



July 2015

COMBATING TERRORISM

State Should Evaluate Its Countering Violent Extremism Program and Set Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations

Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and combating them remains a top priority for the U.S. government. State leads and coordinates U.S. efforts to counter terrorism abroad. State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism was elevated to bureau status in 2012 with the aim of enhancing State's ability to counter violent extremism, build partner counterterrorism capacity, and improve coordination. GAO was asked to review the effects of this change and the new bureau's efforts.

This report examines (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 selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed and analyzed State and other U.S. government agency information and interviewed U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State take steps to (1) ensure that CVE program efforts abroad are evaluated and (2) establish time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. State concurred with both of GAO's recommendations. State indicated that it was currently assessing which programs would benefit from a third-party evaluation and that it would commit to setting a timetable for reviewing each recommendation by a third-party evaluator.

View [GAO-15-684](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

July 2015

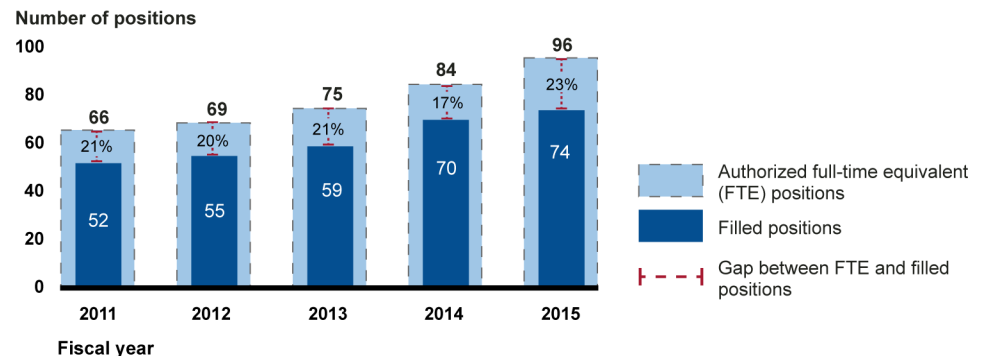
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State Should Evaluate Its Countering Violent Extremism Program and Set Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations

What GAO Found

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 bureau's authorized FTEs increased from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, and over the same period, FTE vacancies ranged from 17 to 23 percent. The vacancies included both staff and management positions. Bureau officials said they postponed filling some positions until the Coordinator for Counterterrorism had sufficient time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities. A senior Bureau of Counterterrorism official testified before Congress in June 2015 that the bureau was making progress and that it had 11 vacancies. However, we have not been able to verify that 4 of the reportedly filled positions have been filled because State did not provide sufficient documentation.

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-15-684

Note: Data are as of October 31 in each fiscal year. For example, fiscal year 2015 data are as of October 31, 2014.

While the bureau has undertaken efforts to assess its progress, it has not yet evaluated its priority Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program and has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. Specifically, the bureau established indicators and targets for its foreign assistance-related goals and reported results achieved toward each indicator. The bureau has also completed four evaluations covering three of its six programs that resulted in 60 recommendations. The bureau reported having implemented about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) as of June 2015 but has not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations. Without specific time frames, it will be difficult for the bureau to ensure timely implementation of programmatic improvements. In addition, despite identifying its CVE program as a priority and acknowledging the benefit of evaluating it, the bureau has postponed evaluating it each fiscal year since 2012.

The bureau's coordination on two programs GAO reviewed, CVE and Counterterrorism Finance, generally reflects key practices for effective collaboration. For example, GAO identified efforts to define outcomes and accountability, bridge organizational cultures, and establish written guidance and agreements—all key practices of effective collaboration.

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Abbreviations

CT Bureau	Bureau of Counterterrorism
CT Office	Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism
CTF	Counterterrorism Finance
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
FTE	full-time equivalent
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PISCES	Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System
QDDR	Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review
State	Department of State
TSWG	Technical Support Working Group
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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July 22, 2015

The Honorable Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Peter T. King
Chairman
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Ted Poe
Chairman
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and countering terrorism both at home and abroad remains a top national security priority for the U.S. government. In 2010, the first *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (QDDR), conducted by the Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), addressed these global threats by recommending that State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (CT Office) be elevated to a Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau).¹ According to the 2010 QDDR report, the elevation of the CT 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 QDDR report stated that the bureau's new status would enable more effective coordination with other U.S. government agencies. Following the QDDR, State elevated the CT Office to the CT Bureau in January 2012.

¹U.S. Department of State and United States Agency for International Development, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington, D.C.: 2010).

You asked us to review the effects of this change and the CT Bureau's efforts. In this report, we examine (1) how the CT 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 selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices.²

To examine how the CT Bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, we reviewed and analyzed State data from fiscal years 2011 to 2015. We also interviewed State officials from the CT Bureau; Office of Inspector General; Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources; and the Bureaus of Human Resources, Comptroller and Global Financial Services, Budgeting and Planning, and Administration about staffing and budgeting resources. To assess the reliability of the staffing data, we compared information provided by State with staffing information in State's Congressional Budget Justifications and interviewed State officials regarding the processes they use to collect and verify the staffing data. On the basis of the checks we performed, we determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, we reviewed bureau strategic plans, performance reports, program evaluation reports, and action plans for evaluation recommendations, as well as State policy and guidance documents outlining performance reporting and evaluation requirements for bureaus. We compared the bureau's performance reporting and program evaluation efforts against State requirements. We also interviewed CT Bureau officials responsible for strategic planning and program monitoring and evaluation and interviewed or obtained written responses from State officials responsible for overseeing implementation of State's performance reporting and evaluation policies. To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices, we reviewed agency documents and interviewed officials from various State regional and functional bureaus; from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and the Treasury; and from USAID, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. We focused on the CT Bureau's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism

²We testified on a number of these issues on June 2, 2015. GAO, *State Department: Preliminary Observations on the Bureau of Counterterrorism's Resources, Performance, and Coordination*, [GAO-15-655T](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 2, 2015).

Finance (CTF) programs because these programs involve coordination with large numbers of agencies and also represent strategic priorities for the CT Bureau. We compared the CT Bureau's coordination efforts against key collaboration practices to evaluate the extent and nature of collaboration between the CT Bureau and other bureaus within State and other U.S. government agencies.³ See appendix I for a complete description of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2014 to July 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Role and Evolution of State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism

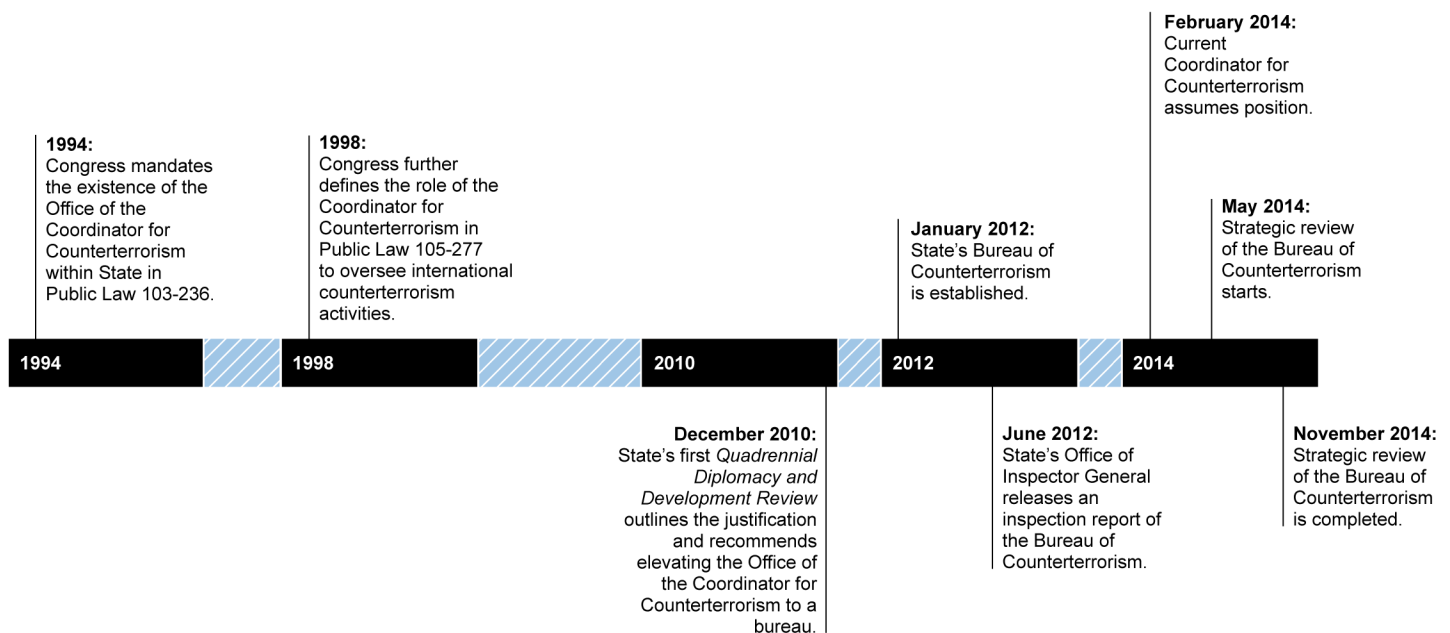
As shown in figure 1, the CT Office has evolved over the last two decades. In December 2010, the QDDR recommended the creation of the CT Bureau to supersede the CT Office.⁴ The CT Office, along with numerous other offices, was attached to State's Office of the Secretary, which provided management and administrative support to the CT Office. The CT Office relied on the Secretary of State's Office of the Executive Secretariat for functions such as budgeting and human resources. According to a report by State's Office of Inspector General in 2012, the

³GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012). GAO identified a range of mechanisms that the federal government uses to lead and implement interagency collaboration, as well as issues to consider, such as key practices, when implementing these mechanisms. GAO developed these practices by conducting a literature review on interagency collaborative mechanisms, interviewing academic and practitioner experts in the field of collaboration, and reviewing their work.

⁴In 1994, Congress mandated the existence of the CT Office within State to be headed by a Coordinator for Counterterrorism. In 1998 Congress further defined the role of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism to include overall supervision of resources for U.S. international counterterrorism activities, including policy oversight. Congress also established the Coordinator for Counterterrorism as the principal adviser to the Secretary of State on international counterterrorism matters, reporting directly to the Secretary of State.

CT Office's needs for management support services, such as human resources, could not be met in a timely and efficient fashion because the Office of the Executive Secretariat had other responsibilities in addition to providing administrative support to the CT Office.⁵

Figure 1: Timeline of Key Events Related to the Evolution of the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State information. | GAO-15-684

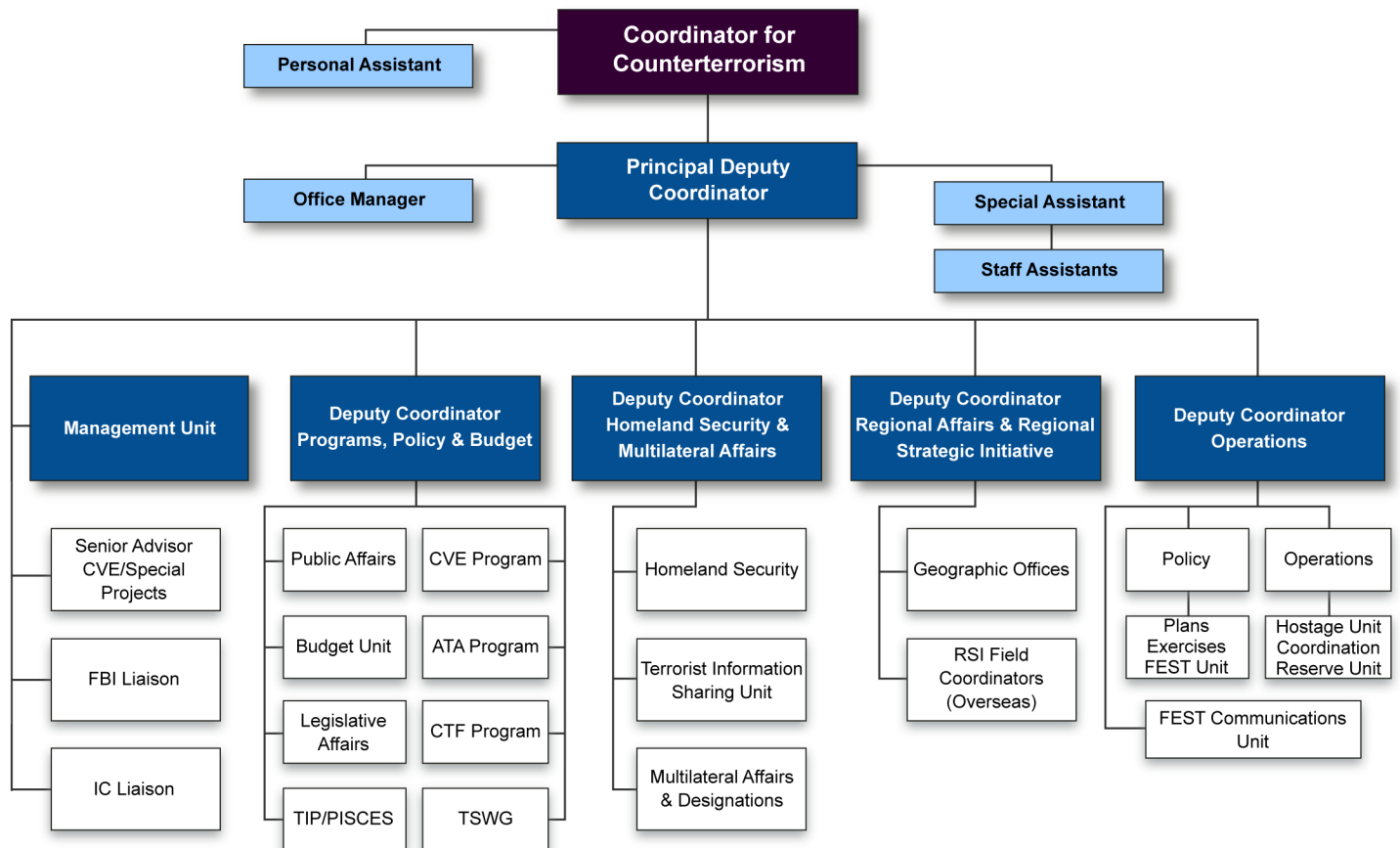
According to State, one reason for elevating the CT Office to a bureau was that the office's responsibilities for counterterrorism strategy, policy, operations, and programs had grown far beyond the original coordinating mission.⁶ The QDDR stated that the new CT Bureau, when established,

⁵U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Office of Inspections: Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism*, Report Number ISP-I-12-32A (Arlington, Va.: June 2012).

⁶The mission of the CT Office in 2011 was to "develop and lead a worldwide effort to combat terrorism using all instruments of statecraft: diplomacy, economic power, intelligence, law enforcement, and military" as well as "provide foreign policy oversight and guidance to all U.S. government international counterterrorism activities."

would build on and expand the CT Office's activities in three areas; it would (1) play a key role in State's efforts to counter violent extremism, (2) strengthen State's ability to assist foreign partners as they build their own counterterrorism capabilities, and (3) engage in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy to advance U.S. counterterrorism goals. In addition, the QDDR mentioned that the bureau status would allow for more effective coordination with other agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Justice, and with the Intelligence Community. Figure 2 shows the organizational structure of the CT Office in 2011.

Figure 2: Organizational Chart of the Department of State Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, as of November 2011



CVE Countering Violent Extremism **FBI** Federal Bureau of Investigation
IC Intelligence Community **ATA** Antiterrorism Assistance
CTF Counterterrorism Finance **TSWG** Technical Support Working Group
RSI Regional Strategic Initiative **FEST** Foreign Emergency Support Team
TIP/PISCES Terrorist Interdiction Program/Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System

Source: Department of State. | GAO-15-684

As the new CT Bureau began organizing itself, State's Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an inspection of the CT Bureau in early 2012. The OIG recognized that the inspection took place as the bureau was implementing internal reorganization and reported that this process entailed creating an executive office, adding new staff to develop capabilities, and shifting staff around, among other things. In its report, the OIG stated that the CT Bureau's intended goals included improving communications and coordination through measures such as integrating

policy and program staff and creating more efficient and transparent flows of information, including through a new tasking and tracking system. The OIG made 13 formal recommendations addressing issues such as staffing, training, and reorganization; 10 of the recommendations had been closed as implemented as of June 2015, according to an OIG official.⁷

Role and Evolution of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism

Since transitioning to a bureau in January 2012, the CT Bureau updated its mission statement to focus on partnerships and building the capacity of partner nations to counter terrorism. The current mission of the CT Bureau is

to promote U.S. national security by taking a leading role in developing coordinated strategies and approaches to defeat terrorism abroad and securing the counterterrorism cooperation of international partners.

