



July 2018

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

Better Guidance for Strategy Development Could Help Agencies Align Their Efforts

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-499](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 20 federal agencies spend billions of dollars on U.S. foreign assistance each year. Six agencies—the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, and State; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and the U.S. Agency for International Development—implement most of this assistance, using multiple strategies. State is responsible for coordinating their efforts. Questions have been raised about potential inefficiencies in implementing multiple foreign assistance strategies.

GAO was asked to review the alignment of U.S. foreign assistance strategies. This report examines the extent to which strategies include key elements GAO identified, related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress, that help ensure alignment. These elements are based on GAO's prior work on strategic planning and interagency collaboration. GAO reviewed 52 strategies related to health, security, and democracy assistance that were current in 2017. These included government-wide, agency, multi-agency, and regional strategies as well as strategies for two countries. GAO also reviewed agency guidance and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State lead an effort to establish, in collaboration with the five other agencies, guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies that addresses the key elements GAO identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress. State concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-18-499](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

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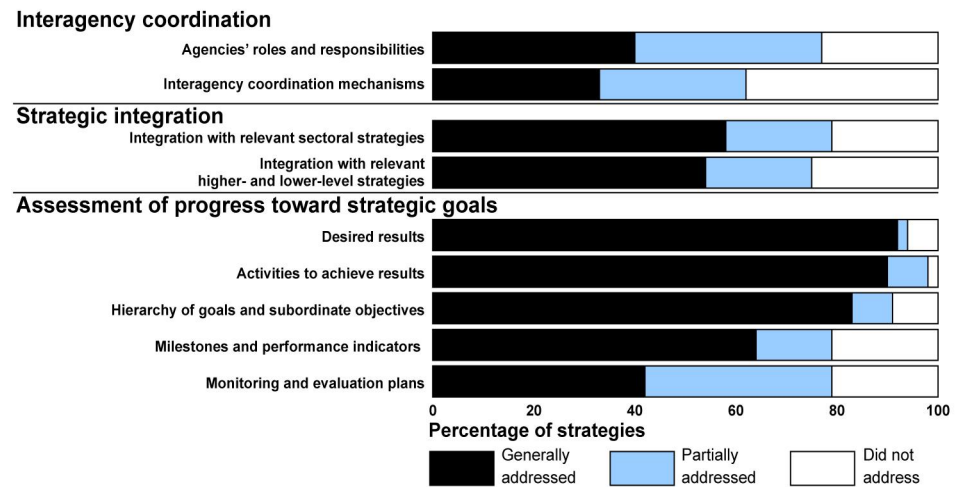
Better Guidance for Strategy Development Could Help Agencies Align Their Efforts

What GAO Found

Many foreign assistance strategies related to health, security, and democracy assistance that GAO reviewed at least partially addressed key elements GAO identified that help ensure the strategies are aligned. Prior work has found that consistently addressing these elements, related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress, is important for, among other things, better managing fragmentation in strategic planning. However, some strategies did not address these elements (see figure). For example:

- **Interagency coordination.** Twenty-three percent of the strategies (12 of 52) did not address agencies' roles and responsibilities, and 38 percent (20 of 52) did not identify specific interagency coordination mechanisms.
- **Strategic integration.** Twenty-one percent of the strategies (11 of 52) did not address linkages with other related strategies, and 25 percent (13 of 52) did not address linkages with higher- or lower-level strategies.
- **Assessment of progress toward strategic goals.** Twenty-one percent of the strategies (11 of 52) did not include milestones and performance indicators, and 21 percent (11 of 52) did not outline plans for monitoring and evaluation.

Percentage of Foreign Assistance Strategies Addressing Key Elements Related to Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: GAO rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if it provided sufficient detail to understand that element and as partially addressing an element if it mentioned the element but lacked sufficient detail.

The six agencies implementing most U.S. foreign assistance do not have consistent guidance for strategy development that could help ensure their strategies address these key elements. Some agencies' guidance addresses many of the elements but does not apply to all of their foreign assistance strategies, while other agencies have no such guidance. The Department of State (State) plays a significant role in interagency coordination. By collaborating with other agencies to establish guidance that addresses the key elements GAO identified, State could help the agencies improve their ability to align future strategies and identify and manage fragmentation in foreign assistance planning.

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Abbreviations

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
DOD	Department of Defense
FY	fiscal year
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USDA	Department of Agriculture

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July 12, 2018

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management,
International Operations, and Bilateral International Development
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

The Honorable David A. Perdue
United States Senate

The Honorable Ted Poe
Chairman
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

More than 20 federal agencies and departments spend billions of dollars each year on various types of U.S. foreign assistance—health, security, and democracy assistance as well as education, energy, environmental protection, food aid, refugee assistance, water and sanitation assistance, and countering illicit activities.¹ These agencies implement foreign assistance with, in some cases, separate strategies—including government-wide and country-level strategies—guiding their efforts. Questions have been raised about potential inefficiencies stemming from the multiplicity of strategies related to foreign assistance as well as about the ability of agencies to demonstrate progress in achieving strategic goals.

¹Office of Management and Budget Bulletin No. 12-01—“Guidance on Collection of U.S. Foreign Assistance Data”—issued on September 25, 2012, defines foreign assistance as tangible or intangible resources (goods, services, or funds) provided by the U.S. government to a foreign country or an international organization for the purpose of assistance to foreign entities or populations as authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, or any other act. This includes, for example, security cooperation activities implemented by DOD and authorized under Title 10 of the United States Code as well as security assistance authorized under Title 22 of the code, much of which is implemented by DOD.

You asked us to assess alignment among U.S. foreign assistance strategies. This report examines the extent to which foreign assistance strategies address key elements we identified that help promote alignment of agencies' efforts—specifically, elements related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals and objectives. We focused on strategies identified by the six largest providers of U.S. foreign assistance: the Department of State (State); the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); and the Departments of Defense (DOD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Agriculture (USDA).

In a June 2017 report, we listed 63 foreign assistance strategy documents that these six agencies had identified;² the agencies subsequently identified 9 additional strategies. For our current report, we conducted a detailed review of 52 of the 72 strategies identified.³ The 52 strategies we reviewed had been issued by December 2017 and were current in 2017. In addition, the strategies incorporated goals and activities related to the health, security, or democracy assistance sectors, which accounted for the majority of foreign assistance obligations in fiscal year 2016, the most recent year for which data were available. The strategies we reviewed include government-wide, agency-specific, multi-agency, regional, sectoral, and multisectoral strategies as well as country-level strategies for Afghanistan and Kenya, which are among the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid.⁴ We limited our review to strategy documents that agencies provided. We did not review agencies' efforts to implement the

²See GAO, *U.S. Foreign Assistance: Inventory of Strategies at Selected Agencies*, [GAO-17-563R](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2017). To compile the inventory for our June 2017 report, we reviewed agency websites as well as our prior work on foreign assistance to identify and obtain available documents and statements relating to U.S. foreign assistance strategies. We asked officials at each agency whether they considered the documents we identified to be strategy documents, and we asked them to identify and provide any additional strategy documents; we generally relied on each agency to define what it considered to be strategy documents. We categorized the strategy documents by sector and examined them to identify the agencies involved in developing and implementing them. Agencies noted at that time that several of the documents we identified for our June 2017 report were being updated.

³The 52 strategies we reviewed for our current report include 44 of the 63 strategies listed in [GAO-17-563R](#) and 8 of the 9 strategies that the agencies subsequently identified. Many of the strategies address foreign assistance as part of a larger portfolio.

⁴Country-level strategies were not listed in [GAO-17-563R](#) but were among those that agencies subsequently identified.

strategies and did not assess the overall effectiveness of such efforts. Instead, we focused on the extent to which the strategies we reviewed provided a clear picture of the organization and management of U.S. foreign assistance efforts.

We reviewed the strategies to determine the extent to which each addressed nine key elements we had identified as important for helping to ensure that agencies' foreign assistance is well aligned in terms of implementation approach and desired results. These elements related to (1) delineation of agencies' roles and responsibilities and coordination mechanisms; (2) integration with other related strategies; and (3) assessment of progress toward strategic goals, including identifying activities to achieve results, performance indicators, and monitoring and evaluation plans. We developed these elements on the basis of prior work related to U.S. government strategies and interagency collaboration as well as prior work on addressing fragmentation, overlap, and duplication in the federal government. Our prior work suggests that strategic documents offer an opportunity to consider the relationship among goals outlined in the strategies, the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in achieving those goals, and information on how progress toward those goals will be measured. Each strategy was reviewed and rated by two analysts, including a subject-matter expert in the strategic area that the strategy addressed. Given the variety of strategies we reviewed and reviewers' varying expectations for the detail and emphasis accorded to the key elements we identified, we rated the strategies using a three-part scale focused on their presence in each strategy. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element within that strategy, as partially addressing the element if the strategy mentioned the element but did not provide sufficient detail, and as not addressing the element if the strategy did not mention it. We also reviewed agency guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies. See appendix I for further details of our scope and methodology, and see appendix II for a list of the 52 strategies we reviewed.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2017 to July 2018 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.

Background

U.S. agencies implementing foreign assistance have individually and jointly developed strategies to guide their efforts. While State's, USAID's, and MCC's strategies focus exclusively on foreign affairs or foreign assistance, DOD's, HHS's, and USDA's strategies—as well as those of other agencies—address foreign assistance as part of larger portfolios of programs.

- State and USAID, which provide the majority of all foreign assistance, develop joint foreign assistance-related strategies. The *State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan* outlines top-level goals for State and USAID efforts, including the use of foreign assistance, to inform strategies developed by State and USAID bureaus, offices, and country teams. Six joint State-USAID regional strategies (e.g., the State Bureau of African Affairs–USAID Bureau for Africa Joint Regional Strategy) identify regional bureau priorities that are intended to align with the *State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan* and guide country-level planning for joint integrated country strategies.
- State, the lead U.S. foreign affairs agency, also develops strategies for its functional bureaus, which implement foreign assistance programs, and has participated in the development of a number of multisectoral and global strategies. State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources is responsible for coordinating foreign assistance programs, including providing strategic direction for both State and USAID. According to State documents, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources strengthens the integration of foreign assistance with U.S. foreign policy priorities by guiding the development of coordinated strategic plans for each U.S. overseas mission at the country level (i.e., integrated country strategies), aiming for a holistic, whole-of-government approach. It provides tools and resources to assist bureaus, offices, and country teams in designing foreign assistance programs, projects, and processes that can help align with, and advance, broader strategic goals as well as monitoring and evaluation of progress and results.
- USAID, the lead U.S. foreign assistance agency, develops global, regional, and country strategies in the areas of health, democracy and human rights, water and sanitation, food security, education, poverty, and the environment, among others.

