

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105842](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. provides training and equipment through DOD's Section 333 authority to build the capacity of partner countries' national security forces to conduct specific operations. In fiscal years 2018 through 2022, DOD allocated nearly \$5.6 billion for Section 333 projects. DOD is required to jointly develop and plan such projects with State.

The fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act includes a provision for GAO to review Section 333 projects. This report examines (1) changes in the processes DOD uses for planning Section 333 projects, (2) the extent to which State is involved in planning the projects, and (3) the extent to which DOD addressed key planning elements in selected project proposals and congressional notifications.

GAO analyzed program documents for a nongeneralizable sample of 46 projects notified to Congress in fiscal years 2018 through 2021—the most recent data available at the time of selection. GAO also interviewed DOD and State officials in Washington, D.C.; at the six geographic combatant commands; and at five overseas posts, selected on the basis of factors such as location and project funding.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOD—to define a joint planning process, establish associated guidance, and improve proposals and notifications. GAO is also making two recommendations to State—to establish planning guidance and enhance security cooperation training. DOD and State concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105842](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or [kenneyc@gao.gov](mailto:kenneyc@gao.gov).

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## BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

### DOD and State Should Strengthen Planning for Train and Equip Projects

## What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has instituted a multiyear planning process for projects funded under one of its largest security cooperation programs (known as Section 333) to build foreign partners' security capacity. Initial planning occurs at DOD's geographic combatant commands. Combatant command officials described improvements as well as challenges related to the new planning process. For example, officials cited financial planning targets as improvements but also noted challenges related to guidance and timelines, among others.

#### Examples of Section 333 Training and Equipment Provided to Partner Nations



**Equipment**

Military trucks provided for military logistic support, troop transport, and military operations.



**Training**

Crisis response team training to improve a partner nation's counter-terrorism capabilities.

Sources: U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (left), U.S. Embassy Dushanbe (right). | GAO-23-105842

The Department of State has had inconsistent involvement in Section 333 projects due to the lack of a joint DOD–State planning process and insufficient training. Section 333 requires DOD and State to jointly plan and develop projects and requires State concurrence to conduct or support these projects. However, officials at overseas posts reported varying levels of State participation in planning, and GAO found State officials' involvement in reviewing more detailed proposals occurs later in the planning process. DOD has not worked with State to define a joint process, including timelines for State's review, which has hindered State's ability to contribute expertise. For example, State officials told GAO there is pressure to concur on projects quickly, without sufficient time for review. As a result, projects may have negative outcomes, such as assistance that cannot be used. In addition, State officials overseas lack training in security cooperation, which limits their participation in project planning.

DOD has not addressed longstanding gaps in project planning related to its consideration of partner nations' capacity to absorb and sustain DOD-provided training and equipment. GAO has previously identified gaps related to DOD's planning for these elements, and DOD has found that associated challenges have hindered project success. Most of the Section 333 project proposals GAO reviewed lacked one or more key planning elements critical to project success. For example, 42 of 46 proposals did not fully document a plan for project sustainment, an analysis of the partner nation's absorptive capacity, or measurable objectives. GAO also found that DOD's required congressional notifications provided limited information about its analysis of partner nations' absorptive capacity and its plans for sustainment. As a result, DOD risks continued gaps in its planning that endanger project success.