The CT Bureau identified five principal areas of responsibility: (1) U.S. counterterrorism strategy and operations, (2) countering violent extremism, (3) homeland security coordination, (4) capacity building, and (5) counterterrorism diplomacy. According to CT Bureau officials, these responsibilities are reflected in the types of programming that the bureau carries out.

CT Bureau Programs and Activities

Like its predecessor office, the CT Bureau manages a range of programs, initiatives, and activities to combat terrorism around the world. According to the CT Bureau, it manages and oversees six key programs:

- **Antiterrorism Assistance:** implemented by the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, helps partner nations build capacity across a wide spectrum of counterterrorism law enforcement skills, offering training, equipment, mentoring, and technical assistance.

⁷According to the CT Bureau, two of the outstanding OIG recommendations involve approval of a memorandum of understanding between the CT Bureau and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security on the operation of the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program and one involves the reorganization of the CT Bureau, which involves getting approval for the bureau's final structure by State's management and incorporating this into the department's *Foreign Affairs Manual*.

-
- **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):** seeks to deny terrorism new recruits by reducing sympathy and support for violent extremism. The program supports targeted counter-recruitment interventions for at-risk communities in priority countries and aims to build resilience against violent extremist narratives. It also builds the capacity of partner nations and civil society organizations to counter violent extremism.
 - **Counterterrorism Engagement:** builds the capacity of multilateral organizations and regional bodies, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum, to promote counterterrorism cooperation and best practices.
 - **Counterterrorism Finance (CTF):** assists partner nations to build and strengthen effective legal frameworks and regulatory regimes, establish active and capable Financial Intelligence Units, strengthen the investigative skills of law enforcement entities, and bolster prosecutorial and judicial development.
 - **Regional Strategic Initiative:** fosters regional cooperation and deepens partnerships to address top-priority terrorism challenges.
 - **Terrorist Interdiction Program:** provides partner nations with biometrics technology and training to identify, disrupt, and deter terrorist travel at airports and other major ports of entry.

In addition, the CT Bureau manages or is responsible for other counterterrorism-related efforts, which are described in appendix II.

CT Bureau Organizational Structure

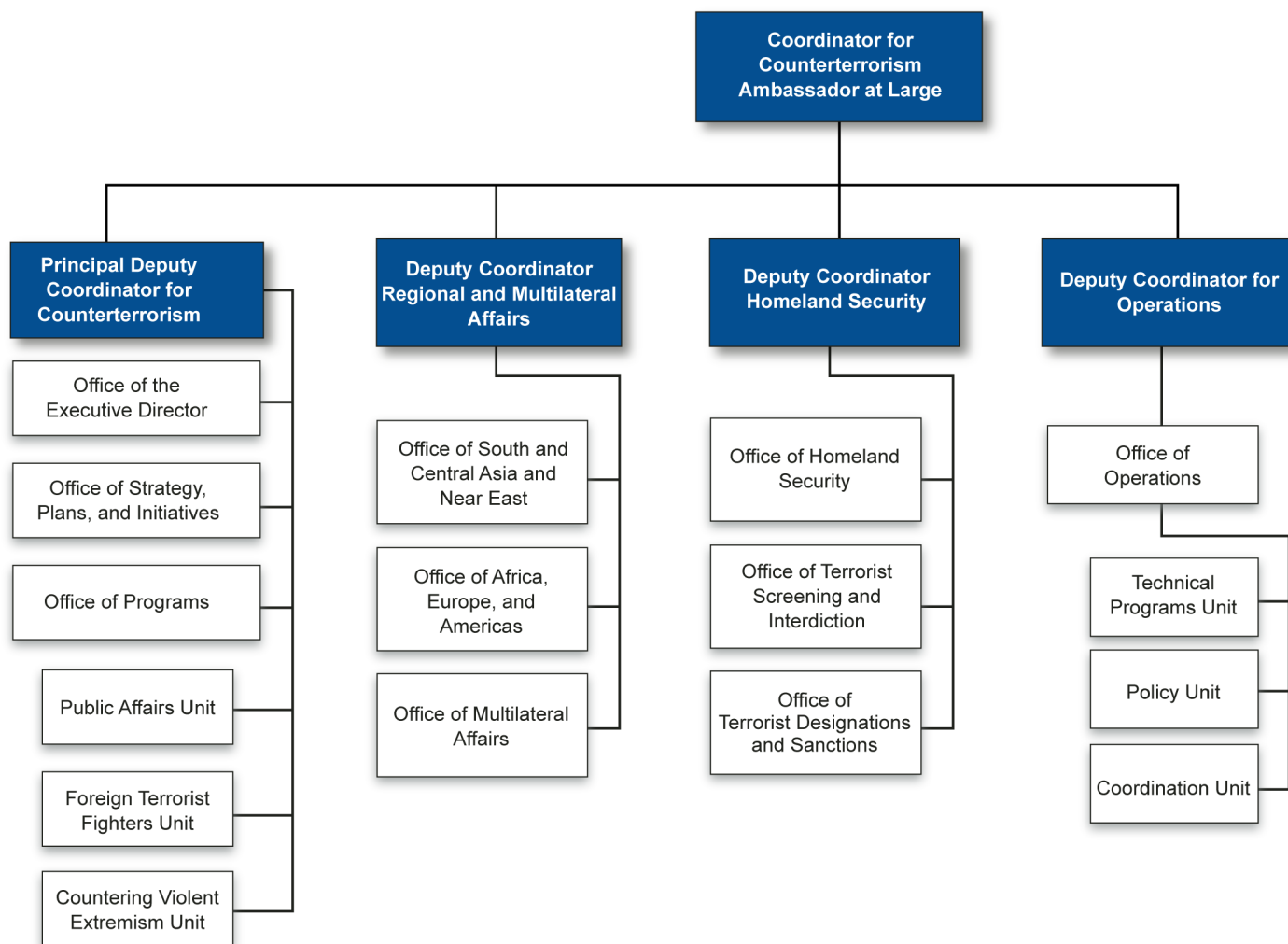
In the transition from CT Office to CT Bureau in 2012, some organizational changes occurred, such as a reduction from five to four Deputy Coordinators. The creation of the bureau elevated the role of strategic planning and metrics, and established a new policy and guidance unit to ensure that all CT programs and activities, to include counterterrorism programs implemented with foreign partners, conform to law and policy and reflect the counterterrorism priorities of the Secretary of State and the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

Additional changes to the CT Bureau's organizational structure occurred starting in 2014, following the confirmation of an ambassador as the

Coordinator of the bureau.⁸ According to CT Bureau officials, the new Coordinator initiated a strategic review of the CT Bureau's programs and what they were accomplishing to help form a clear picture of priorities, threats, and where the bureau's efforts and funding should be directed. The strategic review led to several key changes in the bureau's structure, and the CT Bureau's overall programmatic focus shifted to a regional or geographic approach. The function of program monitoring, oversight, and evaluation was elevated, and a separate Office of Programs was created to monitor the day-to-day activities of counterterrorism programming at the program management level. Figure 3 depicts the new organizational chart of the CT Bureau as of June 2015.