- MCC has developed one overall strategy document, related to its mission of reducing poverty through country-led economic growth.⁵ MCC also collaborates with stakeholders in and outside government to develop and implement foreign assistance programs.⁶
- DOD performs security cooperation strategic planning, implementation, and oversight to achieve national defense strategy objectives. DOD also develops country-specific strategies for security cooperation and other assistance, including humanitarian assistance and efforts to build foreign partner security capacity.
- HHS has developed, or is a party to, a number of strategies related to global health, including strategies for specific diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and Ebola, and for immunization and emergency preparedness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a component of HHS, develops its own strategies, which discuss CDC's plans to combat infectious diseases worldwide.
- USDA has contributed to jointly issued strategies in food security related to two food aid programs that it administers—the Food for Progress program and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program.

In addition, these agencies implement foreign assistance programs under the auspices of government-wide foreign assistance strategies developed by the National Security Council, the Executive Office of the President, and the Office of Management and Budget. These government-wide strategies include, for example, the National Security Strategy and the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security.

⁵According to MCC officials, this overall strategy document is intended to deepen and expand MCC's legislative mandate to provide assistance "that promotes economic growth and the elimination of extreme poverty and strengthens good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people."

⁶MCC officials stated that MCC's authorizing legislation encourages it to take into account the national development strategy of each country it works with and requires it to describe USAID's role in designing, implementing, and monitoring any programs and activities funded under its country agreements. MCC officials also noted that the authorizing legislation facilitates interagency coordination through the operations of the MCC Board of Directors, which includes the heads of four other federal agencies—State, USAID, the Department of the Treasury, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. In addition, MCC officials stated that MCC coordinates with other U.S. agencies during the development and implementation of its investments in the countries with which it signs agreements.

The geographic focus of these six agencies' foreign assistance strategies ranges from country level to regional to global. For example, State, USAID, and DOD have developed integrated country strategies, country development cooperation strategies, and country cooperation plans, respectively, applicable to the countries where they implement foreign assistance. Similarly, State and USAID have six joint regional strategies and DOD has strategies focusing on its various geographic areas of command. In addition, various agencies, working both jointly and independently, have developed a wide variety of sectoral, multisectoral, agency-specific, and multi-agency strategies to guide global assistance efforts.

Foreign assistance strategies are continuously developed and updated. Some strategies emerge after the launch of a specific initiative, such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), while others are updated as part of agencies' strategic management processes. For example, State's functional bureau strategies and its joint regional strategies with USAID are periodically updated as bureau-level components of State's planning, budgeting, and performance management cycle. Planning at the agency level is reflected in the *State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan*, updated most recently in February 2018, with which bureau- and country-level strategies are expected to align.⁷ As we have previously reported, strategies that consider relationships among goals and objectives, interagency collaboration, and performance assessment can improve federal management.⁸ In particular, these considerations can help identify, eliminate, or better manage fragmentation, overlap, and duplication in the federal government.

⁷According to State officials, State and USAID update the *Joint Strategic Plan* every 4 years in alignment with the *National Security Strategy*. Recent legislation required State to publish all regional, sectoral, and country assistance strategies within 2 years of the law's enactment, to be updated on a quarterly basis thereafter. See Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-191, § 4 (July 15, 2016). According to State, it will begin posting these strategies in late 2018, after revising them to align with the new *State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan*.

⁸For example, see GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005). We reiterated these practices in guides for helping policymakers identify and evaluate instances of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among programs; see GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 14, 2015); and *2017 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication, and Achieve Other Financial Benefits*, [GAO-17-491SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 2017).

Many Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified That Help Promote Alignment, but Some Did Not

While many of the 52 foreign assistance strategies that we reviewed at least partially addressed the key elements we identified related to alignment of foreign assistance strategies, some did not address these elements. Regarding interagency coordination, 40 percent of the strategies generally identified roles and responsibilities for implementing the strategies, while 33 percent generally identified interagency coordination mechanisms; 23 percent and 38 percent, respectively, did not address these elements. Regarding strategic integration, 58 percent of the strategies we reviewed described linkages with U.S. foreign assistance strategies in the same sector and 54 percent generally described linkages with relevant higher- or lower-level U.S. foreign assistance strategies; 21 percent and 25 percent, respectively, did not identify such linkages. Regarding assessment of progress toward strategic goals, almost all of the strategies generally established desired results and a framework of goals and objectives and described activities to achieve results; however, 21 percent did not identify milestones or performance indicators and 21 percent did not outline plans for monitoring and evaluation. We also found that the six agencies implementing most U.S. foreign assistance do not have consistent guidance for strategy development that could help ensure their strategies address the key elements we identified.

We Identified Nine Key Elements That Help Ensure Strategies Are Aligned and Planning Is Not Fragmented

On the basis of our prior reporting about U.S. government strategic planning and interagency collaboration, we identified nine key elements that are important for helping to ensure that agencies' foreign assistance strategies are well aligned in terms of implementation approach and desired results and that planning among multiple agencies is not fragmented. The nine elements we identified are associated with (1) interagency coordination, (2) strategic integration, and (3) assessment of

progress toward strategic goals (see table 1).⁹ As we have previously reported, fragmentation in the U.S. government refers to circumstances in which multiple federal agencies are involved in serving the same broad area of national need and opportunities exist to improve service delivery.

Table 1: Key Elements That We Identified Related to Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Category	Element
Interagency coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies’ roles and responsibilities: The agencies that will be implementing the strategy and their roles and responsibilities relative to other agencies’. • Interagency coordination mechanisms: Mechanisms that agencies have identified to coordinate their efforts with other agencies’.
Strategic integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration with relevant sectoral strategies: A strategy’s relation to other strategies’ goals, objectives and activities in the same sector. • Integration with relevant higher- or lower-level strategies: A strategy’s relation to higher-level strategies—that is, broader and more comprehensive strategies, such as the <i>National Security Strategy</i>—and to subordinate strategies, such as country-level strategies.
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desired results: The end state that the strategy aims to achieve. • Activities to achieve results: Planned steps and activities to achieve the results. • Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives: The logical links among the strategy’s goals and objectives. • Milestones and performance indicators: Priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results. • Monitoring and evaluation plans: Plans to assess progress toward achieving goals.

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-499

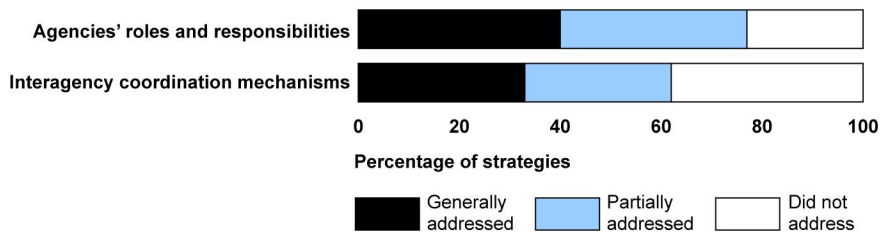
⁹We derived these elements from prior reports related to U.S. government strategic planning and interagency collaboration. In our prior work examining U.S. strategies for international counterterrorism activities, we developed a set of desirable characteristics for government-wide strategies; see GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004). In subsequent work on national security and counterterrorism strategies, we further refined these characteristics; see *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*, [GAO-06-788](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 2006), and *Combating Terrorism: Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address*, [GAO-14-834](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014). For the purposes of this report, we selected, from among six desirable characteristics of strategies identified in our prior reports, three characteristics related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals as being most relevant to the alignment of strategies across multiple agencies. We excluded the other three characteristics—purpose, scope, and methodology; detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats; and description of future costs and resources needed—because we did not consider them to be directly related to alignment of strategies. The three characteristics we included were comprised of 15 elements. We included 9 of these elements and excluded 6 that we did not consider to be directly related to alignment of strategies, such as potential changes to structure and details of subordinate strategies and plans for implementation (e.g., enterprise architecture). See app. I for further details.

Many Strategies We Reviewed Addressed Elements Related to Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress, but Some Did Not

Interagency Coordination

Implementing foreign aid involves the collaborative efforts of multiple U.S. agencies, each of which brings specific contributions and statutory authorities and has its own organizational structure, culture, and priorities. Our prior work has shown that foreign assistance strategies that consistently address (1) agencies' roles and responsibilities and (2) interagency coordination mechanisms can help guide the implementation of various aspects of a strategy and the identification of agreed-on processes for effective collaboration to resolve conflicts and better manage fragmentation.¹⁰ Strategies that do not consistently address elements related to interagency coordination miss opportunities to ensure that agencies' roles and responsibilities are clear and distinct and that coordination mechanisms are well defined. As figure 1 shows, of the 52 strategies we reviewed, 40 percent generally identified agencies' roles and responsibilities and 23 percent did not address this element. In addition, while 33 percent generally identified interagency coordination mechanisms, 38 percent did not identify any such mechanisms.

Figure 1: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Interagency Coordination



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed key elements we identified related to interagency coordination that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance

¹⁰For example, see [GAO-06-15](#). We reiterated these practices in GAO reports aimed at helping policymakers identify and evaluate instances of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among programs; see [GAO-15-49SP](#) and [GAO-17-491SP](#).

efforts. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Agencies' roles and responsibilities. Forty percent (21 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally defined agencies' roles and responsibilities. For example, USAID's *Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance* identified all agencies involved in its implementation and laid out the roles and responsibilities of each agency as well as USAID offices. Thirty-seven percent (19 of 52) of the strategies partially defined agencies' roles and responsibilities, which suggests the potential for improvement in this area. For example, State-USAID joint regional strategies identified the partners and stakeholders and enumerated the activities that State and USAID or the embassy and missions would undertake. However, most of those strategies did not specify the individual agencies' roles and responsibilities. Twenty-three percent (12 of 52) of the strategies contained no information about agencies' lead, support, and partner roles.

Interagency coordination mechanisms. Thirty-three percent (17 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally identified interagency coordination mechanisms. For example, USAID's *Multi-Sector Nutrition Strategy* identified joint planning, funding, and programming mechanisms for coordination among development and humanitarian assistance agencies at country and regional levels in USAID and the U.S. government as a whole. Twenty-nine percent (15 of 52) of the strategies partially identified coordination mechanisms. For example, CDC's *Global Health Strategy and USAID's Global Health Strategic Framework* both described the agencies' respective unique roles in global health but did not specifically discuss how the agencies would work together to achieve their goals. Thirty-eight percent (20 of 52) of the strategies did not discuss interagency coordination mechanisms.

Integration with Other Related Strategies

As our prior work has shown, agencies that establish strategies that align with partner agencies' activities, processes, and resources are better positioned to accomplish common goals, objectives, and outcomes.¹¹ Our prior work has also determined that collaboration among federal agencies working toward similar results can help ensure consistent goals and

¹¹For example, see [GAO-06-788](#), [GAO-06-15](#), and [GAO-15-49SP](#).

mutually reinforcing program efforts that effectively manage fragmentation. These agencies can use higher-level strategic plans as a tool to drive interagency collaboration to ensure complementarities in goals and objectives. To improve alignment of related strategies, each strategy should address (1) integration with relevant sectoral strategies and (2) integration with relevant higher- or lower-level strategies. Strategies that do not consistently address elements related to strategic integration do not clearly show whether objectives and activities align with existing strategic priorities at the government-wide, sectoral, regional, and country levels. As figure 2 shows, 58 percent of the strategies we reviewed generally described linkages with at least one relevant sectoral strategy, while 21 percent did not mention such linkages at all. In addition, 54 percent of the strategies generally described linkages with at least one higher- or lower-level foreign assistance strategy, while 25 percent did not describe any such linkages.

