

Highlights of [GAO-13-335T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has increasingly focused on security cooperation activities designed to build the defense capacity of foreign partners and allies, furthering the U.S. objective of securing international peace and cooperation. Both the *2011 National Military Strategy of the United States of America* and the *2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism* identify building partner capacity as a worldwide priority. As DOD continues to emphasize building partner capacity, the need for efficient and effective coordination with foreign partners and within the U.S. government has become more important, in part due to fiscal challenges, which can be exacerbated by overlapping or ineffective efforts.

This testimony highlights opportunities to strengthen DOD's management of its building partner capacity efforts by focusing on three key practices: (1) setting clear goals and defining terminology, (2) coordinating activities and sharing information, and (3) sustaining efforts and evaluating progress. It is based on GAO's body of work on building partner capacity from April 2010 through November 2012.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made numerous recommendations to align goals with broader strategies and to clarify terminology; develop mechanisms to better coordinate activities and share information; and develop and implement plans and metrics to sustain and evaluate progress. DOD has generally concurred with GAO's recommendations and has taken some actions, but work remains to fully implement GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-13-335T](#). For more information, contact Janet A. St. Laurent at (202) 512-4300 or stlaurentj@gao.gov.

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BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

Key Practices to Effectively Manage Department of Defense Efforts to Promote Security Cooperation

What GAO Found

GAO's recent work has identified key practices that would enhance the Department of Defense's (DOD) management of building partner capacity efforts. Such efforts include a range of security cooperation activities such as military exercises with partner nations and counternarcotics activities. In GAO's reviews of these activities, GAO found that DOD has demonstrated some of these key practices, but opportunities for improvement remain.

- *Setting clear goals and defining terminology.* Setting clear goals and defining terminology can help stakeholders understand what partnership capacity programs seek to accomplish and how they fit in with broad national security interests. GAO has reported that DOD activities to build the capacity of foreign military forces through the Global Train and Equip program have generally been in alignment with U.S. counterterrorism priorities while also addressing partner countries' security interests. However, in a 2012 review of security force assistance, GAO found that the lack of a common understanding of this term within DOD resulted in different interpretations of what types of activities are included and presented challenges in planning activities and forecasting needs for force capabilities. GAO recommended DOD take steps to clarify its intent and then determine what additional actions are required to plan for and conduct security force assistance.
- *Coordinating activities and sharing information.* Coordination mechanisms that facilitate communication within DOD and across agencies are needed to achieve integrated approaches to building partner capacity efforts. In 2012, GAO found that stakeholders had difficulties in obtaining status information on security assistance acquisitions and deliveries because information systems are difficult to access and contain limited information. The department is developing a new information system to address this gap but it will not be fully implemented until 2020. Further, GAO's review of the National Guard State Partnership Program in 2012 found that data systems used by the combatant commands and the National Guard Bureau were not interoperable and users applied varying methods and definitions to track the program's activities and funding. As a result, the data on types and frequency of activities were incomplete and inconsistent. GAO recommended that DOD develop guidance including agreed-upon definitions for data fields.
- *Sustaining efforts and evaluating progress.* Developing plans to sustain projects and establishing mechanisms to evaluate them can help ensure that programs have long-term impact. In 2010, GAO reported that the long-term impact of some projects to train and equip foreign militaries could be limited because U.S. agencies have not fully addressed their sustainment. Specifically, only 26 percent of the 135 proposals for fiscal years 2007-2009 projects explicitly addressed the recipient country's ability or willingness to bear sustainment costs. In a review on counternarcotics efforts in 2012, GAO found that DOD is working to improve its counternarcotics performance measurement system, but the department has been unable to attest to the reliability of the performance data for several countries from 2007 through 2011. GAO recommended that DOD submit its performance summary report with the reliability attestation to the National Drug Control Policy office.