

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. EDT
Wednesday, June 4, 2008

COMBATING TERRORISM

Guidance for State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance Program Is Limited and State Does Not Systematically Assess Outcomes

Statement of Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., Director
International Affairs and Trade





Highlights of [GAO-08-875T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

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. counterterrorism assistance. This statement is based on a February 2008, GAO report titled *Combating Terrorism: State Department's Antiterrorism Program Needs Improved Guidance and More Systematic Assessments of Outcomes*, GAO-08-336 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 29, 2008).

What GAO Recommends

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

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-875T](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

COMBATING TERRORISM

Guidance for State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance Program Is Limited and State Does Not Systematically Assess Outcomes

What GAO Found

S/CT provides minimal guidance to help prioritize ATA program recipients, and S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically align ATA assistance with U.S. assessments of foreign partner counterterrorism needs. S/CT provided policy guidance to DS/T/ATA through quarterly meetings and a tiered list of priority countries, but the list did 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 had established mechanisms to coordinate the ATA program with other U.S. international efforts to combat terrorism. S/CT held interagency meetings with officials from the Department 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 had made progress in establishing goals and intended outcomes for the ATA program, but S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically assess the outcomes and, as a result, could not determine the effectiveness of program assistance. For example, although sustainability is a principal focus, S/CT and DS/T/ATA had not set clear measures of sustainability or integrated sustainability into program planning.

State reporting on U.S. counterterrorism assistance abroad was incomplete and inaccurate. S/CT had 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, such as the number of students trained and courses offered. Moreover, these reports contained inaccurate program information. Additionally, the reports lacked comprehensive information of the results on program assistance that would be useful to Congress.

June 4, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the results of GAO's examination of the Department of State's (State) antiterrorism assistance (ATA) program.¹ Our work focused primarily on the time period from fiscal year 2001 to fiscal year 2007, although we included more recent data where available.

State's ATA program has assumed an increasingly important role in U.S. counterterrorism efforts, and is a key mechanism in State's efforts to help foreign nations improve their ability to combat terrorism. ATA's legislatively mandated² objectives are to (1) enhance the antiterrorism skills of friendly countries by providing counterterrorism training and equipment; (2) improve bilateral ties with partner nations by offering assistance; and (3) increase respect for human rights by sharing modern, humane and effective antiterrorism techniques with foreign civil authorities. Funding for ATA has increased over fourfold in recent years—from \$38 million in fiscal year 2001 to almost \$171 million in fiscal year 2007. Over the period, State provided counterterrorism assistance to nearly 100 countries. Much of this assistance is equipment and counterterrorism training provided in the country by trainers on temporary duty, as well as six programs, which use permanent, in-country training facilities.

Within State, the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT) is charged with the overall supervision (including policy oversight of resources) and coordination of the U.S. government's counterterrorism activities.³ The broadly mandated⁴ role of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Office of Antiterrorism Assistance (DS/T/ATA),⁵ includes implementing security

¹GAO, *Combating Terrorism: State Department's Antiterrorism Program Needs Improved Guidance and More Systematic Assessments of Outcomes*, [GAO-08-336](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 29, 2008).

²22 U.S.C. §§ 2349aa, 2349aa-1.

³22 U.S.C. § 2651a.

⁴State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security in its current form is an outgrowth of the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986 (Pub. L. No. 99-399, §§ 104-105).

⁵ATA is part of a training directorate within Diplomatic Security comprised of the Office of Antiterrorism Assistance, the Office of Training and Performance Support, and the Office of Mobile Security Training.

programs to protect diplomatic personnel and advise chiefs of mission on security matters.

Today, I will discuss (1) State's guidance for determining country recipients and types of counterterrorism assistance to provide; (2) how State coordinates ATA with other U.S. government counterterrorism programs; (3) the extent to which State establishes clear ATA goals, and measures sustainability of program outcomes; and (4) State's reporting on U.S. international counterterrorism assistance. Over the course of our work, we reviewed and analyzed State planning, funding, and reporting documents concerning ATA. We interviewed officials from State's offices in Washington, D.C., including ATA program managers responsible for each of the six in-country programs—Afghanistan, Colombia, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, and the Philippines—and visited four of the six in-country programs.⁶ In these countries, we reviewed country-specific program documents, and interviewed ATA in-country program managers, course instructors, and other contractors; U.S. embassy officials responsible for managing counterterrorism assistance and activities; and partner nation government officials. We also observed various types of ATA training and equipment that were provided to partner nation security units.