Figure 2: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Strategic Integration



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed key elements we identified related to strategic integration that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance efforts. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Integration with relevant sectoral strategies. Fifty-eight percent (30 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally identified or described linkages with other, related U.S. government strategies. For example, State's *Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment* discussed how its activities are designed to complement and reinforce those of the *U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*, and the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. About 21 percent (11 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed partially addressed this element. For example, the strategy *PEPFAR 3.0—Controlling the Epidemic: Delivering on the Promise of an AIDS-Free Generation* explicitly referred to the

PEPFAR Blueprint for Creating an AIDS-Free Generation and stated that targeting interventions for populations at greatest risk for HIV incidence is an important activity. However, the strategy did not discuss how its goals and objectives relate to the strategies of the various agencies implementing PEPFAR and did not refer to the other strategies pertaining to PEPFAR. The remaining 21 percent (11 of 52) of strategies did not mention any other relevant U.S. government strategies. (See app. II for additional analysis of strategies by sector.)

Integration with relevant higher- or lower-level strategies. Fifty-four percent (28 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally described their relationship to relevant strategies at higher or lower levels of government. For example, the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* discussed its relationship to a policy framework that, according to the strategy, is embodied in three higher-level strategies establishing gender equality as an important element of U.S. foreign policy—the *National Security Strategy*, the *U.S. Global Development Policy*, and the *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. About 21 percent (11 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed partially addressed this element—that is, they discussed their relationship with higher- or lower-level strategies in a limited way. For example, the *U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights* discussed priorities outlined in the *National Security Strategy*, aligning activities of business with those priorities, and noted efforts by State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to discuss human rights with businesses. However, the *U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights* did not reference common goals or activities outlined in other relevant higher-level strategies, such as the *U.S. Global Development Policy* or the *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*. The remaining 25 percent (13 of 52) of strategies did not address their relationship with strategies at other levels of government.

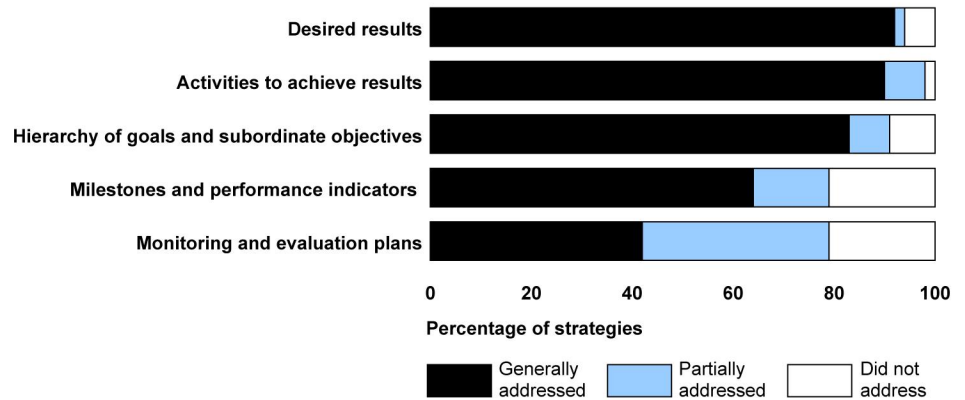
Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Our prior work has shown that effective strategies clearly identify goals and objectives and a means for assessing progress in achieving them and that alignment of strategies and other plans can improve the management of fragmentation.¹² Therefore, our prior work has called for agencies to develop strategies that identify and describe (1) desired

¹²For example, see [GAO-04-408T](#), [GAO-06-788](#), [GAO-14-834](#), and [GAO-15-49SP](#).

results, (2) activities to achieve results, (3) a hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives, (4) milestones and indicators, and (5) plans for monitoring and evaluation. Strategies that do not consistently address elements related to assessing progress may limit agencies' ability to specify and assess common goals and objectives and mutually reinforcing results. As figure 3 shows, most of the strategies we reviewed generally identified desired results, activities to achieve those results, and a hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives. However, fewer strategies addressed how progress toward those goals and objectives would be assessed. In particular, 63 percent generally identified milestones and performance indicators, while 21 percent did not address this element. In addition, 42 percent of the strategies generally outlined plans for monitoring and evaluation, while 21 percent did not outline such plans.

Figure 3: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed selected key elements we identified related to assessment of progress that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance efforts. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Desired results, activities to achieve results, and hierarchy of goals and objectives. Ninety-two percent (48 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally included a statement of desired results, and 90 percent (47 of 52) generally included a description of activities to achieve these results. For example, MCC's *Next: A Strategy for MCC's Future* stated the agency's overall mission of reducing poverty through economic

growth and listed priority actions for each goal, such as exploring new data sources for accurately identifying countries with high poverty rates. In addition, about 83 percent (43 of 52) of the strategies generally included a hierarchy of strategic goals and subordinate objectives. For example, CDC's *Global Health Strategy* included a clear hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives (see table 2). Six percent (3 of 52) of the strategies did not identify desired results, 2 percent (1 of 52) did not describe activities to achieve these results, and 10 percent (5 of 52) did not include a hierarchy of goals and objectives.

Table 2: Example of Hierarchy of Strategic Goals and Subordinate Objectives

Goal	Objectives
Health Impact: Improve the health and well-being of people around the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent new HIV infections and serve the needs of HIV-positive individuals globally • Reduce tuberculosis morbidity and mortality • Reduce malaria morbidity and mortality • Reduce maternal and perinatal mortality • Reduce child morbidity and mortality • Eliminate and control targeted neglected tropical diseases • Control, eliminate, or eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases • Reduce the burden of noncommunicable diseases
Health Security: Improve capabilities to prepare and respond to infectious diseases, other emerging health threats, and public health emergencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen capacity to prepare for and detect infectious diseases and other emerging health threats • Respond to international public health emergencies and improve country response capabilities
Health Capacity: Build country public health capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen public health institutions and infrastructure • Improve surveillance and use of strategic information • Build workforce capacity • Strengthen laboratory systems and networks • Improve research capacity
Organizational Capacity: Maximize potential of CDC's global programs to achieve impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen organizational and technical capacity to better support CDC's global health activities • Enhance communication to expand the impact of CDC's global health expertise

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *CDC Global Health Strategy, 2012-2015* (June 29, 2012). | GAO-18-499

Milestones and performance indicators. Sixty-three percent (33 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally included milestones or performance indicators. These strategies often incorporated milestones or

indicators as discrete components of each goal or subordinate objective.¹³ For example, DOD's *Kenya Country Cooperation Plan* tracked discrete tasks with specific time frames, using color-coding to designate stages of implementation. Fifteen percent (8 of 52) of the strategies partially addressed milestones or indicators. For example, the 2016 updated joint State-USAID *Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally* included an annex listing indicators but did not link them to the strategic objectives and planned actions. Twenty-one percent (11 of 52) of the strategies did not include any milestones or performance indicators.

Monitoring and evaluation plans. Forty-two percent (22 of 52) of the strategies we reviewed generally outlined monitoring and evaluation plans. These strategies typically outlined such plans in a specific goal or in a designated section or appendix. For example, USAID's *Kenya Country Development Strategy* included a section on monitoring and evaluation planning. In this strategy, USAID committed to host donor coordination and other stakeholder forums to monitor progress and to establish a monitoring and evaluation "core team" to ensure that learning is incorporated in decision making. Thirty-seven percent (19 of 52) of the strategies partially addressed monitoring and evaluation planning. Some of these strategies emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluation or made broad statements without outlining more specific plans. For example, the State-USAID *Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism* noted that State and USAID will develop a results framework for measuring progress that will be accompanied by clear, well-developed, and well-resourced monitoring and evaluation plans. The strategy also noted that State and USAID will, to the extent possible, develop a common set of indicators to measure outputs and outcomes. However, the strategy provided no additional details. Twenty-one percent (11 of 52) of the strategies did not outline any monitoring and evaluation plans.

¹³While these strategies generally incorporated milestones and indicators, the milestones and indicators did not always provide information needed to assess progress toward goals and objectives. Some strategies incorporated well-defined milestones and indicators, most of which had baselines, targets, and timeframes. In other strategies, baselines and targets were missing or unevenly applied, timeframes were missing or overly broad, and some indicators or milestones included qualifiers such as "substantive" or "effectively", that were vague and undefined.

Agencies Do Not Have Consistent Guidance for Foreign Assistance Strategy Development That Addresses the Key Elements We Identified

The six agencies implementing most of U.S. foreign assistance do not have consistent guidance for strategy development that could help ensure their strategies address the key elements we identified. For example, State and USAID guidance for strategy development includes many of these elements but does not cover all strategies that these agencies are involved in developing. Additionally, guidance for State's and USAID's joint regional strategies, State's functional bureau strategies, and USAID's country development cooperation strategies does not apply to other State and USAID strategies, such as the joint State-USAID integrated country strategies.¹⁴ DOD has also established guidance for developing security assistance programs that addresses the key elements we identified.¹⁵ However, DOD's guidance does not explicitly apply to the development of foreign assistance strategies. HHS, MCC, and USDA have not established any guidance on foreign assistance strategy development. Inconsistent guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies has contributed to variations in the strategies' addressing the key elements we identified related to interagency

¹⁴For example, State has developed guidance for its functional bureau strategies and regional bureau strategies; see Department of State, *Bureau Strategy Guidance and Instructions 2016: Managing for Results*. USAID has developed guidance for its country development cooperation strategies as part of its "Program Cycle Operational Policy"; see USAID, *ADS Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy*, partially revised Oct. 5, 2017. Both agencies' guidance documents discuss interagency coordination and alignment with various strategies, policies, and efforts. In addition, both agencies require a hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives, performance indicators or milestones, and plans to implement the strategy and review progress toward strategy objectives. However, while USAID requires that its country development cooperation strategies lay out an overall vision for progress expected by the end of the strategy period, State does not specify that its functional bureau and regional bureau strategies should provide a similar statement of overall results for the strategy as a whole.

¹⁵DOD has developed guidance for security cooperation programs that calls for aligning DOD strategies with higher-level strategies such as the *National Security Strategy* and lower-level strategies such as joint State-USAID integrated country strategies, and calls for coordination with other agency and non-U.S. government efforts. The guidance also lays out security cooperation goals, objectives, activities, and criteria for objectives and performance indicators. See Department of Defense, *Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum: Department of Defense Guidance for Security Cooperation* (Aug. 29, 2016).

coordination, strategic integration, and assessing progress toward strategic goals.

