

Highlights of [GAO-11-637](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Eliminating the threat of terrorist attacks continues to be a primary U.S. national security focus. According to the 9/11 Commission, constraining the mobility of terrorists is one of the most effective weapons in fighting terrorism.

This report (1) describes key gaps the U.S. government has identified in foreign countries' capacity to prevent terrorist travel overseas, (2) evaluates how U.S. capacity-building efforts address those gaps, and (3) assesses the extent to which the U.S. government is measuring progress in its efforts to close those gaps.

To identify the key gaps, GAO reviewed governmentwide assessments of vulnerabilities in the international travel system. GAO reviewed the strategies and documentation of U.S. agencies funding and/or implementing foreign capacity-building efforts to prevent terrorist travel overseas, including those of the Departments of State (State)—which coordinates U.S. efforts overseas—Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). GAO also interviewed officials from the National Security Staff, of the National Security Council (NSC), which oversees counterterrorism policy. GAO met with these agencies and conducted field work in Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) State develop a mechanism to improve coordination of various agencies' efforts to provide fraudulent travel document training to foreign partners, and (2) NSC develop a mechanism to measure, track, and report on overall progress toward the goal of enhancing foreign partners' capacity to prevent terrorist travel overseas. State concurred with the first recommendation. NSC did not comment on the draft report.

View [GAO-11-637](#) or key components. For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

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COMBATING TERRORISM

Additional Steps Needed to Enhance Foreign Partners' Capacity to Prevent Terrorist Travel

What GAO Found

The U.S. government has identified four key gaps in foreign countries' capacity to prevent terrorist travel overseas, as shown below:

Key Gaps in Foreign Countries' Capacity to Prevent Terrorist Travel Overseas

Key gaps	Illustrative examples
1. Sharing information about known and suspected terrorists	Lack of a database system with terrorist screening information (identifying or biographical information on people with known or suspected links to terrorism)
2. Addressing the use of fraudulent travel documents	Manufacture and use of fraudulent travel documents
3. Ensuring passport issuance security	Easily counterfeited or doctored low-quality passports
4. Combating corruption in passport issuance and immigration agencies	Corrupt immigration officials that allow terrorists to pass through checkpoints

Source: GAO analysis of National Counterterrorism Center and Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center documents.

U.S. government foreign capacity-building programs and activities address these gaps to varying degrees. For instance, as one of the U.S. efforts to enhance foreign partners' sharing of information about known and suspected terrorists, State's Terrorist Interdiction Program provides participating countries with hardware and software to develop, maintain, and use terrorist screening information. In fiscal year 2010, nearly 150 ports of entry overseas were using this program. With regard to addressing the use of fraudulent travel documents, GAO found the potential for overlap and duplication since seven components of three federal agencies are involved in providing training on fraudulent travel document recognition to foreign government officials, with no mechanism to coordinate such training. In two countries GAO visited, there was a lack of collaboration among agencies funding and implementing training on this topic. For example, in Pakistan, State and DHS were both planning to hold fraudulent travel document training for the same Pakistani agency during the same month without knowing of the other's plans. Regarding helping countries improve the security of their passport issuance, State and USAID have multiple efforts, including State's Bureau of Consular Affairs bringing delegations from foreign passport offices to the United States for briefings at passport-related agencies. Finally, the U.S. government has many efforts aimed at combating corruption overseas, such as encouraging countries to pass anticorruption laws. While these efforts are not aimed specifically at countries' passport and immigration agencies, they are intended to improve the effectiveness of all government functions.

The U.S. government lacks performance measures to assess governmentwide progress in closing the key gaps in foreign partners' capacity to prevent terrorist travel overseas. None of the governmentwide or individual agency strategic documents GAO reviewed contained such measures. While components of State and DOJ have some performance measures related to information sharing, these measures do not provide decision makers with comprehensive information on governmentwide progress in enhancing foreign partners' capacity.