We conducted our work for the ATA report from November 2006 through January 2008 and, for purposes of this statement, we updated certain data in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Summary

At the time of our review, S/CT provided minimal guidance to help determine ATA priorities and ensure that assistance provided supports broader U.S. policy goals. In addition, S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically use country-specific needs assessments and program

⁶We visited Colombia, Indonesia, Kenya, and the Philippines. These four countries comprised about 55 percent of total ATA funding for training and training-related activities in fiscal year 2006, and about 43 percent of funding in fiscal year 2007.

reviews to plan what types of assistance to provide partner nations in accordance with State policy guidance.

- S/CT provided a tiered list of priority countries for policy guidance to DS/T/ATA through quarterly meetings. However, this list did not provide guidance on country counterterrorism-related program goals, objectives, or training priorities that DS/T/ATA could use to implement a country-specific counterterrorism program and ensure that assistance provided is consistent with U.S. policy objectives. As a result, neither S/CT nor DS/T/ATA could ensure that program assistance provided to specific countries supports broader U.S. antiterrorism policy goals. In addition, some countries not on the tiered list received assistance because of unanticipated circumstances, such as an increase in the U.S. government's diplomatic or political interest in a country.
- S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not consistently use country-specific needs assessments and program reviews to plan what types of assistance to provide to partner nations. In the five countries receiving the largest amounts of program assistance since fiscal year 2002, we found that program managers did not use the assessments as the basis for developing ATA country-specific plans. According to State policy documents, the assessments are to guide ATA resource decisions and form the basis of country-specific assistance plans. However, the assessments included broad-ranging recommendations for counterterrorism assistance, but they generally did not prioritize assistance to be provided. Consequently, the assessments did not consistently provide a basis for targeting program assistance to the areas of a partner nation's greatest counterterrorism need.

S/CT had established mechanisms to coordinate ATA with other U.S. international efforts to combat terrorism. S/CT held biweekly interagency meetings with officials from the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Treasury, and other agencies as well as ambassador-level regional strategic coordinating meetings in order to help coordinate all U.S. government international counterterrorism training assistance and avoid duplication of efforts. Based on our review of program documents and interviews and meetings with counterterrorism officials in the four countries we visited, we did not find any significant duplication or overlap among the various U.S. international counterterrorism efforts.

State had made progress in establishing goals and intended outcomes for ATA, but S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically assess the outcomes of program assistance. Since fiscal year 2006, State planning documents listed sustainability—that is, enabling partner nations to achieve advanced

counterterrorism capabilities and maintain them—as a key intended program outcome. However, S/CT and DS/T/ATA had not set clear measures of sustainability, and had not integrated sustainability into program planning. As a result, State could not determine the effectiveness of program assistance or assess the extent to which ATA was meeting its longer-term, congressionally mandated objectives.

S/CT had not provided a congressionally mandated report to Congress on U.S. government-wide assistance related to combating international terrorism since 1996.⁷ After 1996, S/CT has only submitted to Congress annual reports prepared by DS/T/ATA on just the ATA program. Moreover, we found that the ATA annual reports contained inaccuracies, such as the number of students trained and courses offered. Additionally, the ATA annual reports lacked comprehensive information on the results of program assistance that would be useful to Congress in evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

Given changes in the overall scope and nature of U.S. international counterterrorism assistance and the fact that State had not submitted the mandated report on such matters since 1996, we included a matter for congressional consideration regarding the legislative requirement for State’s reporting on U.S. counterterrorism assistance. Additionally, to ensure that ATA, as a key element of State’s broader international counterterrorism efforts, is focused on improving partner nations’ counterterrorism capabilities and aligned with overall U.S. counterterrorism policy goals, we recommended that the Secretary of State improve internal program guidance. We made other recommendations to help S/CT and DS/T/ATA more effectively link assistance needs to resource allocations and better assess program outcomes

Background

Congress authorized State’s ATA program in 1983 through the Foreign Assistance Act.⁸ According to the legislation the purpose of ATA is “(1) to enhance the antiterrorism skills of friendly countries by providing training and equipment to deter and counter terrorism; (2) to strengthen the

⁷22 U.S.C. § 2349aa-7 (requiring the Secretary of State to report annually on the amount and nature of all assistance provided by the U.S. government related to international terrorism).

