

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-681](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Combating terrorism is a government-wide effort, to which DHS contributes. In such efforts abroad, DHS partners with the Department of State (State)—the lead agency at U.S. missions. DHS deploys resources abroad to carry out programs and build capacity within its areas of expertise—border, maritime, aviation, and cyber security; immigration; and law enforcement.

GAO was asked to examine DHS's efforts abroad to combat terrorism. This report answers the following questions: (1) What programs, activities, and resources does DHS have abroad to help combat terrorism? (2) How, if at all, has DHS contributed to U.S. missions and what, if any, factors have affected contributions? (3) To what extent has DHS aligned resource use abroad with strategic priorities?

GAO analyzed DHS expenditures for fiscal years 2008-2012, personnel data for May 2013 and documents, such as national strategies and management directives. GAO also interviewed DHS and State officials in headquarters and 10 countries, selected on the basis of factors such as the size of DHS's presence. The results from site visits cannot be generalized but provided insights. GAO also surveyed DHS and State personnel in all 57 U.S. missions where DHS has a presence.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS establish (1) department-wide strategic priorities, (2) an institutionalized mechanism to review resource alignment abroad, and (3) a method to collect reliable and comparable cost data for resources abroad. DHS concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-13-681](#). For more information, contact David Maurer at (202) 512-9627 MaurerD@gao.gov or Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 JohnsonCM@gao.gov.

September 2013

COMBATING TERRORISM

DHS Should Take Action to Better Ensure Resources Abroad Align with Priorities

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) carries out a variety of programs and activities abroad within its areas of expertise that could have the effect of thwarting terrorists and their plots while also combating other categories of transnational crime, and DHS expended approximately \$451 million on programs and activities abroad in fiscal year 2012. For example, through the Visa Security Program, DHS has deployed personnel abroad to help prevent the issuance of visas to people who might pose a threat. As of May 2013, DHS has stationed about 1,800 employees in almost 80 countries to conduct these and other activities. In addition, DHS has delivered training and technical assistance in areas such as border and aviation security to officials from about 180 countries to enhance partner nations' security capacities.

GAO identified five types of contributions DHS has made to U.S. missions (e.g., embassies and consulates), 12 factors that support DHS's ability to contribute, and a range of challenges and impacts related to DHS contributions. On the basis of surveys of DHS and State officials abroad, GAO found that DHS has significantly or moderately contributed to combating terrorism goals for each of the types of contributions GAO identified, including building relationships, identifying threats, and sharing information. The factors GAO identified that facilitated DHS's ability to contribute fell into two general categories: (1) facilitating a collaborative climate and (2) leveraging resources and clarifying roles and responsibilities. GAO also identified a variety of challenges, including DHS domestic management effectively coordinating with personnel abroad and partners at U.S. missions understanding of DHS's role. Fewer than half of respondents identified any challenge as moderate or significant. For impacts arising from these challenges, less than one-third of respondents identified them as causing a significant or moderate impact.

DHS has taken actions to increase organizational and programmatic alignment, but has not established mechanisms to ensure that resource use abroad aligns with department-wide and government-wide strategic priorities. DHS has a stated objective to improve alignment across the department, and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* calls for agencies to implement mechanisms to help ensure achievement of their objectives. Although DHS conducted a one-time review of the department's international footprint and created a department-wide international engagement plan, DHS has not established mechanisms to help ensure that decisions to deploy resources abroad—which are made at the individual component level—align with department-wide and government-wide strategic priorities. Specifically, DHS (1) has not established department-wide strategic priorities for international engagement, such as specific types of activities or target regions to further combating terrorism goals; (2) does not have a mechanism for monitoring alignment between resource deployment abroad and strategic priorities; and (3) does not have reliable, comparable cost data for its programs and activities abroad and has not established a standardized framework to capture these data. Strategic priorities, a mechanism to routinely monitor alignment between strategic priorities and resource deployment abroad, and reliable cost data could provide DHS with critical information to make informed resource deployment decisions and help achieve its objective to improve organizational alignment across components.