

Why GAO Did This Study

After the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies, a U.S. government panel determined that staffing levels had not been adjusted to reflect changing missions, requirements, and security concerns. In 2004, Congress mandated the establishment of the Office of Rightsizing within the Department of State. The office reviews levels of overseas staffing for all U.S. government agencies at every post every 5 years, projects future staffing levels it determines are appropriate to meet mission needs, and recommends ways to improve efficiency. Rightsizing is intended to align the number and location of staff with foreign policy priorities, security, and other constraints.

GAO examined (1) the consistency of State's approach to conducting rightsizing reviews and how its projections compare to actual staffing levels; (2) the focus of State's rightsizing recommendations; and (3) the extent to which State uses its rightsizing reviews and monitors implementation of recommendations. GAO reviewed 181 rightsizing reviews, compared projections in reviews with current actual staffing data, and interviewed officials from State and other agencies in Washington, D.C., and at overseas posts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State designate the appropriate entities to ensure that rightsizing recommendations are addressed and to track and report the actions taken to implement the recommendations. State described a number of actions it intends to take that could address GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-12-799](#). For more information, contact Michael J. Courts at (202) 512-8980 or courtsm@gao.gov.

OVERSEAS RIGHTSIZING

State Has Improved the Consistency of Its Approach, but Does Not Follow Up on Its Recommendations

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) has improved the consistency of its rightsizing approach across overseas posts. However, differences between future staffing levels it projects are appropriate to meet mission needs and actual staffing levels still exist due to unanticipated events and other factors. GAO reported in 2006 that State's Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation (M/PRI) had not been conducting its rightsizing reviews consistently. Some reviews discussed various rightsizing elements, such as outsourcing, while others did not. State has since improved the consistency of its reviews by developing a variety of methodological tools and a standard template which it applies to each post. GAO found that over half of the 144 rightsizing projections analyzed were within 10 percent of actual staffing levels as of December 2011. In contrast, over 40 percent of the posts have staffing level differences of over 10 percent. Unanticipated events and other factors, such as changes in policies, contributed to these differences. For example, according to the management officer in Mozambique, M/PRI projected staffing increases as a result of the President's program to combat AIDS, but the actual funding level for the program was much higher than anticipated. This resulted in higher actual staffing levels for both U.S. direct-hire and locally-employed staff positions.

Rightsizing reviews contain recommendations to improve post operations and eliminate duplicative services and positions. To develop its recommendations, M/PRI reviews the levels of all staff at posts and seeks input from State and non-State agencies. M/PRI relies on non-State agencies to determine independently their own staffing needs. Many of State's recommendations for a specific post focus on the level of State's administrative or management staff, rather than State's programmatic staff or staff from other agencies. Some State officials stated that the activities of administrative and management staff are better suited to quantitative measurement while the qualitative nature of programmatic staff activities, such as discussing policy issues with foreign diplomatic counterparts, is more difficult to measure.

State's use of rightsizing reviews varies, and State does not follow up on review recommendations. State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations uses the staffing projections in rightsizing reviews to plan the size of new embassy compounds. Further, M/PRI uses rightsizing reviews when it assesses requests by State or other agencies to add staff to overseas posts, although the final decision is made by the respective Chief of Mission. In addition, Bureau of Diplomatic Security officials said that they incorporate rightsizing reviews into their annual staffing planning exercise, and some post officials said that they refer to rightsizing reviews to support staffing changes. Some U.S. officials stated that undertaking the rightsizing process acts as a check on growth in overseas staffing levels. However, some State regional bureau officials said that they do not actively use the reviews except as a historical overview of staffing, and some post officials said that they do not use the reviews at all. State often uses documents other than rightsizing reviews for decisions in areas including staffing levels. Finally, State does not monitor the implementation of rightsizing review recommendations and has not designated an office with responsibility for their implementation. State issues an annual report to Congress in which it lists the rightsizing reviews it has completed, number of positions recommended for elimination, and potential cost savings; the report does not address whether recommendations have been implemented. Because State does not track or report on the implementation of recommendations, State cannot determine if rightsizing reviews are achieving their purpose of aligning overseas staffing levels with U.S. priorities.