Existing government-wide guidance requires agencies to address some of the key elements of assessment of progress toward strategic goals that we identified as being important for ensuring alignment of agencies' foreign assistance strategies. In January 2018, the Office of Management and Budget issued new guidance for agencies that administer foreign assistance that includes some of the elements we used to assess the strategies we reviewed.¹⁶ For example, the guidance recommends that agencies ensure their programs have clear goals and objectives, align their programs with higher-level strategies or objectives, and plan for monitoring and evaluation while developing policies and strategies. In addition, the Government Performance and Results Act, as amended, requires agencies to submit strategic plans for program activities that include general goals and objectives for the major functions and operations of the agency, a description of how the goals are to be achieved, and a description and schedule of program evaluations.¹⁷ The act's provisions were among the sources we used to develop the desirable characteristics from which we derived the key elements we identified. However, according to officials of State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources, there is no government-wide guidance that incorporates interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals into the interagency strategic planning process. In addition, the officials stated that there is no overarching review mechanism for strategies outside of the core strategic planning process for joint State-USAID strategies.

According to State officials, State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources plays a significant role in promoting interagency coordination by convening roundtables and working groups. By collaborating with the five other agencies that implement most of U.S. foreign assistance to establish guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies, the office could help the agencies ensure that future strategies address the key elements we identified. Consistent guidance for strategy development

¹⁶Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Memorandum for Heads of Federal Departments and Agencies*, OMB M-18-04 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 11, 2018). According to the memorandum, the office provided it as required by the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016.

¹⁷GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352, § 2 (Jan. 4, 2011), codified at 31 U.S.C. § 306(a).

could help the agencies align their strategies and better identify and manage fragmentation in foreign assistance planning.

Conclusions

U.S. foreign assistance often involves multiple agencies or a whole-of-government approach. Alignment of related foreign assistance strategies can help agencies better identify and manage fragmentation. Moreover, consistently addressing the key elements we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals can help ensure that strategies provide a clear and comprehensive picture of alignment.

Several of the six largest providers of U.S. foreign assistance in the three sectors we reviewed have not issued consistent guidance for foreign assistance strategy development that incorporates these key elements. For example, some agencies have issued guidance that addresses many of the key elements we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals, but this guidance does not apply to all of these agencies' strategies.

State's Office of Foreign Assistance Resources leads interagency strategic planning for the implementation of foreign assistance. This office—which has responsibility for, and experience in, promoting coordination among agencies involved in foreign assistance—is uniquely placed to collaborate with other agencies implementing foreign assistance to establish guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies that addresses the key elements we identified. Such guidance would improve the agencies' ability to align future strategies and to identify and manage fragmentation in foreign assistance planning.

Recommendation for Executive Action

We are making the following recommendation to the Department of State:

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources leads an effort to establish, in collaboration with the five other agencies that implement most of U.S. foreign assistance, guidance for strategy development that addresses the key elements we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic

integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals.
(Recommendation 1)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to State, USAID, MCC, DOD, HHS, and USDA for review and comment. We received substantive comments from State, USAID, and MCC, which are reprinted in appendixes IV through VI, respectively. In addition, we received technical comments from HHS, which we incorporated as appropriate. State, USAID, MCC, USDA, and DOD did not provide technical comments about our draft report.

In their substantive comments, State and MCC concurred with our recommendation. USAID's comments expressed support for our goal of strengthening interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress across the federal departments and agencies that implement U.S. foreign assistance. However, USAID suggested that we issue our recommendation to the National Security Council or address it jointly to State and USAID. We believe that our recommendation is appropriately addressed to State, given the responsibility of State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources for coordinating foreign assistance programs, including providing strategic direction for both State and USAID.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and to the Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, and State; the Chief Executive Officer of MCC; and the Administrator of the USAID. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix VII.



Letter

David Gootnick
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

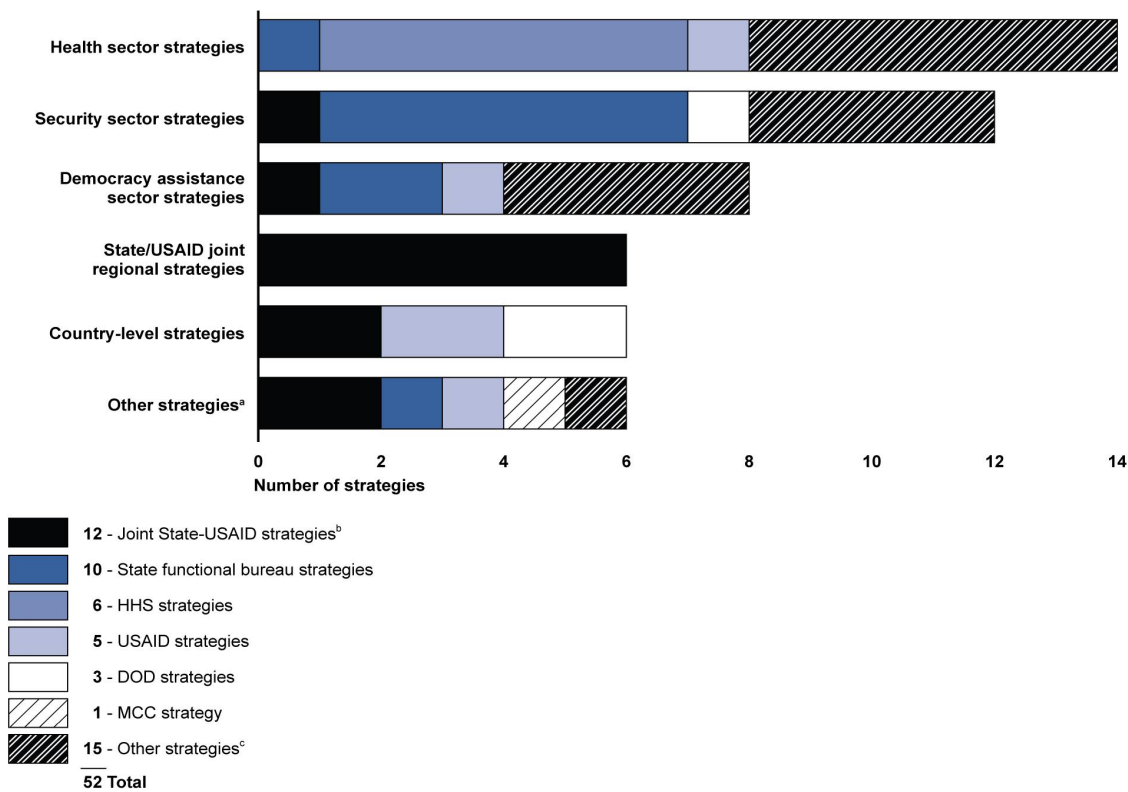
This report examines the extent to which foreign assistance strategies address key elements that we identified related to alignment of agencies' efforts—specifically, elements related to (1) interagency coordination, (2) strategic integration, and (3) assessment of progress toward strategic goals. We focused on the six agencies that administer the largest amounts of foreign assistance, according to fiscal year 2016 obligations data: the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Defense (DOD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and State (State); the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We limited our review to foreign assistance strategies that were in effect during 2017. We further focused on strategies relating to health, security, and democracy assistance, which account for the majority of total foreign assistance obligations, according to fiscal year 2016 data. We excluded strategies for other assistance sectors, such as counternarcotics and other law enforcement activities that require interagency coordination with domestically focused agencies outside the scope of our review, such as the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice.

To identify the strategies for this review, we asked the six agencies to update a list of 63 government-wide, agency, multi-agency, regional, sector-specific, and multisectoral strategies that they had provided for a related report that we published in June 2017.¹ We also asked the agencies to provide country-level strategies for Afghanistan and Kenya, two of the largest recipients of U.S. security and development assistance, based on fiscal year 2016 obligations data. We obtained and initially reviewed 72 strategies, which included the 63 strategies we identified for the June 2017 report; 6 country-level strategies for Afghanistan and Kenya; and 3 updated strategies covering national security, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and water and sanitation. We determined that 52 of these 72 strategies incorporated goals or

¹GAO, *U.S. Foreign Assistance: Inventory of Strategies at Selected Agencies*, [GAO-17-563R](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2017).

activities related to health, security, or democracy assistance (see fig. 4).² These 52 strategies, which had been issued by December 2017 and were current in that year, include 44 of those listed in our June 2017 report and 8 of those subsequently identified by the agencies.

Figure 4: Summary of 52 Strategies Reviewed, by Sector, Geographic Area, and Implementing Agencies



Legend: DOD = Department of Defense, HHS = Department of Health and Human Services, MCC = Millennium Challenge Corporation, State = Department of State, USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.

Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

^aMultisectoral strategies not specific to any region or country.

^bIncludes State-USAID joint regional strategies, State-USAID integrated country strategies, and other joint State-USAID strategies.

^cMulti-agency, Office of the President, or State strategies other than functional bureau strategies.

²Many of the strategies addressed foreign assistance as part of a larger portfolio. Eighteen of the strategies covered multiple assistance sectors, including health, security, and democracy assistance; 34 focused on one of these sectors. Democracy assistance includes strategies related to human rights and the empowerment of women and girls.

We reviewed the 52 strategies to determine the extent to which they addressed nine key elements we identified relating to the alignment of multiple strategies. We identified these nine elements by reviewing prior reports focused on foreign assistance in the security sector that assessed the quality of various U.S. government strategies; articulated practices for enhancing collaboration among federal agencies; or discussed fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among government programs. Those reports identified six desirable characteristics for government-wide strategies and practices for enhancing agency collaboration.³ For the purposes of this report, we selected three of these characteristics, related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals. We excluded three characteristics—purpose, scope, and methodology; detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats; and description of future costs and resources needed—because we did not consider them to be directly related to alignment of strategies. The three characteristics we included comprised 15 elements, 9 of which we considered to be directly related to the alignment of health, security, and democracy assistance sector strategies across multiple agencies. We excluded 6 elements—for example, potential changes to structure and details on subordinate strategies and plans for implementation (e.g., enterprise architecture)—that we did not consider to be directly related to this topic.

We reviewed the selected strategies using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. For each strategy, two reviewers, including at

³We initially reported a set of desirable characteristics for government-wide strategies in GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004). These characteristics were further developed and refined in subsequent reports focused on national security and counterterrorism strategies; see GAO, *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*, [GAO-06-788](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 2006), and *Combating Terrorism: Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address*, [GAO-14-834](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014). In addition, we reported on practices that can help enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies, including the establishment of mutually reinforcing or joint strategies, and other practices that are similar to the desirable characteristics discussed in the above reports; see GAO, *Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005). We reiterated these practices in guides for helping policymakers identify and evaluate instances of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among programs; see GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 14, 2015), and *2017 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication, and Achieve Other Financial Benefits*, [GAO-17-491SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 2017).

least one with expertise in the area of foreign assistance addressed by each strategy, independently identified text related to each of the key elements we had identified. We used a standardized set of criteria in an assessment instrument to consistently judge whether each strategy sufficiently addressed these elements. This instrument contained evaluative questions intended to gauge the presence of each element—for example, “To what extent does the strategy address the agencies involved and their roles and responsibilities?”. Given the variety of strategies we reviewed and reviewers’ varying expectations for the detail and emphasis accorded the key elements we had identified, we rated the strategies using a three-part scale focused on the presence of these elements. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy; as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail; and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it. The two reviewers for each strategy independently documented their judgments on the extent to which the strategy addressed the key elements we had identified. Our initial coding shows that the reviewers agreed in about 78 percent (363 of 468) of these initial judgments.⁴ The reviewers reconciled their judgments, with resolution of differences split roughly evenly between accepting the higher and lower of the initial ratings. A supervisor reviewed each set of ratings for internal consistency. The supervisor related any identified issues, as appropriate, to the reviewers, who addressed them before the supervisor recorded the review as final.