⁸Pub. L. No. 87-195, Pt. II, §571, as added by Pub. L. No. 98-151, §101(b)(2), 97 Stat. 972 (1983) (codified at 22 U.S.C. § 2349a).

bilateral ties of the United States with friendly governments by offering concrete assistance in this area of great mutual concern; and (3) to increase respect for human rights by sharing with foreign civil authorities modern, humane, and effective antiterrorism techniques.”

ATA Program Assistance

ATA offers a wide range of counterterrorism assistance to partner nations, but most assistance consists of (1) training courses on tactical and strategic counterterrorism issues and (2) grants of counterterrorism equipment, such as small arms, bomb detection equipment, vehicles, and computers. ATA curricula and training focus on enhancing critical counterterrorism capabilities, which cover issues such as crisis management and response, cyberterrorism, dignitary protection, and related areas. According to DS/T/ATA, all its courses emphasize law enforcement under the rule of law and sound human rights practices.

ATA Program Funding

ATA is State’s largest counterterrorism program, and receives appropriations under the Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs account. Fiscal year 2002 appropriations for ATA increased to about \$158 million—over six times the level of funding appropriated in fiscal year 2000. Appropriations have fluctuated since fiscal year 2002, but increased to almost \$171 million in fiscal year 2007. From fiscal years 2002 to 2007, program assistance for the top 10 recipients of ATA allocations ranged from about \$11 million to about \$78 million. The top 10 recipients represented about 57 percent of ATA funding allocated for training and training-related activities over the 6-year period. ATA funding for the other 89 partner nations that received assistance during this period ranged from \$9,000 to about \$10.7 million.

ATA Program Management

The Coordinator for Counterterrorism, the head of S/CT, is statutorily⁹ charged with the overall supervision (including policy oversight of resources) and coordination of the U.S. government’s counterterrorism activities. The broadly mandated¹⁰ role of the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security, the head of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, includes implementing security programs to protect diplomatic personnel

⁹22 U.S.C. § 2651a.

¹⁰State’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security in its current form is an outgrowth of the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986 (Pub. L. No. 99-399, §§ 104-105).

and advise chiefs of mission on security matters. Specific roles and responsibilities for S/CT and DS/T/ATA regarding ATA are described in a 1991 internal policy guidance memorandum, the Omnibus Diplomatic Security Act of 1986,¹¹ and incorporated into State's Foreign Affairs Manual.¹²

S/CT is responsible for leading the initial assessment of a partner nation's counterterrorism needs, and DS/T/ATA is responsible for developing annual, country-specific plans. Under current program operations, DS/T/ATA conducts an initial assessment of a new participant nation's counterterrorism capabilities, and conducts subsequent assessments—referred to as program reviews—every 2 to 3 years thereafter. In general, the needs assessments include input from the embassy teams, but the assessments themselves are conducted by technical experts contracted by DS/T/ATA. According to DS/T/ATA, the purpose of the needs assessment and program review process is to determine the forms of assistance for a partner nation to detect, deter, deny, and defeat terrorism; and to evaluate program effectiveness.

State's Implementation of ATA Lacks Guidance and Use of Country Needs Assessments

S/CT provides minimal policy guidance to DS/T/ATA to help determine assistance priorities and ensure that it supports broader U.S. policy goals. In addition, S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically use country-specific needs assessments and program reviews to plan what types of assistance to provide partner nations in accordance with State policy guidance. The assessments we reviewed had weaknesses and inconsistencies.

S/CT Provides a Tiered Country List, but Little Additional Policy Guidance

According to State officials, S/CT places countries on a tiered list in one of four priority categories based on criteria that address several factors, including country-specific threats and the level and depth of diplomatic and political engagement in a country. State officials indicated that other factors also may be considered in determining whether and where a country is placed on the list, such as the presence of a U.S. military base or a planned international sporting or cultural event with U.S. participation.

¹¹Pub. L. No. 99-399, §§ 104-105.

