to protect America's diplomatic missions from other hostile challenges as well, such as the protests and violence directed against numerous American facilities in 2012.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry shakes hands with Marine Security Guards at U.S. Embassy Baghdad in March 2013.

Indeed, this mission is more important than ever in the current threat environment. As the world has witnessed all too clearly and too often, determined terrorists will not hesitate to harm innocent citizens, including professional diplomats, at any vulnerable location in the world.

Today, MSGs are recognized as the professional, well-trained, disciplined guard force that is best suited for providing internal security at U.S. embassies and consulates. Time and time again, Marine Security Guards have lived up to the Marine Corps credo, "Semper Fidelis." They have, in fact, always remained faithful to U.S. Diplomatic Security and to American diplomacy.

The Program

The Marine Corps Embassy Security Group, as it is known today, comprises a select group of men and women who have been specially trained for this duty. Well over a thousand officers and enlisted Marines are assigned to the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group at Quantico, Virginia; to its Regional Commands; and to the Marine Security Guard detachments located at U.S. embassies and consulates around the globe. A new detachment, called Marine Security Augmentation Unit squads, was created in 2013 to provide augmented support, wherever and whenever needed.

Standing duty 24 hours each day, seven days a week, they protect U.S. Government personnel and property in every hostile situation. In the event of an attack, Marine Security Guards deter the aggressors to safeguard diplomatic personnel and classified information.

MSGs also control access within U.S. missions. They conduct inspections to ensure that classified information is secure, and they monitor surveillance devices and fire alarms. They are the focal point for all post emergency communications. As such, they perform an essential role in helping our country achieve its goals in world affairs.

The MSG program offers a great opportunity to travel, learn new languages, experience new cultures, and make new friends. MSGs experience an exciting adventure at U.S. embassies and consulates throughout the world. Not only do they meet the U.S. personnel and their families assigned to the diplomatic posts, they also get to know the local national employees who work in the American facilities. Being part of the State Department diplomatic security team, they acquire a wealth of knowledge about local customs and attitudes.

The Tradition Continues

Marine Security Guards are one of America's greatest assets abroad. The U.S. Department of State and its Diplomatic Security team honor and respect MSG devotion to duty, honor, and country as together they work to support freedom and stability in the 21st century.

The MSGs who have gone before have heroically ensured the safety and security of U.S. diplomatic posts abroad. Marine Security Guards today, through their professionalism, dedication, and faithful support, carry on that powerful and noble tradition.

Marine Color Guards perform at a dedication ceremony of the new U.S. Embassy Macedonia on July 2, 2009.

"I have an unqualified respect for their dedication, discipline, and devotion."

—A U.S. CONSUL IN AFRICA TALKING ABOUT THE MARINE SECURITY GUARDS

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