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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-711](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In December 2002, the U.S. Department of State (State) established the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to promote democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. MEPI provides assistance for political, economic, and educational reform and women's empowerment. In fiscal years 2002-2004, State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reviewed U.S. bilateral economic assistance programs in the region to ensure they were aligned with the new U.S. policy focus on promoting democracy and reform. In this report, GAO (1) describes MEPI's structure for managing projects and allocating funding, (2) examines MEPI's uses of the reviews, and (3) evaluates MEPI's project monitoring.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that, to improve project monitoring, the Secretary of State ensure that MEPI managers (1) clearly delineate, document, and communicate monitoring roles and responsibilities; (2) systematically obtain, maintain, and communicate complete information on all MEPI projects; and (3) regularly assess progress in these areas. State and USAID agreed with GAO's recommendations. State disagreed with the extent of our finding that it could not with certainty evaluate its projects' performance. However, State said that it intends to improve its monitoring of MEPI projects.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-711](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-711).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or [dgootnick@gao.gov](mailto:dgootnick@gao.gov).

## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

# Middle East Partnership Initiative Offers Tool for Supporting Reform, but Project Monitoring Needs Improvement

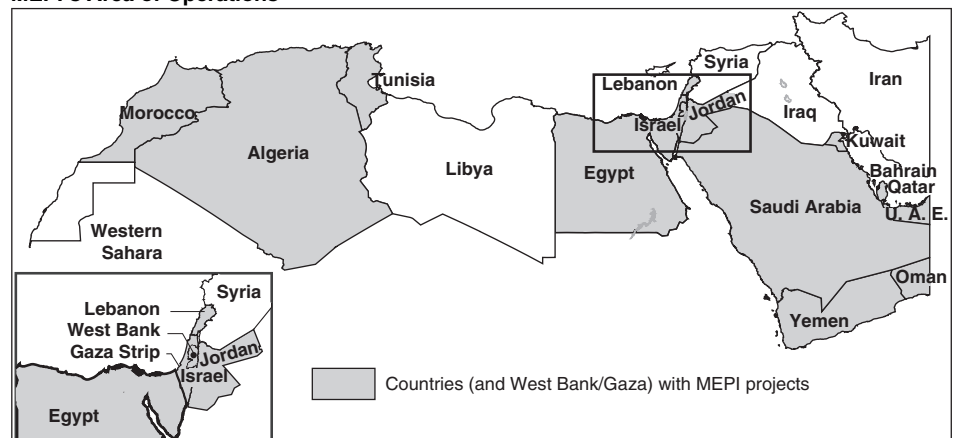
## What GAO Found

MEPI has worked with U.S. embassies, USAID headquarters in Washington, D.C., and USAID missions overseas to manage projects and obligate funding. In turn, MEPI and its partners have negotiated agreements with nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and other U.S. agencies to implement the projects. MEPI has obligated about 45 percent of the \$129 million that it received for fiscal years 2002-2003, and its partners have obligated the remainder.

MEPI used the State and USAID reviews of existing U.S. bilateral economic assistance programs in the Middle East and North Africa in two ways. First, in response to the reviews, MEPI targeted reform activities in the Middle East and North Africa that were not being addressed by other U.S. agencies. For example, responding to the reviews' finding that little progress had been made in supporting women's political involvement, MEPI provided funds to assist women candidates. Second, MEPI shaped its strategy in response to the reviews, particularly regarding the need to monitor projects' short-term results and hold project implementers accountable for project performance.

Despite its strategic emphasis on monitoring projects' performance, MEPI's monitoring has been limited by unclear communication of roles and responsibilities and a lack of complete project information. MEPI has acknowledged these deficiencies and begun to address them; in July 2005, State and USAID agreed on a framework for project monitoring roles and responsibilities. Without the ability to evaluate its projects' performance with certainty and access to complete information, MEPI's capacity to meet its strategic goals of producing tangible results and making results-based decisions is limited.

MEPI's Area of Operations



Source: MapArt (image).