¹²The general responsibilities for S/CT and DS/T/ATA regarding the ATA program are described in the *2007 U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual, Volume 1—Organization and Functions*, 1 FAM 022.5 and 1 FAM 262.3-1.

Since 2006, S/CT has reviewed and discussed the tiered list—including changes, additions, or deletions—with DS/T/ATA during quarterly meetings. In addition to the quarterly meetings, an S/CT official told us that they had established a series of regional roundtable discussions in 2006 between S/CT regional subject experts and DS/T/ATA counterparts. According to the S/CT official, the roundtables were intended as a means of identifying priority countries and their counterterrorism needs for purposes of developing budget requests.

S/CT provides little guidance to DS/T/ATA beyond the tiered list, although the 1991 State policy guidance memorandum states that S/CT's written policy guidance for the program should include suggested country training priorities. While S/CT provides some additional guidance to DS/T/ATA during quarterly meetings and on other occasions, DS/T/ATA officials in headquarters and the field stated they received little or no guidance from S/CT beyond the tiered list. As a result, neither S/CT nor DS/T/ATA could ensure that program assistance provided to specific countries supports broader U.S. antiterrorism policy goals.

Other factors beyond S/CT's tiered list of countries, such as unforeseen events or new governmental initiatives, also influence which countries receive program assistance. We found that 10 countries on the tiered list did not receive ATA assistance in fiscal year 2007, while 13 countries not on the tiered list received approximately \$3.2 million. S/CT and DS/T/ATA officials stated that assistance does not always align with the tiered list because U.S. foreign policy objectives sometimes cause State, in consultation with the President's National Security Council, to provide assistance to a non-tiered-list country.

S/CT and DS/T/ATA Did Not Systematically Align Program Assistance with Counterterrorism Needs

According to the 1991 State policy guidance memorandum and DS/T/ATA standard operations procedures, ATA country-specific needs assessments and program reviews are intended to guide program management and planning. However, S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically use the assessments to determine what types of assistance to provide to partner nations or develop ATA country-specific plans. Although the 1991 State policy memorandum states that S/CT should lead the assessment efforts, a senior S/CT official stated that S/CT lacks the capacity to do so. As a result, DS/T/ATA has led interagency assessment teams in recent years, but the assessments and recommendations for types of assistance to be provided may not fully reflect S/CT policy guidance concerning overall U.S. counterterrorism priorities.

DS/T/ATA Did Not Consistently Use Country Needs Assessments

DS/T/ATA officials responsible for five of the top six recipients of ATA support—Colombia, Kenya, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Philippines¹³—did not consistently use ATA country needs assessments and program reviews in making program decisions or to create annual country assistance plans. In some instances, DS/T/ATA officials responsible for in-country programs had not seen the latest assessments for their respective countries, and some said that the assessments they had reviewed were either not useful or that they were used for informational purposes only.

- The Regional Security Officer, Deputy Regional Security Officer, and DS/T/ATA Program Manager for Kenya had not seen any of the assessments that had been conducted for the country since 2000. Although the in-country program manager for Kenya was familiar with the assessments from her work in a previous position with DS/T/ATA, she stated that in general, the assessments were not very useful for determining what type of assistance to provide. She said that the initial needs assessment for Kenya failed to adequately consider local needs and capacity.
- The Regional Security Officer and Assistant Regional Security Officer for Indonesia stated they had not seen the latest assessment for the country. The DS/T/ATA program manager for Indonesia said that he recalled using one of the assessments as a “frame of reference” in making program and resource decisions. The in-country program manager also recalled seeing one of the assessments, but stated that he did not find the assessment useful given the changing terrorist landscape; therefore, he did not share it with his staff.
- The DS/T/ATA Program Manager for Pakistan stated that decisions on the types of assistance to provide in Pakistan were based primarily on the knowledge and experience of in-country staff regarding partner nation needs, rather than the needs assessments or program reviews. He added that he did not find the assessments useful, as the issues identified in the latest (2004) assessment for the country were outdated.

¹³Each of these countries received a range of ATA training and other assistance through an in-country presence. The sixth in-country program, Afghanistan, also received significant program assistance during this period. But, according to DS/T/ATA officials, the Afghanistan in-country program focuses principally on training and monitoring a Presidential Protective Service.