⁸When the CT Bureau was created, the Coordinator for Counterterrorism remained in his position through the end of 2012. From December 2012 through February 2014, an Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism led the CT Bureau. The current Coordinator for Counterterrorism assumed her position in February 2014. State bureaus are typically headed by Assistant Secretaries. However, according to State officials, State had reached its statutory cap on Assistant Secretaries. As a result, State kept the Coordinator for Counterterrorism title for the bureau head; however, the position is at the same level as an Assistant Secretary position. The Coordinator for Counterterrorism serves as the principal advisor to the Secretary of State, other department principals, and policy bureaus on international counterterrorism strategy, policy, and operations, and directs the department's counterterrorism programs. The Coordinator continues to report to the Secretary of State for the purposes of counterterrorism strategy, threats, and operations. However, for matters related to counterterrorism programs and other routine activities of the bureau, the Coordinator reports to the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.

Figure 3: Organizational Chart of the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism, as of June 2015



Source: Department of State. | GAO-15-684

Note: According to the Bureau of Counterterrorism, the bureau's final structure is pending until it has been approved by Department of State's management and incorporated into the department's *Foreign Affairs Manual*.

As a result of the strategic review, the portfolio of the Office of Programs has changed to reflect a more regional approach rather than an approach based on funding streams. According to CT Bureau officials, the shift is intended to encourage and facilitate cross-bureau discussions and leverage synergies across the entire CT Bureau. Specifically, the portfolios of program officials have been broadened by requiring a cross-cutting look at programs across their assigned regions. According to CT

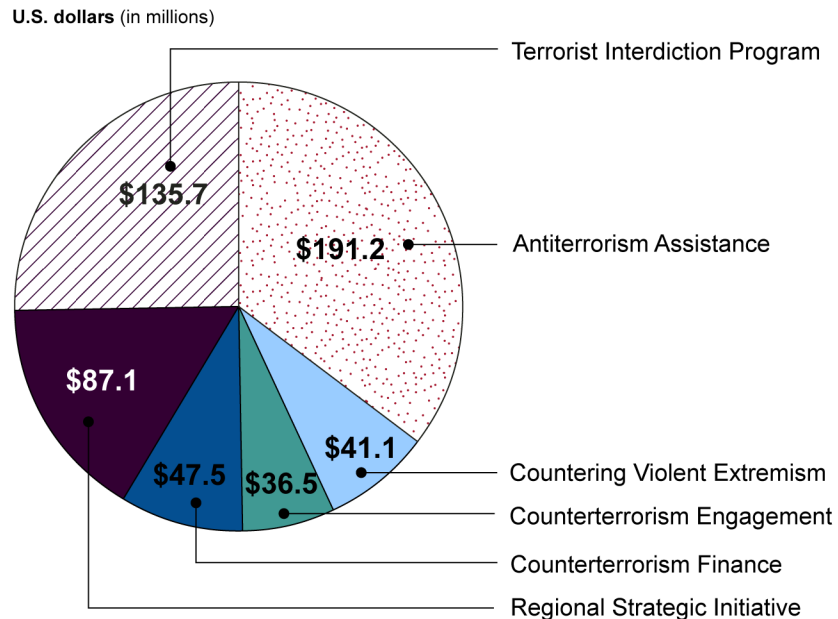
Bureau officials, this should result in program officials receiving guidance on a broader range of counterterrorism policy issues as well as information on program implementation and monitoring of projects in their regions.

Other changes to the organizational structure of the bureau included changes in names, portfolios of directorates and offices, or both to better reflect the new strategic approach and priorities of the bureau. For example, the portfolio for multilateral affairs was shifted and combined with the portfolio for regional affairs. In addition, three new offices or units were created under the Principal Deputy Coordinator: (1) the previously mentioned Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives; (2) the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Unit; and (3) the Countering Violent Extremism Unit. The reorganization also shifted the policy work on counterterrorism finance to the Office of Terrorist Designations and Sanctions. Appendix III provides descriptions of the CT Bureau's directorates, offices, and units as of June 2015.

CT Bureau Funding Allocations

The CT Bureau is allocated funding for (1) foreign assistance programming that the bureau oversees as well as (2) the operations of the bureau. The foreign assistance allocations to the CT Bureau fund counterterrorism-related programs that the bureau oversees. As shown in figure 4, from fiscal years 2011 through 2014, the CT Bureau was allocated a cumulative total of \$539.1 million for six counterterrorism-related programs: (1) Antiterrorism Assistance, (2) Countering Violent Extremism, (3) Counterterrorism Engagement, (4) Counterterrorism Finance, (5) Regional Strategic Initiative, and (6) Terrorist Interdiction Program. The CT Bureau requested \$104.4 million in allocations for fiscal year 2015 for these programs. State officials were unable to provide actual allocations for fiscal year 2015 because they were working to finalize them, as of June 2015. For funding allocations by program, fiscal year, and funding account, see appendix IV.

Figure 4: Total Allocations of Funds to the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism for Six Counterterrorism-Related Programs, Fiscal Years 2011 through 2014

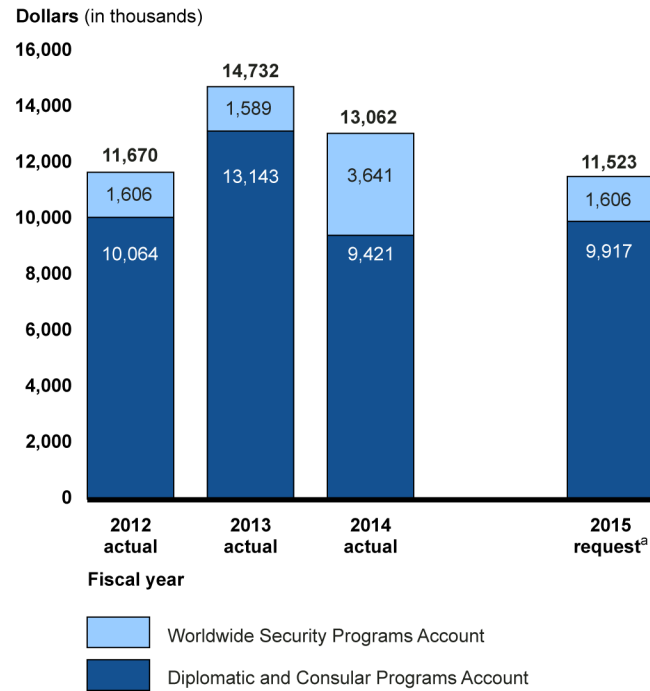


Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Note: The Bureau of Counterterrorism transitioned from an office to a bureau during fiscal years 2011 and 2012; therefore, allocations for these fiscal years include those for the office and the bureau. The bureau requested \$104.4 million in allocations for fiscal year 2015 for these programs. Department of State officials were unable to provide actual allocations for fiscal year 2015 because they were working to finalize them, as of June 2015.

When the CT Bureau became operational, in early 2012, its operations were no longer part of the executive management of the Office of the Secretary of State. The CT Bureau and the Office of the Secretary of State worked with State's Bureau of Budgeting and Planning to determine the size of the budget that was needed to support the new CT Bureau, according to CT Bureau officials. The bureau's allocated resources include funding for the operations of the bureau. The CT Bureau receives funds from two sources to fund its core operations: the Diplomatic and Consular Programs and the Worldwide Security Programs accounts. Figure 5 shows the bureau's total allocations for its overall management and operations since fiscal year 2012. These allocations increased from \$11.7 million in fiscal year 2012 to \$14.7 million in fiscal year 2013, as the bureau was being established. The allocations then decreased to \$13.1 million in fiscal year 2014. Appendix V provides information on the CT Bureau's total obligations for its overall operations since fiscal year 2012.

Figure 5: Funds Allocated for Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Operations Budget, Fiscal Years 2012 to 2014, and Allocations Requested for Fiscal Year 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Notes: The Bureau of Counterterrorism was established in the second quarter of fiscal year 2012; some of the funding shown for fiscal year 2012 covered the predecessor of the bureau, the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

^aAccording to the Bureau of Counterterrorism, the fiscal year 2015 allocations have not been finalized.

