

Why GAO Did This Study

The activities of Iranian government elements, such as a 2011 attempt to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador in the United States, could pose a threat to U.S. national security. Congress enacted the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012, requiring State to assess the threats posed to the United States by Iran's presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere and to develop a strategy to address those threats. This report examines (1) State's collaboration with other key U.S. agencies and foreign partners to address Iranian activities in the Western Hemisphere, (2) the extent to which the strategy addresses elements identified in the act, and (3) the extent to which the strategy includes desirable characteristics of national strategies.

GAO analyzed agency documents and interviewed agency officials in Washington, D.C.; Argentina; Brazil; Colombia; and Mexico. GAO chose these countries based on factors such as past instances of Iran-linked terrorist attacks and their bilateral relationships with the United States.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State provide the relevant congressional committees with additional information that would fully address the elements in the act. In the absence of such information, State should explain why it was not included in the strategy. State generally disagreed with our assessment of the extent to which the strategy addressed the elements in the act but agreed to continue to provide Congress with information regarding Iranian activities in the Western Hemisphere.

View [GAO-14-834](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or JohnsonCM@gao.gov

COMBATING TERRORISM

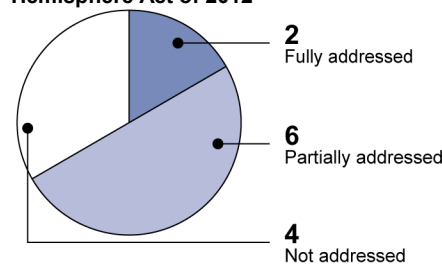
Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) uses a variety of mechanisms to collaborate with interagency partners and host governments to address activities of Iran in the Western Hemisphere. In developing the strategy, which includes an Intelligence Community Assessment developed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs worked with other U.S. agencies at the headquarters level and relied on cable reporting from posts. According to State officials, the strategy represents a consensus view of key agencies. While the Department of Defense (DOD) as a whole joined in this consensus, one part of DOD—the Southern Command—disagreed with the strategy's characterization of the Iranian threat at the time the strategy was prepared. State also uses venues such as country team meetings and law enforcement working groups to address Iranian activities.

While the strategy contains information on Iranian activities in the Western Hemisphere, it does not contain all the information that the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012 stated it should include. GAO identified 12 distinct elements that the act stated should be included in the strategy. As shown in the figure, the strategy fully addresses 2, partially addresses 6, and does not address 4 of 12 elements. For example, the strategy contains information describing the operations of Iran, but does not include a plan to address U.S. interests to ensure energy supplies from the Western Hemisphere are free from foreign manipulation. State and ODNI officials reported several reasons why the strategy may not fully address the information identified in the law. For example, State said it only included information in the strategy if it deemed the activity identified in the law to be a threat to the United States.

Extent to Which the Strategy Addressed Elements in the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State and Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) documents and statements by ODNI officials. | [GAO-14-834](#)

Note: ODNI officials did not provide documentation for three of the elements that were fully or partially addressed in the Intelligence Community Assessment.

State is not legally required to address the six desirable characteristics of effective national strategies GAO has identified, but the strategy does include some of them. The strategy fully addresses problem definition and risk assessment. It partially addresses purpose, scope, and methodology; goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures; and organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination. The strategy does not, however, address resources, investments, and risk management; and integration into other strategies and implementation by other levels of government.