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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-336](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of State's (State) Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program's objectives are to provide partner nations with counterterrorism training and equipment, improve bilateral ties, and increase respect for human rights. State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT) provides policy guidance and its Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Office of Antiterrorism Assistance, (DS/T/ATA) manages program operations. GAO assessed (1) State's guidance for determining ATA priorities, (2) how State coordinates ATA with other counterterrorism programs, (3) the extent State established ATA program goals and measures, and (4) State's reporting on U.S. international counterterrorism assistance. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed State documents and met with cognizant officials in Washington, D.C., and four ATA program partner nations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO suggests that Congress reconsider the requirement that State prepare an annual report on U.S. counterterrorism assistance. GAO also recommends that State review its ATA program guidance, its use of needs assessments, and measures for assessing the ATA program. State generally agreed with our recommendations regarding the ATA program, and supported the matter we suggest for congressional consideration.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-336](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

COMBATING TERRORISM

State Department's Antiterrorism Program Needs Improved Guidance and More Systematic Assessments of Outcomes

What GAO Found

S/CT provides minimal guidance to help prioritize ATA program recipients, and S/CT and DS/T/ATA do not systematically align ATA assistance with U.S. assessments of foreign partner counterterrorism needs. S/CT provides policy guidance to DS/T/ATA through quarterly meetings and a tiered list of priority countries, but the list does not provide guidance on country counterterrorism-related program goals, objectives, or training priorities. S/CT and DS/T/ATA also did not consistently use country-specific needs assessments and program reviews to plan assistance.

S/CT has established mechanisms to coordinate the ATA program with other U.S. international efforts to combat terrorism. S/CT holds interagency meetings with representatives from the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, and Treasury and other agencies as well as ambassador-level regional strategic coordinating meetings. GAO did not find any significant duplication or overlap among the various U.S. international counterterrorism efforts.

State has made progress in establishing goals and intended outcomes for the ATA program, but S/CT and DS/T/ATA do not systematically assess the outcomes and, as a result, cannot determine the effectiveness of program assistance. For example, although sustainability is a principal focus, S/CT and DS/T/ATA have not set clear measures of sustainability or integrated sustainability into program planning.

State reporting on U.S. counterterrorism assistance abroad has been incomplete and inaccurate. S/CT has not provided a congressionally mandated annual report to Congress on U.S. government-wide assistance related to combating international terrorism since 1996. After 1996, S/CT has only submitted to Congress annual reports on the ATA program. However, these reports contained inaccurate program information, such as the number of students trained and courses offered. Additionally, the reports lacked comprehensive information on the results of program assistance that would be useful to Congress.

Training Exercise at ATA Facility in Colombia



Source: GAO.