CT Bureau's Authorized Staffing Has Increased since Fiscal Year 2011, and Recent Efforts Have Been Made to Reduce Long-standing Staffing Gaps

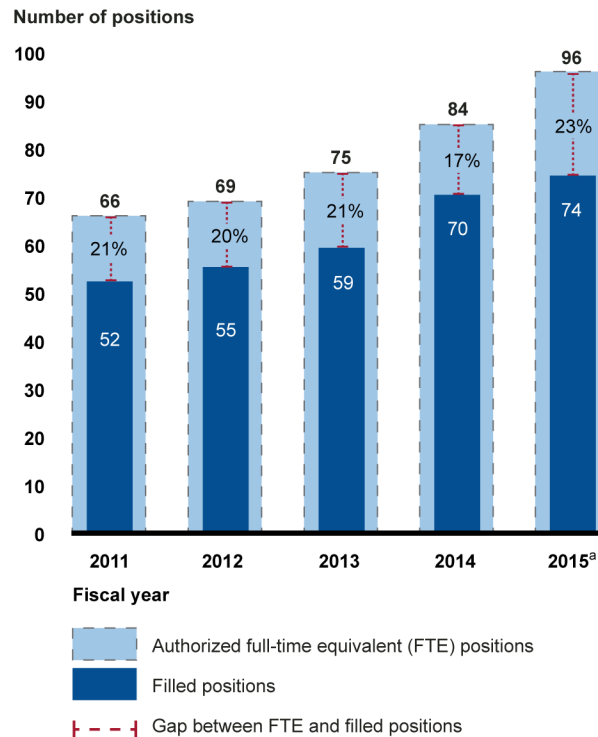
The CT Bureau's number of authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) staff positions has grown annually since fiscal year 2011, and the bureau has recently undertaken efforts to reduce a persistent staffing gap.⁹ The bureau's number of authorized FTEs grew from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, which is an increase of more than 45 percent. Figure 6 shows the number of authorized FTEs within the bureau for fiscal years 2011 to 2015, along with the number of FTE positions that were filled. While the bureau's current authorized level of FTEs for fiscal year 2015 is 96 positions, it had 22 vacancies as of October 31, 2014.¹⁰ The percentage of vacancies in the bureau has ranged from 17 percent to 23 percent in fiscal years 2011 to 2015. According to the CT Bureau, these vacancies have included both staff-level and management positions. For example, recent vacancies have included a management position in the Office of Homeland Security and program analyst positions in the Office of Programs. Since the staffing snapshot reflected in figure 6, the bureau has reported it has made efforts to fill vacancies. The Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism testified before Congress on June 2, 2015 that the CT Bureau had reduced its FTE vacancies to 11 positions.¹¹ However, we have been unable to verify that 4 of the reportedly filled positions have been filled because State has not provided sufficient documentation.

⁹A position is the specified set of all duties and responsibilities currently assigned or delegated by competent authority and requiring full-time, part-time, or intermittent employment of one person. FTE positions include both civil service employees and Foreign Service Officers.

¹⁰A vacancy is a position that an agency has allocated funds to pay for but that is currently not filled by an employee.

¹¹*State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism: Budget, Program, and Policies.* Statement by Justin Siberell, Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade; Washington, D.C.: June 2, 2015.

Figure 6: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Authorized Full-Time Equivalent Positions and Filled Positions, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Notes: Data are as of October 31 in each fiscal year. For example, data for fiscal year 2015 are as of October 31, 2014. The Bureau of Counterterrorism was established in the second quarter of fiscal year 2012; the positions shown for fiscal years 2011 and 2012 were for the predecessor of the bureau, the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

^aOn June 2, 2015, the Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism reported that the Bureau of Counterterrorism had reduced its FTE vacancies to 11 positions. GAO has been unable to verify that 4 of the reportedly filled positions have been filled because the Department of State has not provided sufficient documentation.

In addition to the authorized FTEs, the CT Bureau also has non-FTE positions, which include contractors; interns; fellows; detailees; and “When Actually Employed,” the designation applied to retired State employees rehired under temporary part-time appointments. For fiscal years 2013, 2014, and 2015, respectively, the CT Bureau had 92, 78, and

69 such positions, in addition to its authorized FTEs, according to the CT Bureau.¹²

According to State, to meet the personnel requirements associated with standing up the CT Bureau, the bureau received an authorized increase of 31 positions covering fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2014.¹³ According to the CT Bureau, about 7 of these positions were initially filled within the first 6 months after the bureau was established. Filling many of the remaining positions was postponed until the current Coordinator for Counterterrorism had time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities, according to the CT Bureau. CT Bureau officials stated that since fiscal year 2012, the authorized positions have been reallocated each year and moved around within the CT Bureau based on the bureau's needs. When the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, following the strategic review, deemed that more staff might be needed in newly created units, some of the authorized positions were used for that purpose. For example, 1 position was used to fill a management-level position in the CT Bureau's Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives and another to fill a senior-level position in the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Unit, according to CT Bureau officials. For additional information regarding the CT Bureau's workforce planning efforts, see appendix VI.

¹²According to the CT Bureau, the total number of staff positions fluctuates based on the time of year.

¹³According to the CT Bureau, these 31 positions were existing positions for which funding would be reprogrammed to the CT Bureau in fiscal years 2012 through 2014.

While CT Bureau Has Assessed Its Performance, It Has Not Evaluated Its Priority Countering Violent Extremism Program or Established Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations

The CT Bureau utilized various means to assess its performance, including performance assessments and program evaluations. Specifically, in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, the CT Bureau established indicators and targets for its foreign assistance–related goals identified in the bureau’s first multiyear strategic plan. The bureau also reported results achieved toward each established indicator. In addition, since being elevated to a bureau in fiscal year 2012, the CT Bureau has completed four evaluations of counterterrorism-related programs it oversees, but none have focused on CVE programming—a priority for the bureau. The completed evaluations resulted in 60 recommendations, and the CT Bureau reported having implemented about half of the recommendations as of June 2015. A standard practice in program management is to complete actions in response to recommendations from evaluations within established time frames. However, the CT Bureau has not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations. Without specific time frames for completing actions in response to recommendations from evaluations, it will be difficult for the bureau to ensure that needed programmatic improvements are made in a timely manner or to hold its implementing partners accountable for doing so.

CT Bureau Assessed Progress toward Achieving Its Foreign Assistance–Related Goals

The CT Bureau assessed its progress toward achieving its foreign assistance–related goals in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, as required by State policy.¹⁴ That policy requires bureaus to respond to an annual department-wide data call for foreign assistance–related performance information. Specifically, bureaus must identify indicators and targets for their foreign assistance–related goals, as defined in their multiyear strategic plans, and report results achieved toward each indicator for the prior fiscal year.¹⁵ As shown in figure 7, the CT Bureau identified four foreign assistance–related goals in its first multiyear strategic plan and

¹⁴Department of State, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources, *Guidance for Performance Plan and Report* (2012, 2013). We analyzed the CT Bureau’s performance reports for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. The fiscal year 2014 performance report was not available at the time of our review. We also analyzed the fiscal year 2011 performance report for the CT Office to show what changes, if any, the bureau had made with regard to its performance reporting efforts since being elevated from an office to a bureau in fiscal year 2012.

¹⁵The multiyear strategic plan is a 3-year strategy that defines priority goals for the bureau. Those goals serve as the framework and basis for the annual performance reports from bureaus.

established quantitative indicators and corresponding targets for each of those goals.¹⁶ It also reported results achieved for each indicator. According to these results, the CT Bureau generally met or exceeded its targets or the baseline when no target existed.

Figure 7: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Performance Results Reported for Foreign Assistance-Related Goals, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2013

		FY 2011		FY 2012		FY 2013	
Performance Indicator ^a	Baseline ^b	Target	Result	Target	Result	Target	Result
Goal #1: Counter violent extremism							
Number of students trained in activities, tools, and techniques related to Countering Violent Extremism	2,960	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA ^c	● 2,960
Number of Countering Violent Extremism programs directly related to U.S. government objectives implemented in country by civil society and partner governments	0	NA	NA	1	▲ 3	5	▲ 11
Goal #2: Disrupt terrorist networks, including sponsorship, financial support, travel, and sanctuary ^d							
Number of students trained in counterterrorism finance by U.S. government programs	1,593	NA ^c	● 2,063	2,100	▼ 1,819	2,000	▼ 1,853
Goal #3: Enhance host country civilian capacity and performance to deter, disrupt, and apprehend terrorists							
Goal #4: Strengthen multilateral and regional mechanisms ^e							
Number of students trained in antiterrorism topics and skills through the Antiterrorism Assistance program	8,504	NA	NA	NA ^c	● 9,869	7,921	▲ 12,109
Number of Counterterrorism Engagement-funded multilateral training and capacity-building activities conducted by multilateral organizations that promote effective counterterrorism policies and programs	17	NA ^c	● 20	15	▲ 15	15	▲ 50
Number of U.S. government-assisted assessments on terrorism	18	17	▲ 18	23	▼ 18	18	NA ^f

FY Fiscal year

NA Indicator not applicable to fiscal year, so no target or result reported

● Baseline reportedly met or exceeded

▲ Target reportedly met or exceeded

▼ Target reportedly not met

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documents. | GAO-15-684

¹⁶The CT Bureau's first multiyear strategic plan became effective with its submission to the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources in April 2012. In January 2015, the CT Bureau submitted its second multiyear strategic plan, which supersedes the first.