We examined these strategies and any appendixes included in the documents that the agencies submitted, because these strategic documents should broadly describe objectives and efforts—including interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals—needed to achieve them. We did not review agencies’ efforts to implement the strategies and did not assess the overall effectiveness of such efforts. Instead, we focused on the extent to which the strategies we reviewed provided a clear picture of the organization and management of U.S. foreign assistance efforts.

To measure the extent of strategies’ integration with other relevant sectoral strategies and with higher- and lower-level strategies, we

⁴The reviewers judged each of the 52 strategies on the extent to which they addressed the nine key elements we had identified—a total of 468 discrete judgments.

performed a word search for references to the other selected strategies in the same sector and to other strategies or sets of strategies (e.g., regional or country-level strategies) that we classified as either higher- or lower-level strategies. We searched for such references in each of the 14 strategies that we classified as covering the health sector, the 12 strategies that we classified as covering the security sector, and the 8 strategies that we classified as covering the democracy assistance sector. See appendix III for the results of this analysis.

We also reviewed agency guidance related to foreign assistance strategies. We requested current versions of any relevant documentation from each of the six agencies. State provided us with agency guidance for developing its functional bureau strategies and joint State-USAID regional strategies as well as a related template. State also provided guidance documents related to its monitoring and evaluation policy and performance management. USAID provided strategic planning and implementation guidance for its country development and cooperation strategies. HHS, USDA, and MCC did not provide—and, according to agency officials, do not have—specific guidance related to what constitutes a foreign assistance strategy. DOD provided guidance for developing security assistance programs.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2017 to July 2018 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.

Appendix II: Listing of 52 Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies

The following list shows the 52 foreign assistance strategies¹ that we reviewed.²

Multisectoral strategies

1. *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review: Enduring Leadership in a Dynamic World* (2015)
2. *U.S. Global Development Policy* (Sept. 22, 2010)
3. *State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan FY2014-2017* (Mar. 17, 2014)
4. *State Department, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F), Functional Bureau Strategy* (2016)
5. *Millennium Challenge Corporation, NEXT: A Strategy for MCC's Future* (Feb. 24, 2016)
6. *USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014-2025* (May 2014)

Regional strategies (not specific to any single sector)

¹In the list, dates shown in parentheses without italics are the issuance or approval dates shown in the strategies. Strategies for which no such date is listed did not include an issuance or approval date.

²In a June 2017 report, we listed 63 foreign assistance strategy documents that six agencies—the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Defense (DOD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and State (State); the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—had identified; see GAO, *U.S. Foreign Assistance: Inventory of Strategies at Selected Agencies*, [GAO-17-563R](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2017). The agencies subsequently identified 9 additional strategies. For our current report, we conducted a detailed review of 52 of those strategies (44 of the strategies listed in [GAO-17-563R](#) and 8 of the strategies subsequently identified) that had been issued by December 2017 and were current in that year. These strategies include government-wide, agency-specific, multi-agency, regional, sectoral, and multisectoral strategies as well as country-level strategies for Afghanistan and Kenya, which are among the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid ([GAO-17-563R](#) did not include country-level strategies). Many of the strategies address foreign assistance in the context of larger portfolios.

7. *State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs/USAID Bureau for Asia Joint Regional Strategy* (approved May 24, 2016)
8. *State Bureau of African Affairs/USAID Bureau for Africa Joint Regional Strategy* (approved Apr. 5, 2016)
9. *State Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs/USAID Bureau for Middle East Joint Regional Strategy, FY 2016-2018*
10. *State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs/USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Joint Regional Strategy, FY 2015-2018* (approved April 2015)
11. *State Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs/USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Joint Regional Strategy, FY 2015-2018*
12. *State and USAID Joint Regional Strategy for South and Central Asia, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, FY 2015-2018* (June 2014)

Health sector strategies

13. *PEPFAR: Strategy for Accelerating HIV/AIDS Epidemic Control 2017-2020* (September 2017)³
14. *2016-2020 CDC Strategic Framework for Global Immunization* (May 2016)
15. *“U.S. Government Strategy for Reducing Transmission of the Ebola Virus Disease in West Africa”* (draft strategy, Sept. 30, 2015)
16. *President’s Malaria Initiative Strategy 2015-2020* (April 2015)
17. *President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Human Resources for Health Strategy PEPFAR 3.0* (February 2015)
18. *CDC Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria Strategic Priorities 2015-2020*
19. *The Global Strategy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* (2015-2019)
20. *State Department, Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, Functional Bureau Strategy FY2015-2018*
21. *PEPFAR 3.0 Controlling the Epidemic: Delivering on the Promise of an AIDS-Free Generation* (December 2014)

³Because this President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) strategy was issued after June 2017, it was not listed in [GAO-17-563R](#).

22. *HHS Strategic Plan, 2014-2018* (updated March 10, 2014)
23. *HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Strategic Plan* (February 2014)
24. *PEPFAR Blueprint: Creating an AIDS-Free Generation* (November 2012)
25. *USAID's Global Health Strategic Framework: Better Health for Development, FY 2012-2016*
26. *CDC Global Health Strategy 2012-2015* (June 29, 2012)

Security sector strategies

27. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (December 2017)⁴
28. State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, *Conventional Weapons Destruction Strategic Plan, 2017-2019*
29. *Department of Defense Guidance for Security Cooperation* (Aug. 29, 2016)
30. *Department of State & USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism* (May 2016)
31. *State Department, Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Functional Bureau Strategy* (approved December 2015)
32. State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Plans & Initiatives, Peace Operations Capacity Building Division, *U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative Strategy: Strengthening the Effectiveness of United Nations and Regional Peace Operations* (October 2015)
33. *National Security Strategy* (February 2015)
34. *State Department, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2018* (January 2015)
35. *State Department, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2018* (January 2015)
36. *State Department, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2017* (January 2015)

⁴This updated version of the National Security Strategy was not listed in [GAO-17-563R](#). The version listed in that report was issued in February 2015.

37. *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* (June 2011)

38. *Security Sector Reform* (February 2009)

Democracy assistance sector strategies

39. *State Department, The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, Functional Bureau Strategy* (approved Mar. 27, 2017)

40. *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally* (June 2016)

41. *United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (June 2016)

42. *U.S. Department of State Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment* (June 2016)

43. *United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* (March 2016)

44. *State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2018* (approved 2014)

45. *U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights* (2013)

46. *USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance* (June 2013)

Country strategies (for Afghanistan)

47. Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. Report to Congress in Accordance With Section 1225 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (P.L. 113-291), as Amended* (June 2017)

48. *USAID Afghanistan Plan for Transition 2015-2018* (Jan. 6, 2016)

49. *State/USAID Integrated Country Strategy: Afghanistan* (February 2015)

Country strategies (for Kenya)

50. *State/USAID Integrated Country Strategy: Kenya* (approved Feb. 1, 2017)

51. *DOD/USAFRICOM: Kenya Country Cooperation Plan FY 2017-2021* (Nov. 8, 2016)

*52. USAID Kenya Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2014-2018
(May 2014)*

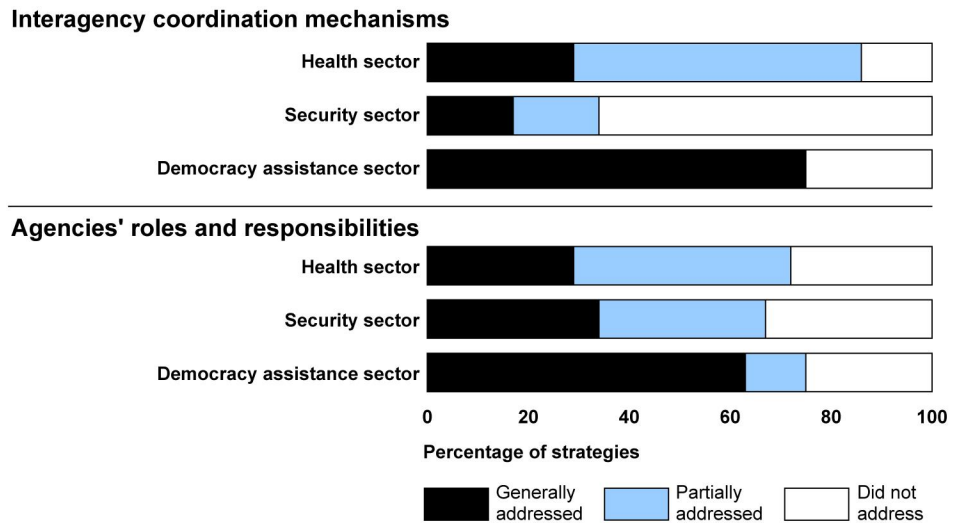
Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Our analysis of strategies we reviewed in the health, security, and democracy assistance sectors found inconsistency in the extent to which the strategies addressed selected, or key, elements that we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress toward strategic goals.

Interagency Coordination

As figure 5 shows, about 30 percent (4 of 14) of the strategies in the health sector and about 17 percent (2 of 12) in the security sector generally identified interagency coordination mechanisms, while about 33 percent (4 of 12) in the security sector addressed agencies' roles and responsibilities. In contrast, 75 percent (6 of 8) of the strategies in the democracy assistance sector generally addressed interagency coordination mechanisms and 63 percent (5 of 8) addressed agencies' roles and responsibilities.