Needs Assessments
Generally Lacked
Prioritized
Recommendations and
Were Inconsistent

We reviewed 12 of the 21 ATA country-specific needs assessments and program reviews¹⁴ that, according to ATA annual reports, DS/T/ATA conducted between 2000 and 2007 for five of the six in-country programs.¹⁵ The assessments and reviews generally included a range of recommendations for counterterrorism assistance, but did not prioritize assistance to be provided or include specific timeframes for implementation. Consequently, the assessments did not consistently provide a basis for targeting program assistance to the areas of a partner nation's greatest counterterrorism assistance need. Only two of the assessments—a 2000 needs assessment for Indonesia and a 2003 assessment for Kenya—prioritized the recommendations, although a 2004 assessment for Pakistan and a 2005 assessment for the Philippines listed one or two recommendations as priority ATA efforts. In addition, the information included in the assessments was not consistent and varied in linking recommendations to capabilities. Of the 12 assessments we reviewed:

- Nine included narrative on a range of counterterrorism capabilities, such as border security and explosives detection, but the number of capabilities assessed ranged from 5 to 25.
- Only four of the assessments that assessed more than one capability linked recommendations provided to the relevant capabilities.
- Six included capability ratings, but the types of ratings used varied. For example, a 2003 assessment for Colombia rated eight capabilities from 1 through 5, but the 2004 assessment rated 24 capabilities, using poor, low, fair, or good.
- Two used a format that DS/T/ATA began implementing in 2001. The assessments following the new format generally included consistent types of information and clearly linked recommendations provided to an assessment of 25 counterterrorism capabilities. However, they did not prioritize recommendations or include specific timeframes for implementing the recommendations.

¹⁴DS/T/ATA was unable to provide nine assessments that were reportedly conducted for four of these countries between 2002 and 2007. According to DS/T/ATA officials, they were either unable to locate these assessments, written reports on the assessment visits were not completed, or the annual reports stating that they had been completed were inaccurate.

¹⁵We did not include the ATA in-country program in Afghanistan in this analysis because the scope of the program is narrowly focused on presidential protection training.

Country Assistance Plans Were Not Used or Were Not Linked to Needs Assessments

Although the 1991 State policy memorandum states that DS/T/ATA should create annual country assistance plans that specify training objectives and assistance to be provided based upon the needs assessments and program reviews, we found that S/CT and DS/T/ATA did not systematically use the assessments to create annual plans for the five in-country programs. DS/T/ATA officials we interviewed regarding the five in-country programs stated that in lieu of relying on the assessments or country assistance plans, program and resource decisions were primarily made by DS/T/ATA officials in the field based on their knowledge and experience regarding partner nation needs. Some DS/T/ATA officials said they did not find the country assistance plans useful. The program manager for Pakistan stated that he used the country assistance plan as a guide, but found that it did not respond to changing needs in the country. The ATA program manager for Kenya said that he had not seen a country assistance plan for that country.

We requested ATA country assistance plans conducted during fiscal years 2000-2006 for the five in-country programs included in our review, but S/CT and DS/T/ATA only provided three plans completed for three of the five countries. Of these, we found that the plans did not link planned activities to recommendations provided in the needs assessments and program reviews. For example, the plan for the Philippines included a brief reference to a 2005 needs assessment, but the plan did not identify which recommendations from the 2005 assessment were intended to be addressed by current or planned efforts.

S/CT Has Established Various Mechanisms to Coordinate Program Assistance

S/CT has mechanisms to coordinate the ATA program with other U.S. government international counterterrorism training assistance and to help avoid duplication of efforts. S/CT chairs biweekly interagency working group meetings of the Counterterrorism Security Group's Training Assistance Subgroup¹⁶ to provide a forum for high-level information sharing and discussion among U.S. agencies implementing international counterterrorism efforts.¹⁷ S/CT also established the Regional Strategic Initiative in 2006 to coordinate regional counterterrorism efforts and

¹⁶The Training Assistance Subgroup includes representatives from the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury, and other agencies.

¹⁷The Counterterrorism Security Group is chaired by the National Security Council and is intended to serve as a means for U.S. agencies to share information and coordinate the response to terrorist threats against U.S. interests domestically and abroad.

strategy. S/CT described the Regional Strategic Initiative as a series of regionally based, interagency meetings hosted by U.S. embassies to identify key regional counterterrorism issues and develop a strategic approach to addressing them, among other goals.

