

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-606](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has emphasized innovative and low-cost approaches to build the defense capacity of foreign partners, and it uses its five Regional Centers to administer programs to foster partnerships and deepen foreign officials' understanding of U.S. objectives. The conference report accompanying the fiscal year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 112-705) mandated GAO to conduct a study of the Regional Centers. GAO's report (1) describes how the Regional Centers' activities compare with those of other DOD training and education organizations, and (2) evaluates the extent to which DOD has developed and implemented an approach to oversee and assess the Regional Centers' progress in achieving DOD priorities. This report also provides information on the process used to approve Regional Center requests to waive reimbursement of the costs for nongovernmental and international organizations that participate in the Regional Centers' activities. GAO reviewed public law and departmental directives and conducted an analysis comparing aspects of the Regional Centers with other selected DOD training and education institutions.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop measurable goals linked to key programming priorities for the Regional Centers, metrics for assessing performance against these goals, and a methodology to assess the Regional Centers' progress in achieving DOD priorities. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-606](#). For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov) or Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or [johnsoncm@gao.gov](mailto:johnsoncm@gao.gov).

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## BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

### Actions Needed to Strengthen DOD Efforts to Assess the Performance of the Regional Centers for Security Studies

## What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) five Regional Centers for Security Studies (Regional Centers) share similarities and differences with other DOD institutions that provide training and education, including professional military education, advanced degree-conferring, and professional development institutions, in terms of curriculum topics, targeted audience, and program format. GAO found that they all offer training and educational programs and activities to help participants understand security and military matters and to enhance their knowledge, skills, and experiences in these matters. However, there are notable differences in that the Regional Centers generally focus on helping foreign participants understand and respond to regional security issues; generally target a foreign civilian and military personnel audience; and offer shorter and typically less formal courses of study. The Regional Centers support DOD policy objectives with curricula designed to enhance security and foster partnerships through education and exchanges. By contrast, other DOD training and education organizations focus their curricula on military operations and leadership. While the Regional Centers' target audience is foreign civilian and military officials, the other DOD educational organizations typically aim their programs and activities at U.S. servicemembers at all career levels. Regional Center participants generally do not earn credit toward a degree, and the offered courses, conferences, and workshops are of shorter duration ranging from days to weeks. DOD's professional military education and advanced degree-conferring institutions are accredited and generally offer longer, more formal courses that provide participants the opportunity to earn advanced degrees.

DOD has taken some steps to enhance its oversight of the Regional Centers' plans and activities, but its ability to determine whether the Regional Centers are achieving departmental priorities remains limited because it has not developed an approach for assessing progress. DOD has defined roles and responsibilities, issued relevant guidance that reflects departmental objectives, and established a governance body and planning process to facilitate information sharing and to achieve more integrated decision making. However, DOD has not developed an approach that includes measurable goals and objectives, metrics for assessing performance, or a methodology to assess the Regional Centers' progress in achieving DOD priorities, to include clarifying how it will use performance data provided by the Regional Centers. GAO's prior work has found that achieving results in government requires a comprehensive oversight framework that includes clear goals, measurable objectives, and metrics for assessing progress, consistent with the framework established in the Government Performance and Results Act. The Regional Centers report various types of performance data, such as summaries of past activities. While DOD has established a governance body to assist in monitoring the Regional Centers' plans and activities, the body has not identified how it will use performance information to assess the Regional Centers' progress toward achieving department priorities. Conducting routine assessments using measurable goals and objectives, with metrics to evaluate progress, and a methodology for using performance information to include defining the role of the governance body would provide DOD a sounder basis for assessing the Regional Centers' progress in achieving results, and for better determining the allocation of resources.