Figure 5: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Interagency Coordination, by Sector



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

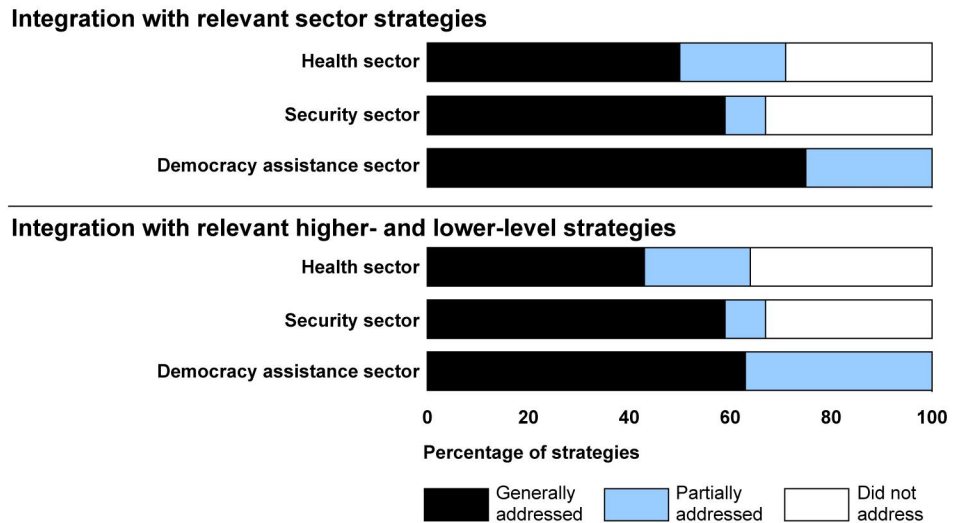
Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed key elements we identified related to interagency coordination that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance efforts. Of the 52 strategies we reviewed, 14 were health sector strategies, 12 were security sector strategies, and 8 were democracy assistance sector strategies. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Strategic Integration

As figure 6 shows, in the health sector, 50 percent (7 of 14) of the strategies generally addressed their relationship with at least one other strategy in the same sector and about 43 percent (6 of 14) generally addressed their relationship with at least one higher- or lower-level strategy. In the security sector, about 58 percent (7 of 12) of the strategies generally addressed their relationship with at least one other strategy in the same sector and their relationship with at least one higher- or lower-level strategy. In the democracy assistance sector, about 75 percent (6 of 8) of the strategies we reviewed generally addressed their relationship with at least one other strategy in the same sector, while about 63 percent (5 of 8) generally addressed their relationship with at least one higher- or lower-level strategy.

Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Figure 6: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Strategic Integration, by Sector



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed key elements we had identified related to strategic integration that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance efforts. Of the 52 strategies we reviewed, 14 were health sector strategies, 12 were security sector strategies, and 8 were democracy assistance sector strategies. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Figures 7, 8, and 9 show the strategies in the health, security, and democracy assistance sectors, respectively, that refer to higher- and lower-level strategies as well as to other strategies in the same sector.¹

¹Because many strategies—particularly higher-level strategies—are updated on a regular basis, the sectoral strategies listed in figures 7, 8, and 9 in some cases refer to earlier versions of higher- or lower-level strategies or other sectoral strategies than the versions shown. As a result, a sectoral strategy may be shown as referring to another strategy that postdates it.

Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Figure 7: Health Sector Strategies' References to Higher- and Lower-Level Strategies and Other Health Sector Strategies

Higher- and lower-level strategies	Country-level strategies									
	State-USAID joint regional strategies									
	Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review									
	National Security Strategy									
	State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan									
	USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, 2014-2025									
	U.S. Global Development Policy (September 2010)									
Health sector strategies	PEPFAR: Strategy for Accelerating AIDS Epidemic Control (September 2017)									
	CDC Strategic Framework for Global Immunization (May 2016)									
	U.S. Government Strategy for Reducing the Ebola Virus in West Africa (September 2015)									
	President's Malaria Initiative Strategy (April 2015)									
	PEPFAR Human Resources (February 2015)									
	CDC Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria: Strategic Priorities 2015–2020									
	The Global Strategy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015-2019)									
	State Functional Bureau Strategy – Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, FY 2015-2018									
	PEPFAR 3.0 – Controlling the Epidemic: Delivering on the Promise of an AIDS-Free Generation (December 2014)									
	HHS Strategic Plan, 2014-2018									
	HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Strategic Plan (February 2014)									
	PEPFAR Blueprint: Creating an AIDS-Free Generation (November 2012)									
	USAID's Global Health Strategic Framework: Better Health for Development, FY 2012-2016									
	CDC Global Health Strategy 2012-2015									
Health sector strategies	CDC Global Health Strategy 2012-2015									
	USAID's Global Health Strategic Framework: Better Health for Development, FY 2012-2016									
	PEPFAR Blueprint: Creating an AIDS-Free Generation (November 2012)									
	HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Strategic Plan (February 2014)									
	HHS Strategic Plan, 2014-2018									
	PEPFAR 3.0 – Controlling the Epidemic: Delivering on the Promise of an AIDS-Free Generation (December 2014)									
	State Functional Bureau Strategy – Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, FY 2015-2018									
	The Global Strategy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015-2019)									
	CDC Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria: Strategic Priorities 2015–2020									
	PEPFAR Human Resources (February 2015)									
	President's Malaria Initiative Strategy (April 2015)									
	U.S. Government Strategy for Reducing the Ebola Virus in West Africa (September 2015)									
	CDC Strategic Framework for Global Immunization (May 2016)									
	PEPFAR: Strategy for Accelerating AIDS Epidemic Control (September 2017)									

Refers to the related sectoral strategy
 Refers to the higher- or lower-level strategy
 X Not applicable

Legend: AIDS = acquired immune deficiency syndrome, CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FY = fiscal year, HHS = Department of Health and Human Services, PEPFAR = President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, State = Department of State, USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.

Source: GAO analysis of selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Notes: In some cases, a sectoral strategy may refer to an earlier version of a higher- or lower-level strategy or of another sectoral strategy than the versions shown.

Dates shown in parentheses without italics are, with one exception, the issuance or approval dates on the strategies. The year range shown for the Global Strategy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicates the years to which the strategy states that it applies. Strategies for which no such date is shown did not include an issuance or approval date.

Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Figure 8: Security Sector Strategies' References to Higher- and Lower-Level Strategies and Other Security Sector Strategies

Higher- and lower-level strategies	Country-level strategies																							
	State-USAID joint regional strategies																							
	Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review																							
	National Security Strategy																							
	State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan																							
	USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, 2014-2025																							
	U.S. Global Development Policy (September 2010)																							
Security sector strategies	Conventional Weapons Destruction Strategic Plan 2017-2019																							
	Department of Defense Guidance for Security Cooperation (August 2016)																							
	State-USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (May 2016)																							
	State Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State Bureau of Counterterrorism Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2017																							
	U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative Strategy (October 2015)																							
	National Strategy for Counterterrorism (June 2011)																							
	Security Sector Reform (February 2009)																							
Security sector strategies	Security Sector Reform (February 2009)																							
	National Strategy for Counterterrorism (June 2011)																							
	National Security Strategy (February 2015)																							
	U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative Strategy (October 2015)																							
	State Bureau of Counterterrorism Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2017																							
	State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018																							
	State-USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (May 2016)																							
	Department of Defense Guidance for Security Cooperation (August 2016)																							
	Conventional Weapons Destruction Strategic Plan 2017-2019																							
	National Security Strategy (December 2017)																							
Security Sector Reform (February 2009)	X																							
National Strategy for Counterterrorism (June 2011)	X																							
National Security Strategy (February 2015)																								
U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative Strategy (October 2015)		X																						
State Bureau of Counterterrorism Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2017			X																					
State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018				X																				
State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018					X																			
State Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, Functional Bureau Strategy FY 2015-2018						X																		
State-USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (May 2016)							X																	
Department of Defense Guidance for Security Cooperation (August 2016)								X																
Conventional Weapons Destruction Strategic Plan 2017-2019									X															
National Security Strategy (December 2017)																								

■ Refers to the related sectoral strategy ■ Refers to the higher- or lower-level strategy X Not applicable

Legend: FY = fiscal year, State = Department of State, USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.
 Source: GAO analysis of selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Notes: In some cases, a sectoral strategy may refer to an earlier version of a higher- or lower-level strategy or of another sectoral strategy than the versions shown.

Dates shown in parentheses without italics are the issuance or approval dates shown on the strategies. Strategies for which no such date is shown did not include an issuance or approval date.

Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Figure 9: Democracy Assistance Sector Strategies' References to Higher- and Lower-Level Strategies and Other Democracy Assistance Sector Strategies

Higher- and lower-level strategies	Country level strategies									
	State-USAID joint regional strategies									
	Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review									
	National Security Strategy									
	State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan									
	USAID Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, 2014-2025									
	U.S. Global Development Policy (September 2010)									
Democracy assistance sector strategies	<i>The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues State Functional Bureau Strategy (March 2017)</i>									
	<i>U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (June 2016)</i>									
	<i>U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (June 2016)</i>									
	<i>U.S. Department of State Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment (June 2016)</i>									
	<i>U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (March 2016)</i>									
	<i>State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2018</i>									
	<i>U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights (2013)</i>									
	<i>USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (June 2013)</i>									
Democracy assistance sector strategies	<i>USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (June 2013)</i>	X								
	<i>U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights (2013)</i>	X								
	<i>State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Functional Bureau Strategy, FY 2015-2018</i>		X							
	<i>U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (March 2016)</i>			X						
	<i>U.S. Department of State Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment (June 2016)</i>				X					
	<i>U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (June 2016)</i>					X				
	<i>U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (June 2016)</i>						X			
	<i>The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues Functional Bureau Strategy (Mar. 2017)</i>							X		

Refers to the related sectoral strategy
 Refers to the higher- or lower-level strategy
 X Not applicable

Legend: FY = fiscal year, State = Department of State, USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.
 Source: GAO analysis of selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Notes: In some cases, a sectoral strategy may refer to an earlier version of a higher- or lower-level strategy or of another sectoral strategy than the versions shown.
 Dates shown in parentheses without italics are the issuance or approval dates shown on the strategies. Strategies for which no such date is shown did not include an issuance or approval date.

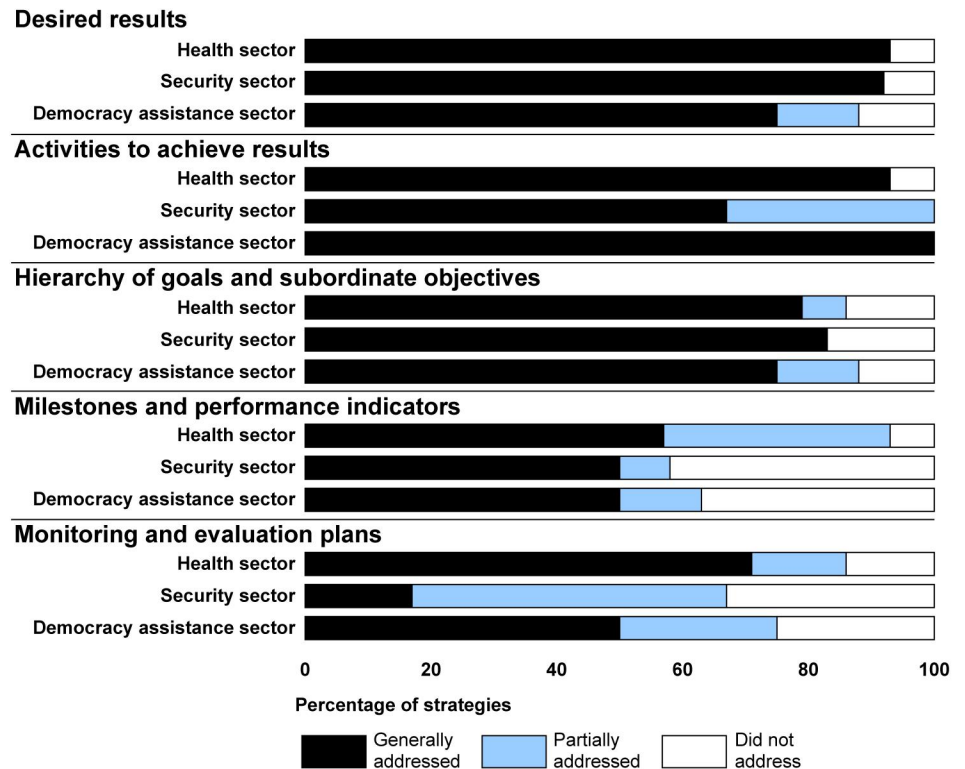
Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

As figure 10 shows, most strategies in the health, security, and democracy assistance sectors generally identified desired results, a hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives, and activities to achieve results. However, strategies in all three sectors were less consistent in identifying milestones and performance indicators. Specifically, 57

Appendix III: Extent to Which Sectoral Strategies Addressed Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

percent (8 of 14) of health sector strategies, 50 percent (6 of 12) of security sector strategies, and 50 percent (4 of 8) of democracy assistance strategies generally addressed this element. In addition, while 71 percent (10 of 14) of strategies in the health sector outlined plans for monitoring and evaluation, 17 percent (2 of 12) of security sector strategies and 50 percent (4 of 8) of democracy assistance sector strategies generally addressed this element.