Notes: We analyzed information in the Bureau of Counterterrorism's performance reports for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. The fiscal year 2014 performance report was not available at the time of our review. We also analyzed the fiscal year 2011 performance report for the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism to show what changes, if any, the Bureau of Counterterrorism had made with regard to its performance reporting efforts since being elevated from an office to a bureau in fiscal year 2012.

^aIn addition to the indicators identified in the figure, the bureau was also tracking the number of publicly reported terrorism incidents in a given year worldwide as a "proxy" indicator to inform strategic planning.

^bBaseline numbers reflect the most recent data available at the time the indicators were introduced and were established before targets were set.

^cAlthough no target was set for the fiscal year, a result was reported. This is consistent with Department of State policy stating that bureaus are not required to set a target for the first fiscal year when an indicator is introduced but that a result can still be reported.

^dFor this goal, the bureau was also tracking three indicators related to the Terrorist Interdiction Program. These indicators are not presented in the figure because the bureau determined them to be sensitive but unclassified information.

^eThese goals are presented together because the bureau established the same indicators for both.

^fNo result was reported because the indicator was discontinued in fiscal year 2013. It was discontinued because the bureau concluded that the number of assessments conducted is not a contributing factor to, and does not establish a measure of, the success of a program.

CT Bureau Has Completed Four Program Evaluations since Fiscal Year 2012 but Has Not Evaluated Its Priority CVE Program

Since being elevated to a bureau in fiscal year 2012, the CT Bureau has completed four evaluations of counterterrorism-related programs it funds and oversees.¹⁷ The number of completed program evaluations meets the number of evaluations required by State's February 2012 evaluation policy.¹⁸ As shown in table 1, the CT Bureau completed these evaluations during fiscal years 2013 and 2014 and focused primarily on evaluating programs providing training courses to law enforcement officials of partner nations, such as the Antiterrorism Assistance program in Morocco and Bangladesh.

¹⁷Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of programs as a basis for judgments, to improve effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about current and future programming. Evaluation is distinct from monitoring, which is a continual process designed to give an indication of a program's progress and whether its implementation is on track. The CT Bureau has not completed any impact evaluations, which assess the net effect of a program by comparing program outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program. However, State's February 2012 evaluation policy gave bureaus the flexibility to choose the appropriate type of evaluation to conduct for their programs.

¹⁸Department of State, *Program Evaluation Policy* (Feb. 23, 2012). State's February 2012 evaluation policy required bureaus to complete two to four program evaluations over the 24-month period that began in fiscal year 2012. State modified its evaluation policy in January 2015 to require bureaus to complete at least one evaluation per fiscal year.

Table 1: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Completed Program Evaluations, Fiscal Years 2013 and 2014

Program evaluated	Program description	Evaluation date
Antiterrorism Assistance program in Morocco	Provided training courses to Moroccan law enforcement officials on, for example, cyber forensic and cyber security	August 2013
Antiterrorism Assistance program in Bangladesh	Provided training courses to Bangladeshi law enforcement officials on, for example, critical incident response, border security, and investigative competence	October 2013
Resident Legal Advisor and Intermittent Legal Advisor program	Placed advisors in 13 geographic areas to build partner nation investigative, prosecutorial, and judicial capacity in anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance	December 2013
Regional Strategic Initiative program in Algeria	Provided training courses and technical assistance to the Algerian Gendarmerie Nationale on, for example, forensics, criminal investigations, and border security	September 2014

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documents. | GAO-15-684.

The four evaluations covered program activities totaling more than \$68 million. The CT Bureau reported spending \$2.4 million on program monitoring and evaluation activities, including an estimated \$350,000 to complete the evaluations themselves. State's February 2012 evaluation policy states that bureaus should leverage resources of up to 3 to 5 percent for evaluation activities. With the exception of the evaluation of the Resident Legal Advisor and Intermittent Legal Advisor program, the evaluations the CT Bureau completed were of portions of programs such as Antiterrorism Assistance in Bangladesh and Morocco and did not cover the full scope of a program. Antiterrorism Assistance is a global program that has active partnerships with 53 countries around the world. CT Bureau officials noted that, when deciding what programs to evaluate, the bureau took into consideration whether the evaluation would inform the priority programming and objectives of the bureau and produce results the bureau could use in future programming decisions and evaluation designs. To date, the CT Bureau has not evaluated the CVE program despite having identified the program as a priority goal for the bureau. The bureau acknowledged that such an evaluation would help it to ensure accountability, better measure program impact and effectiveness, and shape future programming decisions, but has postponed plans to evaluate the CVE program every fiscal year since 2012. The bureau cited two main reasons for postponing these plans. First, the bureau said it is difficult to evaluate the CVE program given that its goal is to deny terrorist groups new recruits and measuring and attributing this negative effect can be a complex task. Second, the CVE program is a relatively new effort for the U.S. government and most of its partners, so evaluation methodologies are still evolving. As of June 2015, the CT Bureau was unsure what future evaluations it would undertake but indicated that it was working to finalize its evaluation plans for 2015.

Evaluating the CVE program could provide the CT Bureau with information it could use to make more informed decisions about current and future programming.

CT Bureau Has Not Established Time Frames for Addressing Recommendations from Program Evaluations

Standard practices in program management include, among other things, establishing specific time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. For example, internal control standards for the federal government state that management should (1) promptly assess the findings and recommendations from evaluations, (2) determine and complete actions in response to the findings and recommendations from evaluations within established time frames, and (3) record actions taken on recommendations in a timely and accurate manner.¹⁹ State's January 2015 evaluation guidance, which provides specific criteria and guidelines for evaluating State programs, also recognizes the need for bureaus to track and address recommendations from evaluations.²⁰

The four program evaluations the CT Bureau completed during fiscal years 2013 and 2014 resulted in 60 recommendations. In response to questions during the course of our review, CT Bureau officials developed action plans to describe the status of efforts to address the 60 recommendations.²¹ On the basis of our review of these action plans, the CT Bureau reported having implemented about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) as of June 2015. The bureau had put on hold or decided not to implement 4 recommendations. The remaining 28 recommendations were still being considered or were in the process of

¹⁹Office of Management and Budget, *Management's Responsibility for Internal Control*, OMB Circular No. A-123 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 21, 2004), and GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 1, 1999).

²⁰For example, it states that bureaus are encouraged to: (1) discuss the findings and recommendations with important stakeholders and determine which recommendations should be implemented; (2) identify management and/or program actions to be taken to implement those recommendations; (3) assign clear responsibility for the completion of each set of actions; (4) monitor progress in implementing recommendations to ensure that recommendations are implemented; and (5) set up a system to track actions taken on the recommendations, using an Excel spreadsheet or other tool.

²¹At the onset of our review, the CT Bureau did not track the status of recommendations from evaluations. CT Bureau officials said our review prompted internal discussions within the bureau about creating a spreadsheet to track the status of recommendations. CT Bureau officials subsequently developed these action plans.

being implemented, or the bureau had made a commitment to implement them. CT Bureau officials said that program officers are assigned responsibility for following up on recommendations that affect their portfolio but that the bureau does not have any policy or other guidance outlining the timing for addressing recommendations from evaluations. Further, according to bureau officials, the bureau does not have a system for assigning time frames for the implementation of recommendations. While the action plans are a positive first step to help the bureau monitor and track its progress in implementing recommendations, they do not address the need for the bureau to establish time frames for addressing recommendations from evaluations. Without specific time frames for completing actions in response to recommendations from evaluations, it will be difficult for the bureau to ensure that needed programmatic improvements are made in a timely manner or to hold its implementing partners accountable for doing so.

