

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105385](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Coast Guard is a multi-mission maritime military service within the Department of Homeland Security responsible for securing the U.S. maritime transportation system.

The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 includes a provision for GAO to review the Coast Guard's International Port Security Program. This report addresses, among other things, the extent the Coast Guard: (1) assessed foreign port security from fiscal years 2014 through 2022, and (2) shared its foreign port assessments and coordinated capacity building efforts with relevant federal stakeholders.

GAO reviewed relevant law and federal guidance, analyzed Coast Guard and State Department documentation and data, and interviewed cognizant officials from these agencies and CBP.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including that the Coast Guard document its procedures for using alternative approaches to make foreign port security assessment determinations, share its annual assessment reports with CBP and other federal agencies it identifies as having a vested interest, and establish a process with the State Department for coordinating foreign port security capacity building.

The Department of Homeland Security and State Department concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105385](#). For more information, contact Heather MacLeod at (202) 512-8777 or MacLeodH@gao.gov.

April 2023

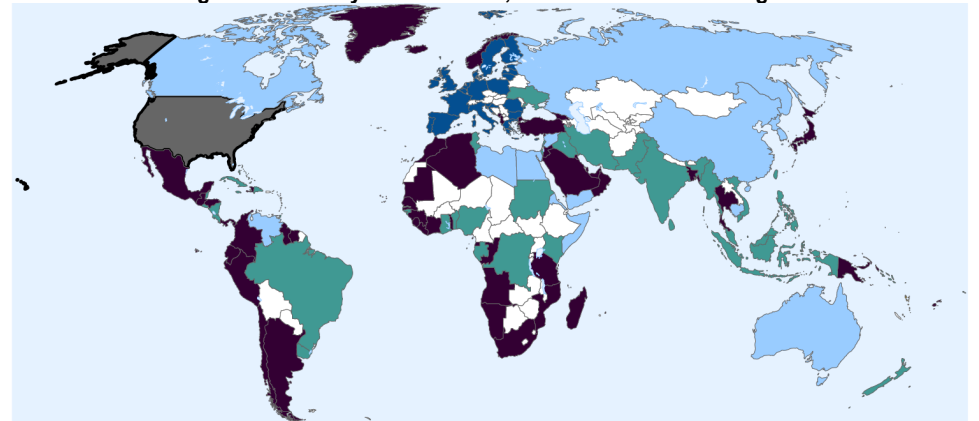
COAST GUARD

Opportunities Exist To Strengthen Foreign Port Security Assessment Program

What GAO Found

Under its International Port Security Program, the Coast Guard has assessed the security of foreign maritime ports. Since 2014, the Coast Guard generally met its triennial foreign port security assessment requirement before the COVID-19 pandemic led it to suspend its country assessment visits during fiscal years 2020 and 2021. The program resumed its visits in May 2021.

Coast Guard Foreign Port Security Assessments, Fiscal Years 2014 through 2022



Legend:
■ Coast Guard has conducted assessment within the last 3 years, as required
■ Coast Guard has conducted assessment since 2014, but not within the last 3 years
■ Coast Guard used results from European Commission's assessments
■ Coast Guard has not conducted assessment since 2014

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-23-105385

The Coast Guard has faced a longstanding challenge in accessing some countries' ports to conduct assessments. In recent years, the service began using alternative approaches—such as using Coast Guard intelligence—to make determinations for some countries it has been unable to visit. However, the program has not consistently done so. By documenting procedures for using alternative approaches, the Coast Guard could better ensure that personnel consistently implement this practice.

The program documents the results of its foreign port assessments in various reports. However, as of September 2022, it had not disseminated its most comprehensive report (known as its annual report) to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and other federal agencies that may have a vested interest in receiving it. For example, it had not shared them with CBP, which is required to assess the information in its supply chain security efforts. By sharing its annual reports with CBP and other federal agencies, the Coast Guard could better support its "whole of government" approach for securing the U.S. supply chain.

Like the Coast Guard, the State Department provides capacity building to help its maritime trading partners strengthen their port security. However, the two agencies have not regularly coordinated planning and implementation in these efforts. By establishing a process for doing so, they can better ensure that they are complementing, rather than potentially overlapping, their efforts.