Figure 10: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals, by Sector



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: We examined the extent to which the selected strategies addressed key elements we had identified related to assessment of progress that help promote alignment of U.S. agencies' foreign assistance efforts. Of the 52 strategies we reviewed, 14 were health sector strategies, 12 were security sector strategies, and 8 were democracy assistance sector strategies. We rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if the strategy provided sufficient detail to understand the element in that strategy, as partially addressing an element if the strategy mentioned it but lacked sufficient detail, and as not addressing an element if the strategy did not mention it.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of State

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department
of State



United States Department of State
Comptroller
Washington, DC 20520

JUN 21 2018

Charles M. Johnson, Jr.
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

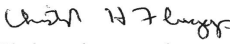
Dear Mr. Johnson:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report,
“FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development
Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts GAO Job Code 102081.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for
incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact
Eric Schoennauer, Chief, Strategic and Operational Planning, Office of U.S.
Foreign Assistance Resources at (202) 647-2834.

Sincerely,


Christopher H. Flaggs

Enclosure:
As stated

cc: GAO – David Gootnick
F – Hari Sastry
OIG - Norman Brown

Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts (GAO-18-499, GAO Code 102081)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report, entitled *“Foreign Assistance: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts”*

Recommendation: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources leads an effort to establish, in collaboration with the five other agencies that implement most of U.S. foreign assistance, guidance for strategy development that addresses the key elements we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress.

Department of State agrees with the recommendation. Moving forward, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F), will work with interagency partners and State Department stakeholders to coordinate all foreign assistance related strategies and promulgate guidance for foreign assistance related strategies that incorporates the key elements identified in this report as appropriate. State Department leadership may need to issue additional internal policy guidance and the participation of interagency partners will be encouraged but subject to their willingness to participate.

Pursuant to section 622(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and similar provisions, the Secretary of State has responsibility for the continuous supervision and general direction of U.S. foreign assistance. On behalf of the Secretary, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F) promotes a strategic, coordinated approach to how the U.S. government leverages foreign assistance resources to advance top foreign policy goals and demonstrate accountability to the American taxpayer.

Over recent years, F has worked with the Bureau of Budget and Planning (BP) and USAID to establish a more coherent strategic architecture to govern the full range of U.S. government foreign affairs and foreign assistance efforts. Earlier this year, State and USAID released the 2018-2022 Joint Strategic Plan (JSP), aligned with the U.S. National Security Strategy (2017). State and USAID entities are now

2

working to update Joint Regional Strategies, Functional Bureau Strategies, and Integrated Country Strategies to conform to the JSP. Other agencies and departments who manage foreign assistance are participating in these processes to promote alignment of efforts.

In addition to the strategies, F also seeks to promote coordination in planning, program design, and performance management. On an annual basis, F convenes State, USAID, and interagency stakeholders in roundtables to review foreign assistance priorities and progress on a sector, regional, and country basis. Furthermore, F recently released an official Program and Project Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (18 FAM 300), which applies to all Department programs, including those implemented by interagency partners.

In line with GAO's recommendation, F is committed to leading an effort with State, USAID, and other interagency stakeholders to develop a more defined strategic framework for how the U.S. government uses the full range of foreign assistance tools to advance top national security and foreign policy goals. While agencies and departments have discretion in how they do their internal strategic planning, we believe a more defined foreign assistance framework can promote common goals, principles, and mechanisms that all agencies and departments address in their foreign assistance-related strategies and plans. Related, F is also committed to working to ensure that our Chiefs of Mission and embassies have the tools and support they need to promote strategic coordination and unity of effort at the country-level.

Appendix V: Comments from the U.S. Agency for International Development

Appendix V: Comments from the U.S. Agency
for International Development



JUN 27 2018

David Gootnick
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20548

Re: FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help
Agencies Align Their Efforts (GAO-18-499)

Dear Mr. Gootnick:

I am pleased to provide the formal response of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the draft report entitled "*FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts* (GAO-18-499)."

USAID appreciates the work of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in conducting its review and preparing this report. In reviewing the recommendation, while we appreciate and support the GAO's goal of further strengthening interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress across the Federal Departments and Agencies that implement foreign assistance, we respectfully suggest that GAO assign this recommendation to the National Security Council (NSC) instead of the Department of State. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established the Bureau of Foreign Assistance (F), she intended it oversee and coordinate all foreign assistance funding within the interagency. In practice, F provides this function only for USAID and the Department of State. Therefore, a recommendation requiring coordination across all of the foreign assistance agencies is best led by the NSC, whose purview is to lead the interagency process, as it is best positioned to implement a recommendation to require coordination across multiple institutions that receive funding from different appropriations. If it is beyond the scope of GAO to direct a recommendation to the NSC, then USAID would request that GAO modify the recommendation to have State and USAID jointly lead the effort.

In reviewing the draft report, we also noted that it should highlight the impact of budgets and appropriations on the effectiveness of strategies. Specifically, given the amount of USAID's appropriations bound by Congressional directives, the Agency does not always have the ability to implement our strategies as originally envisioned. We believe that all foreign-assistance strategies are best-served when directly linked, or closely aligned, to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) budget process, which strengthens and increases the relevancy of the planning exercise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angelique M. Crumbly".


Angelique M. Crumbly
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Management

Appendix VI: Comments from the Millennium Challenge Corporation



DATE: June 21, 2018

TO: James B. Michels
Assistant Director
International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office

FROM: Robert I. Blau
Vice President
Department of Compact Operations
Millennium Challenge Corporation 

SUBJECT: MCC Management Comments on *Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts* (GAO-18-499)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's draft report, *Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts*. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is committed to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and data-based progress assessments in the development and establishment of MCC's strategic goals and objectives. Although the report does not identify a recommendation for MCC, we welcome GAO's viewpoint and will assist in collaboration with the other agencies included in the report.

As we discussed with your team, MCC's authorizing legislation sets forth the agency's mission, which in turn defines the agency's core strategy – namely, “to provide such assistance in a manner that promotes economic growth and the elimination of extreme poverty and strengthens good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people”. Thank you for reflecting this feedback in footnote #3 in your report.

We further note that MCC's authorizing legislation also mandates interagency coordination through the operations of our Board of Directors, which includes the heads of four other federal agencies -- the Secretary of State, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the U.S. Trade Representative. As a result, interagency coordination is ensured by our statute through the deliberations and decisions required of the Board of Directors.

To help fully reflect these points in the draft report, attached you will find suggested edits on two specific sections of the report relevant to MCC.

We want to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which this audit was conducted and for the opportunity to provide additional information and feedback on the GAO draft report. MCC looks forward to continued engagement with GAO to improve its practices.

Attachment
MCC Suggested Edits to Report

Page 4, Current Text:

“MCC has developed one overall strategy document, related to its mission of reducing poverty through country-led economic growth. MCC also collaborates with stakeholders in and outside government to develop their strategic plans.”

Page 4, Suggested Revised Text:

“MCC has developed one overall strategy document, related to its mission of reducing poverty through country-led economic growth. MCC’s authorizing legislation creates interagency coordination through the operations of the MCC Board of Directors, which includes the heads of four other federal agencies -- the Secretary of State, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the U.S. Trade Representative. The Board, among other functions, approves MCC’s Criteria and Methodology for selecting countries, approves countries for development of MCC programs, and approves MCC programs. MCC’s statute requires that each compact identify the specific objectives that the country and the United States expect to achieve and establish benchmarks to measure, where appropriate, progress toward achieving those objectives. MCC also collaborates with stakeholders in and outside government to develop programs.”

Footnote #3, Suggested Revised Text:

“MCC officials stated that this overall strategy document is intended to deepen and expand its legislative mandate to provide assistance “that promotes economic growth and the elimination of extreme poverty and strengthens good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people.” MCC officials further stated that MCC’s authorizing legislation encourages it to take into account the national development strategy of each country it works with and that interagency coordination is ensured by MCC’s statute through the deliberations and decisions required of the Board of Directors. In addition, the statute requires MCC to consult with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, and to the maximum extent feasible coordinate with the assistance activities of other donors. Consistent with these requirements, MCC stated that it coordinates with other agencies during the development and implementation of its investments in the countries with which it signs agreements.”

Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

David Gootnick, (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, James Michels (Assistant Director), Gergana Danailova-Trainor (Analyst-in-Charge), Timothy Young, Kay Halpern, Steven Putansu, Mona Sehgal, Drew Lindsey, Judith Williams, Leslie Holen, Ming Chen, Aniruddha Dasgupta, Mark Dowling, Giff Howland, Neil Doherty, and Reid Lowe made key contributions to this report.