CT Bureau's Collaboration on Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism Finance Programs Was Generally in Line with Key Collaboration Practices

We found that activities between the CT Bureau and other bureaus within State as well as with other U.S. government agencies on counterterrorism programs, specifically the CVE and CTF programs, were generally in line with six of the seven key practices that GAO has identified for interagency collaboration in the areas of (1) outcomes and accountability, (2) bridging organizational cultures, (3) leadership, (4) clarity of roles and responsibilities, (5) resources, and (6) written guidance and agreements.²² We did not review one additional key collaboration practice, which covers participants, because doing so would have required taking a comprehensive look across all the State bureaus and other U.S. government agencies to ensure that all the relevant participants in counterterrorism efforts were included and would have required an evaluation of their relevant resources, skills, and abilities to contribute, which was outside the scope of this review.

- **Outcomes and accountability.**²³ According to CT Bureau officials, in coordinating on CVE and CTF, the bureau and its partners have

²²GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012). The report outlines key issues to consider for implementing interagency collaborative mechanisms that tend to enhance and sustain interagency collaboration.

²³[GAO-12-1022](#). Having defined outcomes and mechanisms to track progress can help shape a collaborative vision and goals.

defined intended outcomes generally as collaborating on policy and programming decisions, sharing information, and ensuring that there is no duplication of existing or planned initiatives. When working with other U.S. government agencies, the CT Bureau generally has laid out the intended outcomes of coordination efforts in interagency agreements. We found that within State, the goals of coordination may be articulated by the CT Bureau through specific requests across regional or functional bureaus or messages defining and assigning specific tasks. For example, some State officials in regional bureaus mentioned that the CT Bureau has asked for input on CVE programming, specifically on reviewing CVE grant proposals from posts and nongovernmental organizations for respective regions to ensure that the programming was feasible and did not conflict with other initiatives. Further, some State officials said that the CT Bureau reached out to them to request their expertise on identifying regional stakeholders that could provide input for the State portion of the February 2015 White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism.

With regard to coordination on CTF, we found that the interagency Terrorist Financing Working Group previously had provided a mechanism for the CT Bureau and other U.S. government agencies to hold regular meetings to discuss and reach consensus on CTF programming outcomes and goals. According to agency officials, interagency coordination on CTF programs occurred in the past mostly through the Terrorist Financing Working Group, which developed an annual list of priority countries based on an analysis by participating agencies, including various intelligence agencies. The working group was co-chaired by the former CTF unit within the CT Bureau and provided a mechanism for agency stakeholders to share information on CTF activities and find ways to avoid potential conflict between any initiatives. According to officials at other agencies, the Terrorist Financing Working Group has not met recently, and the CT Bureau is in the process of developing new interagency collaboration mechanisms for CTF programming, after the CTF unit within the bureau was disbanded during the recent reorganization of the bureau. Department of the Treasury officials stated that in the interim there is sufficient coordination between the bureau and stakeholders on CTF programming; however, they stated that if the Terrorist Financing Working Group remains on hiatus for some time, and no replacement mechanism for regular formal collaboration is initiated, stakeholders' awareness of what other agencies are doing to counter terrorism financing could be hindered.

We identified accountability mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results or outcomes of counterterrorism programming, especially when there is an interagency agreement between the CT Bureau and other U.S. government agencies on programming such as CVE. For example, an interagency agreement between the CT Bureau and United States Institute of Peace stipulates that reporting on the outcome of the programming is to include quarterly performance reports, interim reports, and final reports no later than 60 days after the termination of the agreement. In addition, some agency officials said that there are monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place when implementing CT Bureau-funded programming. For example, Department of the Treasury officials stated that they are responsible for providing after-action reports to the CT Bureau on their program efforts related to activities with foreign governments aimed at strengthening anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism regimes for CT Bureau-funded programming.

- **Bridging organizational cultures.**²⁴ We found that while terminology may differ when discussing CVE, within State, some regional and functional bureau officials we spoke with stated that they use a common definition for CVE and apply the CVE strategy and policy that the CT Bureau has developed for CVE programming. Similarly, some officials in other U.S. government agencies we spoke with said they agree on common terms and outcomes of counterterrorism programming as ideas are discussed between the CT Bureau and the implementing agency, if the bureau funds a program or grant. For example, USAID officials said that while their agency's definition of CVE differs from the CT Bureau's, they have implemented programs on the ground in the Maghreb and the Sahel region on CVE capacity building using an agreed-upon common CVE definition.

We also found that collaborating agencies reported frequent communication related to CVE programs. Specifically, we found that frequency of communication between the CT Bureau and other State bureaus as well as other U.S. government agencies varied depending on the project or activity and ranged from daily to monthly interactions. For example, on one of the CT Bureau-funded CVE projects implemented by the United States Institute of Peace, the

²⁴[GAO-12-1022](#). Developing common terminology and open lines of communication among collaborating entities can help ensure that misunderstandings are prevented.

implementing program specialist estimated that he has been in touch with his counterpart at State once every 2 days on average over the life of the program, which focuses on developing training for an international institution for CVE-related training in the United Arab Emirates.

- **Leadership.**²⁵ For CVE and to some extent CTF, we found that officials at State and at other U.S. government agencies were generally aware of the agency or individual with leadership responsibility for the particular counterterrorism program. In addition, at the time of our review, officials said that they receive relevant and timely information on CVE-related programming from the bureau. Officials in State's regional bureaus stated that they are generally aware of when the CT Bureau would have the lead on counterterrorism issues versus the regional bureaus. For example, some of these officials said that if a given issue involved policy and cross-cutting counterterrorism areas, the CT Bureau would take the lead on meetings and assigning tasks, whereas if the issue was more regional in nature, the regional bureaus would take the lead with support from the CT Bureau.

We found that while the leadership for the CTF program was generally clear in the past, at the time of our review there was some uncertainty among officials as to whom they should be working with on CTF programming, because of the recent reorganization of the CT Bureau. For example, some U.S. government officials said that there had been a dedicated CTF unit within the bureau that dealt with CTF programming and also coordinated the interagency Terrorist Financing Working Group. However, with the elimination of the stand-alone CTF unit within the CT Bureau, it was not as clear to these officials who was the point of contact for CTF issues. At the time of our review, a few U.S. government agency officials said that it would be beneficial if the CT Bureau shared new contact information resulting from the recent reorganization; however, in the interim, the officials would still reach out to the point of contact that had been previously established for CTF issues.

²⁵[GAO-12-1022](#). Having clear and consistent leadership can speed decision making and strengthen collaboration among agencies.

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- **Clarity of roles and responsibilities.**²⁶ We found that there was general clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the participants collaborating on CVE and CTF counterterrorism programs with the CT Bureau. For example, several State officials said that for questions related to programs, such as CVE, they knew who their point of contact in the CT Bureau was and also what that person's portfolio encompassed. We also found that the roles and responsibilities of participants are generally clarified in writing in cases where there is an interagency agreement between the bureau and implementing U.S. government agency partners on a particular program. For example, such agreements outline the roles and responsibilities of the requesting agency and the servicing agency.

When referring to assessing the performance of counterterrorism programming, officials from both within State and other U.S. government agencies said that they were clear on whose responsibility it was to monitor and evaluate CVE and CTF programming activities. State and other agency officials understood that the CT Bureau would be responsible for ensuring evaluations of counterterrorism programs are conducted; however, the monitoring and reporting of the outcomes of CT Bureau-funded programs would be the responsibility of the implementing U.S. government agency partner of that program, or the recipient of the funding.

- **Resources.**²⁷ According to information provided by the CT Bureau, it had provided funding for CVE or CTF programming activities to most of the agencies with which we spoke. The program funding for these activities came from the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs and Economic Support Fund funding accounts. According to information from the CT Bureau, from fiscal year 2011 to fiscal year 2014, it obligated over \$11 million to agencies we spoke with for CVE programming and over \$43 million to agencies we spoke with for CTF programming using interagency agreements or transfers.

