

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-655T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and combating these at home and abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. government. In 2010, the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), conducted at the direction of the Secretary of State, highlighted these global threats and, among other actions, recommended that State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism be elevated to bureau status. According to the 2010 QDDR report, the elevation of this office to a bureau would enhance State's ability to, among other things, counter violent extremism, build foreign partner capacity, and engage in counterterrorism diplomacy. In addition, the report stated that the bureau's new status would enable more effective coordination with other U.S. government agencies.

On the basis of preliminary results of ongoing work that GAO is conducting for this subcommittee and other congressional requesters, this testimony provides observations on (1) how the bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, (2) the extent to which the bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, and (3) the extent to which the bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on select programs is in line with key collaboration practices. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed and analyzed State and other U.S. government agency information and interviewed U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C. GAO expects to issue a final report on this work in July 2015, along with any related recommendations.

View [GAO-15-655T](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or [johnsoncm@gao.gov](mailto:johnsoncm@gao.gov).

June 2, 2015

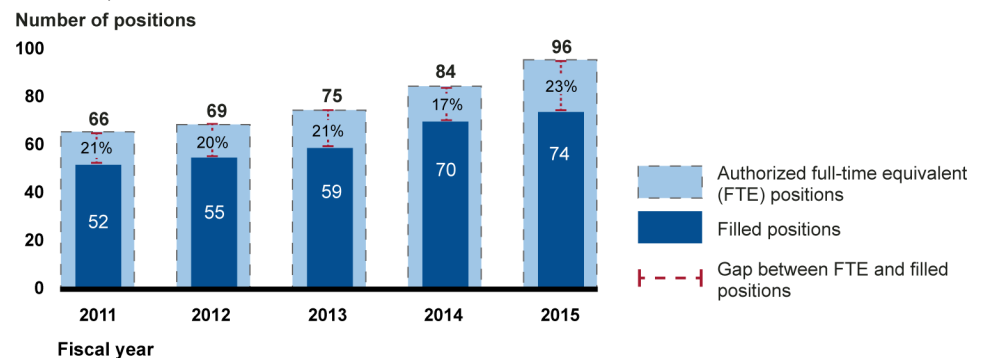
## STATE DEPARTMENT

### Preliminary Observations on the Bureau of Counterterrorism's Resources, Performance, and Coordination

## What GAO Found

GAO's preliminary analysis shows that the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism has had an annual increase in authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions since fiscal year 2011 and has recently undertaken efforts to reduce a persistent staffing gap. The number of FTEs for the bureau increased from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, and over the same period the percentage of FTE vacancies ranged from 17 to 23 percent. The vacancies have included both staff-level and management positions. During GAO's ongoing work, the bureau indicated that the gaps between authorized and filled positions were due to several factors. These included an increase in FTEs that the bureau was authorized when it was established and postponement of some staffing decisions until the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, who assumed her position in 2014, had sufficient time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities. The bureau has recently made progress in filling vacant positions and reported having 10 FTE vacancies as of the end of May 2015.

Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Authorized Full-Time Equivalent and Filled Positions, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-655T

Note: Data are as of October 31 in the fiscal year represented.

GAO's preliminary analysis has found that the bureau assessed its progress toward achieving its foreign assistance-related goals but has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. Specifically, the bureau established indicators and targets for its foreign assistance-related goals identified in the bureau's first multiyear strategic plan, and it reported results achieved toward each indicator. Since its elevation to a bureau in fiscal year 2012, the bureau has also completed four evaluations of counterterrorism-related programs it oversees, resulting in 60 recommendations. GAO's preliminary results show that the bureau had addressed about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) as of April 2015 but had not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations.

GAO's preliminary analysis has also found that the bureau's coordination within State and with other federal agencies on the Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism Finance programs generally reflects key practices for collaboration. For example, with regard to identifying resources, in cases where the bureau funded other U.S. agencies partnering on these programs, the funding mechanism was clear and laid out in interagency agreements.