Appendix VIII: Accessible Data

Data Tables

Accessible Data for Percentage of Foreign Assistance Strategies Addressing Key Elements Related to Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress

Category	Subcategory	Percentage of strategies		
		Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a	n/a			
Interagency coordination	Agencies' roles and responsibilities	40	37	23
Interagency coordination	Interagency coordination mechanisms	33	29	38
Strategic integration	Integration with relevant sectoral strategies	58	21	21
Strategic integration	Integration with relevant higher- and lower-level strategies	54	21	25
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	Desired results	92	2	6
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	Activities to achieve results	90	8	2
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	83	8	9
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	Milestones and performance indicators	64	15	21
Assessment of progress toward strategic goals	Monitoring and evaluation plans	42	37	21

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Interagency Coordination

Category	Percentage of strategies		
	Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a			
Agencies' roles and responsibilities	40	37	23
Interagency coordination mechanisms	33	29	38

Accessible Data for Figure 2: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Strategic Integration

Category	Percentage of strategies		
	Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a			
Integration with relevant sectoral strategies	58	21	21
Integration with relevant higher- and lower-level strategies	54	21	25

Accessible Data for Figure 3: Percentages of Selected Foreign Assistance Strategies That Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals

Category	Percentage of strategies		
	Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a			
Desired results	92	2	6
Activities to achieve results	90	8	2
Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	83	8	9
Milestones and performance indicators	64	15	21
Monitoring and evaluation plans	42	37	21

Accessible Data for Figure 4: Summary of 52 Strategies Reviewed, by Sector, Geographic Area, and Implementing Agencies

Strategy type	Number of strategies						
	Joint State/USAID strategies ^b	State functional bureau strategies	HHS strategies	USAID strategies	DOD strategies	MCC strategy	Other strategies ^c
n/a							
Health sector strategies	0	1	6	1	0	0	6
Security sector strategies	1	6	0	0	1	0	4
Democracy assistance sector strategies	1	2	0	1	0	0	4

Strategy type	Number of strategies						
	Joint State/USAID strategies ^b	State functional bureau strategies	HHS strategies	USAID strategies	DOD strategies	MCC strategy	Other strategies ^c
n/a							
State/USAID joint regional strategies	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Country-level strategies	2	0	0	2	2	0	0
Other strategies ^a	2	1	0	1	0	1	1

Accessible Data for Figure 5: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Interagency Coordination, by Sector

Category	Sector	Percentage of strategies		
		Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a	n/a			
Agencies' roles and responsibilities	Health sector	29%	43%	28%
	Security sector	34%	33%	33%
	Democracy assistance sector	63%	12%	25%
Interagency coordination mechanisms	Health sector	29%	57%	14%
	Security sector	17%	17%	66%
	Democracy assistance sector	75%	0%	25%

Accessible Data for Figure 6: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Strategic Integration, by Sector

Category	Sector	Percentage of strategies		
		Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a	n/a			
Integration with relevant sector strategies	Health sector	50%	21%	29%
	Security sector	59%	8%	33%
	Democracy assistance sector	75%	25%	0%
Integration with relevant higher- and	Health sector	43%	21%	36%
	Security sector	59%	8%	33%

Category	Sector	Percentage of strategies		
		Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a	n/a			
lower-level strategies	Democracy assistance sector	63%	37%	0%

Accessible Data for Figure 10: Extent to Which Selected Strategies Addressed Key Elements We Identified Related to Assessment of Progress toward Strategic Goals, by Sector

Category	Sector	Percentage of strategies		
		Generally addressed	Partially addressed	Did not address
n/a	n/a			
Desired results	Health sector	93%	0%	7%
Desired results	Security sector	92%	0%	8%
Desired results	Democracy assistance sector	75%	13%	12%
Activities to achieve results	Health sector	93%	0%	7%
Activities to achieve results	Security sector	67%	33%	0%
Activities to achieve results	Democracy assistance sector	100%	0%	0%
Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	Health sector	79%	7%	14%
Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	Security sector	83%	0%	17%
Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	Democracy assistance sector	75%	13%	12%
Milestones and performance indicators	Health sector	57%	36%	7%
Milestones and performance indicators	Security sector	50%	8%	42%
Milestones and performance indicators	Democracy assistance sector	50%	13%	37%
Monitoring and evaluation plans	Health sector	71%	15%	14%
Monitoring and evaluation plans	Security sector	17%	50%	33%
Monitoring and evaluation plans	Democracy assistance sector	50%	25%	25%

Agency Comment Letters

Accessible Text for Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of State

Page 1

United States Department of State

Comptroller

Washington, DC 20520

JUN 21 2018

Charles M. Johnson, Jr.

Managing Director

International Affairs and Trade

Government Accountability Office

441 G Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Johnson:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts GAO Job Code 102081.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Eric Schoennauer, Chief, Strategic and Operational Planning, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources at (202) 647-2834.

Sincerely,

Christopher H. Flaggs

Enclosure:

As stated

cc: GAO - David Gootnick

F - Hari Sastry

OIG - Norman Brown

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Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

**FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development
Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts (GAO-18-499, GAO Code
102081)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report, entitled "*Foreign Assistance: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts*"

Recommendation: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources leads an effort to establish, in collaboration with the five other agencies that implement most of U.S. foreign assistance, guidance for strategy development that addresses the key elements we identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress.

Department of State agrees with the recommendation. Moving forward, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F), will work with interagency partners and State Department stakeholders to coordinate all foreign assistance related strategies and promulgate guidance for foreign assistance related strategies that incorporates the key elements identified in this report as appropriate. State Department leadership may need to issue additional internal policy guidance and the participation of interagency partners will be encouraged but subject to their willingness to participate.

Pursuant to section 622(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and similar provisions, the Secretary of State has responsibility for the continuous supervision and general direction of U.S. foreign assistance. On behalf of the Secretary, the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F) promotes a strategic, coordinated approach to how the U.S. government leverages foreign assistance resources to advance top foreign policy goals and demonstrate accountability to the American taxpayer.

Over recent years, F has worked with the Bureau of Budget and Planning (BP) and USAID to establish a more coherent strategic architecture to govern the full range of U.S. government foreign affairs and foreign assistance efforts. Earlier this year, State and USAID released the 2018-2022 Joint Strategic Plan (JSP), aligned with the U.S. National Security Strategy (2017). State and USAID entities are now

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working to update Joint Regional Strategies, Functional Bureau Strategies, and Integrated Country Strategies to conform to the JSP. Other agencies and departments who manage foreign assistance are participating in these processes to promote alignment of efforts.

In addition to the strategies, F also seeks to promote coordination in planning, program design, and performance management. On an annual basis, F convenes State, USAID, and interagency stakeholders in roundtables to review foreign assistance priorities and progress on a sector, regional, and country basis. Furthermore, F recently released an official Program and Project Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (18 FAM 300), which applies to all Department programs, including those implemented by interagency partners.

In line with GAO's recommendation, F is committed to leading an effort with State, USAID, and other interagency stakeholders to develop a more defined strategic framework for how the U.S. government uses the full range of foreign assistance tools to advance top national security and foreign policy goals. While agencies and departments have discretion in how they do their internal strategic planning, we believe a more defined foreign assistance framework can promote common goals, principles, and mechanisms that all agencies and departments address in their foreign assistance-related strategies and plans. Related, F is also committed to working to ensure that our Chiefs of Mission and embassies have the

tools and support they need to promote strategic coordination and unity of effort at the country-level.

Accessible Text for Appendix V: Comments from the U.S. Agency for International Development

USAID

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

JUN 22 2018

David Gootnick

Director, International Affairs and Trade

U.S. Government Accountability Office

441 G Street, Northwest

Washington, D.C. 20548

Re: FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts (GAO-18-499)

Dear Mr. Gootnick:

I am pleased to provide the formal response of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the draft report entitled "*FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts (GAO-18-499)*."

USAID appreciates the work of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in conducting its review and preparing this report. In reviewing the recommendation, while we appreciate and support the GAO's goal of further strengthening interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress across the Federal Departments and Agencies that implement foreign assistance, we respectfully suggest that GAO assign this recommendation to the National Security Council (NSC) instead of the Department of State. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice established the Bureau of Foreign Assistance (F), she intended it oversee and coordinate all foreign assistance funding within

the interagency. In practice, F provides this function only for USAID and the Department of State. Therefore, a recommendation requiring coordination across all of the foreign assistance agencies is best led by the NSC, whose purview is to lead the interagency process, as it is best positioned to implement a recommendation to require coordination across multiple institutions that receive funding from different appropriations. If it is beyond the scope of GAO to direct a recommendation to the NSC, then USAID would request that GAO modify the recommendation to have State and USAID jointly lead the effort.

In reviewing the draft report, we also noted that it should highlight the impact of budgets and appropriations on the effectiveness of strategies. Specifically, given the amount of USAID's appropriations bound by Congressional directives, the Agency does not always have the ability to implement our strategies as originally envisioned. We believe that all foreign-assistance strategies are best-served when directly linked, or closely aligned, to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) budget process, which strengthens and increases the relevancy of the planning exercise.

Sincerely,

Angelique M. Crumbly

Acting Assistant Administrator

Bureau for Management

Accessible Text for Appendix VI: Comments from the Millennium Challenge Corporation

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MILLENNIUM

CHALLENGE CORPORATION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DATE: June 21, 2018

TO: James B. Michels Assistant Director

International Affairs and Trade

U.S. Government Accountability Office

FROM: Robert I. Blau

Vice President

Department of Compact Operations

Millennium Challenge Corporation

SUBJECT: MCC Management Comments on *Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts* (GAO-18-499)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's draft report, *Better Guidance for Strategy Development Would Help Agencies Align Their Efforts*. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is committed to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and data-based progress assessments in the development and establishment of MCC's strategic goals and objectives. Although the report does not identify a recommendation for MCC, we welcome GAO's viewpoint and will assist in collaboration with the other agencies included in the report.

As we discussed with your team, MCC's authorizing legislation sets forth the agency's mission, which in turn defines the agency's core strategy—namely, “*to provide such assistance in a manner that promotes economic growth and the elimination of extreme poverty and strengthens good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people*”. Thank you for reflecting this feedback in footnote #3 in your report.

We further note that MCC's authorizing legislation also mandates interagency coordination through the operations of our Board of Directors, which includes the heads of four other federal agencies -- the Secretary of State, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the U.S. Trade Representative. As a result, interagency coordination is ensured by our statute through the deliberations and decisions required of the Board of Directors.

To help fully reflect these points in the draft report, attached you will find suggested edits on two specific sections of the report relevant to MCC.

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We want to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which this audit was conducted and for the opportunity to provide additional information and feedback on the GAO draft report. MCC looks forward to continued engagement with GAO to improve its practices.

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Attachment

MCC Suggested Edits to Report

Page 4, Current Text:

“MCC has developed one overall strategy document, related to its mission of reducing poverty through country-led economic growth. MCC also collaborates with stakeholders in and outside government to develop their strategic plans.”

Page 4, Suggested Revised Text:

“MCC has developed one overall strategy document, related to its mission of reducing poverty through country-led economic growth. MCC's authorizing legislation creates interagency coordination through the operations of the MCC Board of Directors, which includes the heads of four other federal agencies -- the Secretary of State, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the U.S. Trade Representative. The Board, among other functions, approves MCC's Criteria and Methodology for selecting countries, approves countries for development of MCC programs, and approves MCC programs. MCC's statute requires that each compact identify the specific objectives that the country and the United States expect to achieve and establish benchmarks to measure, where appropriate, progress toward achieving those objectives. MCC also collaborates with stakeholders in and outside government to develop programs.”

Footnote #3, Suggested Revised Text:

“MCC officials stated that this overall strategy document is intended to deepen and expand its legislative mandate to provide assistance “that promotes economic growth and the elimination of extreme poverty and strengthens good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people.” MCC officials further stated that MCC’s authorizing legislation encourages it to take into account the national development strategy of each country it works with and that interagency coordination is ensured by MCC’s statute through the deliberations and decisions required of the Board of Directors. In addition, the statute requires MCC to consult with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, and to the maximum extent feasible coordinate with the assistance activities of other donors. Consistent with these requirements, MCC stated that it coordinates with other agencies during the development and implementation of its investments in the countries with which it signs agreements.”

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