In the four countries we visited, we did not find any significant duplication or overlap among U.S. agencies' country-specific training programs aimed at combating terrorism. Officials we met with in each of these countries noted that they participated in various embassy working group meetings, such as Counterterrorism Working Group and Law Enforcement Working Group meetings, during which relevant agencies shared information regarding operations and activities at post. DS/T/ATA officials also coordinated ATA with other counterterrorism efforts through daily informal communication among cognizant officials in the countries we visited.

State Had Made Progress in Establishing ATA Goals, but S/CT and DS/T/ATA Did Not Assess Sustainability

In response to concerns that ATA lacked elements of adequate strategic planning and performance measurement, State took action to define goals and measures related to the program's mandated objectives. S/CT and DS/T/ATA, however, did not systematically assess sustainability—that is, the extent to which assistance has enabled partner nations to achieve and maintain advanced counterterrorism capabilities. S/CT and DS/T/ATA lacked clear measures and processes for assessing sustainability, and program managers did not consistently include sustainability in ATA planning.

State Recently Established ATA Goals and Measures, and Emphasizes Sustaining Partner Nations' Counterterrorism Capabilities

State did not have measurable performance goals and outcomes related to the mandated objectives for ATA prior to fiscal year 2003, but has recently made some progress to address the deficiency, which had been noted in reports by State's Office of Inspector General. Similarly, State developed specific goals and measures for each of the program's mandated objectives in response to a 2003 Office of Management and Budget assessment.

Since fiscal year 2006, State planning documents, including department and bureau-level performance plans, have stated that enabling partner nations to achieve advanced and sustainable counterterrorism capabilities is a key outcome. S/CT and DS/T/ATA officials further confirmed that sustainability is the principal intended outcome and focus of program assistance. In support of these efforts, DS/T/ATA appointed a Sustainment Manager in November 2006 to, among other things, coordinate with other

DS/T/ATA divisions to develop recommendations and plans to assist partner nations in developing sustainable counterterrorism capabilities.

S/CT and DS/T/ATA Did Not Assess Sustainability of Capabilities

Despite progress towards establishing goals and intended outcomes, State had not developed clear measures and a process for assessing sustainability and had not integrated the concept into program planning. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993¹⁸ requires agencies in charge of U.S. government programs and activities to identify goals and report on the degree to which goals are met. S/CT and DS/T/ATA officials noted the difficulty in developing direct quantitative measures of ATA outcomes related to partner nations' counterterrorism capabilities. Our past work also has stressed the importance of establishing program goals, objectives, priorities, milestones, and measures to use in monitoring performance and assessing outcomes as critical elements of program management and effective resource allocation.¹⁹

We found that the measure for ATA's principal intended program outcome of sustainability is not clear. In its fiscal year 2007 Joint Performance Summary, State reported results and future year targets for the number of countries that had achieved an advanced, sustainable level of counterterrorism capability. According to the document, partner nations that achieve a sustainable level of counterterrorism would graduate from the program and no longer receive program assistance. However, program officials in S/CT and DS/T/ATA directly responsible for overseeing ATA were not aware that the Joint Performance Summary listed numerical targets and past results for the number of partner nations that had achieved sustainability, and could not provide an explanation of how State assessed the results. DS/T/ATA's Sustainment Manager also could not explain how State established and assessed the numerical targets in the reports. The Sustainment Manager further noted that, to his knowledge, S/CT and DS/T/ATA had not yet developed systematic measures of sustainability.

DS/T/ATA's mechanism for evaluating partner nation capabilities did not include guidance or specific measures to assess sustainability. According

¹⁸Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285, 287-88 (1993).

¹⁹GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Law Enforcement Agencies Lack Directives to Assist Foreign Nations to Identify, Disrupt, and Prosecute Terrorists*, [GAO-07-697](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 25, 2007).

to program guidance and DS/T/ATA officials, needs assessments and program reviews are intended to establish a baseline of a partner nation's counterterrorism capabilities and quantify progress through subsequent reviews. DS/T/ATA officials also asserted that the process is intended to measure the results of program assistance. However, the process did not explicitly address sustainability, and provided no specific information or instruction regarding how reviewers are to assess sustainability. Moreover, the process focused on assessing a partner nation's overall counterterrorism capabilities, but did not specifically measure the results of program assistance.

DS/T/ATA had not systematically integrated sustainability into country-specific assistance plans, and we found a lack of consensus among program officials about how to address the issue. In-country program managers, embassy officials, instructors, and partner nation officials we interviewed held disparate views on how to define sustainability across all ATA participant countries, and many were not aware that sustainability was the intended outcome. Several program officials stated that graduating a country and withdrawing or significantly reducing program assistance could result in a rapid decline in the partner nation's counterterrorism capabilities, and could undermine other program objectives, such as improving bilateral relations. Further, although State has listed sustainability in State-level planning documents since 2006, S/CT and DS/T/ATA had not issued guidance on incorporating sustainability into country-specific planning, and none of the country assistance plans we reviewed consistently addressed the outcome. As a result, the plans did not include measurable annual objectives targeted at enabling the partner nation to achieve sustainability. For example, Colombia's assistance plan listed transferring responsibility for the antiskidnapping training to the Colombian government and described planned activities to achieve that goal. However, the plan did not include measurable objectives to determine whether activities achieved intended results.

State Reporting on U.S. Counterterrorism Assistance Abroad Has Been Incomplete and Inaccurate

Since 1996, State has not complied with a congressional mandate²⁰ to report to Congress on U.S. international counterterrorism assistance. Additionally, State's annual reports on ATA contained inaccurate data regarding basic program information, did not provide systematic assessments of program results, and lacked other information necessary to evaluate program effectiveness.

S/CT Has Not Prepared a Mandated Report

In 1985, Congress amended the Foreign Assistance Act requiring the Secretary of State to report on all assistance related to international terrorism provided by the U.S. government during the preceding fiscal year.²¹ Since 1996, State has submitted ATA annual reports rather than the broader report required by the statute.

A S/CT official noted confusion within State over what the statute required and he asserted that the ATA annual report, which is prepared by DS/T/ATA, and State's annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report²² were sufficiently responsive to congressional needs. He further noted that, in his view, it would be extremely difficult for State to compile and report on all U.S. government terrorism assistance activities, especially given the significant growth of agencies' programs since 2001. Officials in State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs indicated that, to their knowledge, they had never received an inquiry from congressional staff about the missing reports.

ATA Annual Reports Contain Inaccuracies

Recent ATA annual reports have contained inaccurate data relating to basic program information on numbers of students trained and courses offered. For example,

- *Afghanistan*. According to annual reports for fiscal years 2002 to 2005, 15 Afghan students were trained as part of a single training event over the 4-year period. DS/T/ATA subsequently provided us data for fiscal year

²⁰22 U.S.C. § 2349aa-7.

²¹Pub. L. No. 99-83, Title V, § 502, 99 Stat. 220 (codified at 22 U.S.C. § 2349aa-7).

²²S/CT prepares this annual report, which is required by a separate statute (22 U.S.C. § 2656f(a)). The report primarily describes international terrorist activity.

2005, which corrected the participation total in that year from 15 participants in 1 training event to 1,516 participants in 12 training events.

- *Pakistan.* According to the fiscal year 2005 ATA annual report, ATA delivered 17 courses to 335 participants in Pakistan. Supporting tables in the same report listed 13 courses provided to 283 participants, and a summary report provided to us by DS/T/ATA reported 13 courses provided to 250 course participants.

DS/T/ATA officials acknowledged the discrepancies and noted that similar inaccuracies could be presumed for prior years and for other partner nations. The officials indicated that inaccuracies and omissions in reports of the training participants and events were due to a lack of internal policies and procedures for recording and reporting program data. In the absence of documented policies and procedures, staff developed various individual processes for collecting the information that resulted in flawed data reporting. Additionally, DS/T/ATA officials told us that its inadequate information management system and a lack of consistent data collection procedures also contributed to inaccurate reporting.

ATA Annual Reports Lack Performance and Other Useful Program Information

We reviewed ATA annual reports for fiscal years 1997 through 2005, and found that the reports varied widely in terms of content, scope, and format. Moreover, the annual reports did not contain systematic assessments of program performance or consistent information on program activity, such as number and type of courses delivered, types of equipment provided, and budget activity associated with program operations. In general, the reports contained varying levels of detail on program activity, and provided only anecdotal examples of program successes, from a variety of sources, including U.S. embassy officials, ATA instructors, and partner nation officials. DS/T/ATA program officials charged with compiling the annual reports for the past 3 fiscal years noted that DS/T/ATA did not have guidance on the scope, content, or format for the reports.

Conclusions

Although ATA plays a central role in State's broader effort to fight international terrorism, deficiencies in how the program is guided, managed, implemented, and assessed could limit the program's effectiveness. Specifically, minimal guidance from S/CT makes it difficult to determine the extent to which program assistance directly supports broader U.S. counterterrorism policy goals. Additionally, deficiencies with DS/T/ATA's needs assessments and program reviews may limit their utility

as a tool for planning assistance and prioritizing among several partner nations' counterterrorism needs. As a result, the assessments and reviews are not systematically linked to resource allocation decisions, which may limit the program's ability to improve partner nation's counterterrorism capabilities.

Although State has made some progress in attempting to evaluate and quantitatively measure program performance, ATA still lacks a clearly defined, systematic assessment and reporting of outcomes, which makes it difficult to determine the overall effectiveness of the program. This deficiency, along with State's noncompliance with mandated reporting requirements, has resulted in Congress having limited and incomplete information on U.S. international counterterrorism assistance and ATA efforts. Such information is necessary to determine the most effective types of assistance the U.S. government can provide to partner nations in support of the U.S. national security goal of countering terrorism abroad.

In our February 2008 report, we suggested that Congress should reconsider the requirement that the Secretary of State provide an annual report on the nature and amount of U.S. government counterterrorism assistance provided abroad, given the broad changes in the scope and nature of U.S. counterterrorism assistance abroad in conjunction with the fact that the report has not been submitted since 1996.

We also recommended that the Secretary of State take the following four actions:

1. Revisit and revise internal guidance (the 1991 State policy memorandum and Foreign Affairs Manual, in particular) to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for S/CT and DS/T/ATA are still relevant and better enable State to determine which countries should receive assistance and what type, and allocate limited ATA resources.
2. Ensure that needs assessments and program reviews are both useful and linked to ATA resource decisions and development of country-specific assistance plans.
3. Establish clearer measures of sustainability, and refocus the process for assessing the sustainability of partner nations' counterterrorism capabilities. The revised evaluation process should include not only an overall assessment of partner nation counterterrorism capabilities, but also provide guidance for assessing the specific outcomes of ATA.

-
4. Comply with the congressional mandate to report to Congress on U.S. international counterterrorism assistance.

In commenting on our report, State agreed overall with our principal findings and recommendations to improve its ATA program guidance, the needs assessment and program review process, and its assessments of ATA program outcomes. State noted that the report highlighted the difficulties in assessing the benefits of developing and improving long-term antiterrorism and law enforcement relationships with foreign governments. State also outlined a number of ongoing and planned initiatives to address our recommendations. As noted in our report, we will follow up with State to ensure that these initiatives have been completed, as planned.

Although State supported the matter we suggested for congressional consideration, it did not specifically address our recommendation that it comply with the congressional mandate to report on U.S. counterterrorism assistance.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

For questions regarding this testimony, please contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov. Albert H. Huntington, III, Assistant Director; Matthew E. Helm; Elisabeth R. Helmer; and Emily Rachman made key contributions in preparing this statement.

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through GAO's Web site (www.gao.gov). Each weekday, GAO posts newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence on its Web site. To have GAO e-mail you a list of newly posted products every afternoon, go to www.gao.gov and select "E-mail Updates."

Order by Mail or Phone

The first copy of each printed report is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. A check or money order should be made out to the Superintendent of Documents. GAO also accepts VISA and Mastercard. Orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent. Orders should be sent to:

U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW, Room LM
Washington, DC 20548

To order by Phone: Voice: (202) 512-6000
TDD: (202) 512-2537
Fax: (202) 512-6061

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Web site: www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm

E-mail: fraudnet@gao.gov

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

Congressional Relations

Ralph Dawn, Managing Director, dawnr@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548