We found that, in cases where the CT Bureau funded U.S. government agencies on CVE or CTF programming, the funding mechanism was clear and laid out in the interagency agreements.

²⁶ [GAO-12-1022](#). Discussing and documenting roles and responsibilities of collaborating participants can help with interagency decision making.

²⁷ [GAO-12-1022](#). Identifying and leveraging resources can help ensure that the objectives of collaborative efforts can be accomplished.

Some agency officials told us that these agreements provide the vehicle whereby funding can be obligated from the CT Bureau to their agencies using a standard process. For example, Department of Homeland Security officials said that they have worked with the CT Bureau when receiving funding for cross-border financial training to be carried out in various countries and that the funding mechanism was clear. USAID officials stated that while USAID does not have interagency agreements with the CT Bureau, funding from the bureau for the CVE programs and activities that USAID administers comes through standard interagency transfers.

- **Written guidance and agreements.**²⁸ We found that many of the U.S. government agencies we spoke with had formal interagency agreements with the CT Bureau on CVE- and CTF-related programming or activities. The interagency agreements described, among other things, the service to be provided, roles and responsibilities of each party, method and frequency of performance reporting, and accounting information for funding of the service provided. The interagency agreements we reviewed covered a multiyear agreement period. For example, the CT Bureau has an agreement with the Department of Justice Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training on funding a Resident Legal Advisor in Panama who works with the host country government to enhance the capacity of criminal justice actors and institutions to handle financial crimes involving money laundering and terrorist finance. The interagency agreement in place covers funding for the period of 2014 through 2019. According to CT Bureau officials, as the scope or activities of the CT Bureau-funded programming changes, the interagency agreements can be modified. In addition, the CT Bureau and the Department of Justice have an interagency agreement on development of community police training in Bangladesh.

We found that many of the State bureaus we spoke with that coordinate with the CT Bureau on CVE and CTF programs did not have any written agreements, such as memorandums of understanding or written guidance laying out the terms of the collaboration. However, several State officials indicated that

²⁸ [GAO-12-1022](#). Establishing agreements can define and strengthen commitments by agencies to work collaboratively. Written agreements can be most effective when they are regularly updated and monitored.

formalized agreements were not necessary, as the collaboration between bureaus within State is routine and the CT Bureau has been effective in sharing information pertaining to the CVE programs.

Conclusions

Given the critical importance of preventing terrorist attacks on the United States and its interests around the world, State elevated the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism to the Bureau of Counterterrorism in fiscal year 2012 to lead the department's effort to counter terrorism abroad and to secure the United States against terrorist threats and violent extremism. The CT Bureau recently has undertaken steps to address long-standing staffing gaps and it has placed a priority on efforts to counter violent extremism, among other things, since being elevated to a bureau in fiscal year 2012. Although the bureau has completed some program evaluations, it has yet to evaluate its past or current CVE efforts, an action that could help it make more informed decisions about programmatic efforts to counter violent extremism abroad. Also, while the CT Bureau has completed four program evaluations, resulting in 60 recommendations to improve its programs, it has implemented only about half of those recommendations and has not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations. Without specific time frames for completing actions in response to evaluation recommendations, it will be difficult for the bureau to ensure the timely implementation of programmatic improvements that would benefit both the country-specific efforts evaluated as well as the broader global program.

Recommendations for Executive Action

Given that countering violent extremism is a priority for the U.S. government in general and State's CT Bureau, we recommend that the Secretary of State take steps to ensure that CVE program efforts abroad are evaluated.

To improve State's CT Bureau's program management efforts, we recommend that the Secretary of State take steps to ensure the CT Bureau establishes specific time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations.

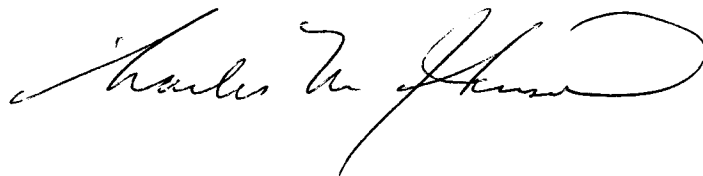
Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, and the Treasury, and to USAID, the United States Institute of Peace, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence for their review and comment. We received written comments from State, which are reprinted in appendix VII. State and Treasury

provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. State concurred with our recommendation to conduct an evaluation of its overseas Countering Violent Extremism program efforts. Specifically, State indicated that it was currently assessing which programs would most benefit from third-party evaluation during the upcoming fiscal year and expected CVE to be included in its final determination. State also concurred with our recommendation to establish specific time frames for addressing recommendations from its program evaluations. State indicated that it will commit to setting a timetable for reviewing each recommendation by a third-party evaluator and implementing those actions that are deemed both implementable and worthwhile.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretaries of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and the Treasury, the Attorney General of the United States, the USAID Administrator, the Director of National Intelligence, and the President, United States Institute of Peace. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.



Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In addition to presenting information on the evolution of the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau) and changes in funding, the objectives of this review were to examine (1) how the CT 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 selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices.

To determine the extent to which the CT Bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, we reviewed staffing allocation data from fiscal years 2011 to 2015. We received data on the total authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, total established positions, and the total on-board positions for those fiscal years.¹ State's Office of the Executive Secretariat provided the FTE staffing data for fiscal years 2011 and 2012, and the CT Bureau, specifically the Executive Office, provided the FTE and other staffing data for fiscal years 2013 to 2015.² To assess the reliability of the staffing data, we compared and corroborated information provided by State with staffing information in the Congressional Budget Justifications for the fiscal years as well as spoke to State officials regarding the processes they use to collect and verify the staffing data. On the basis of the checks we performed, we determined these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. To determine how the CT Bureau's mission, organizational structure, and funding resources may have changed since 2011, we reviewed and analyzed State and CT Bureau documents pertaining to the mission, organization of the bureau, staffing, funding, and foreign assistance program allocations. We also interviewed State officials from the CT Bureau; Office of Inspector General; Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources; and the Bureaus of Human Resources, Comptroller and Global Financial Services, Budgeting and Planning, and Administration. Specifically, for the mission statement, we reviewed the CT Bureau's mission statement from 2011

¹The CT Bureau defines authorized positions as positions that are permitted to be filled within the CT Bureau as determined by State's Bureau of Human Resources. Established positions are positions that have been built, or established, in State's human resources system known as the Global Employment Management System (GEMS) but not yet encumbered. On-board positions are positions that have been established in GEMS and are currently encumbered.

²State's Office of the Executive Secretariat provided human resource functions for the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism until the CT Bureau was established in fiscal year 2012.

and also from 2015, both reflected in bureau documents and on the bureau's website, to ascertain what changes, if any, there have been to the bureau's mission. We discussed with CT Bureau officials any changes to the bureau's mission over time. To determine changes in the CT Bureau's organizational structure, we reviewed the organizational chart of the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (CT Office) from 2011 as well as organizational charts of the CT Bureau covering 2012 through 2015. We also spoke to officials representing every directorate and most offices that had been established within the CT Bureau to understand their roles and responsibilities and any impact that the bureau's strategic review and reorganization has had on their portfolios.³ To depict changes in resources, we reviewed data on the CT Bureau's operations allocations and obligations from 2011 to 2015 as well as foreign assistance allocations that the bureau has received over the same time period. The allocations and obligations for the bureau's operations were provided by the CT Bureau, while the allocations for the foreign assistance programs were provided by State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources. We depicted the allocated funding information based on the funding accounts as well as the foreign assistance programs they cover. To assess the reliability of the funding and allocations data, we spoke to State officials regarding the processes they use to collect and verify the data. On the basis of the checks we performed, we determined these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, we reviewed bureau strategic plans, performance reports, program evaluation reports, and action plans for evaluation recommendations, as well as State policy and guidance documents outlining performance reporting and evaluation requirements for bureaus. Specifically, to examine the CT Bureau's performance reporting efforts, we reviewed the bureau's multiyear strategic plans and performance reports to determine whether the bureau had established performance measures for its foreign assistance–related goals and used established performance measures to assess the bureau's progress toward achieving its goals, as required by State policy.⁴ While we

³We were not able to speak with officials in a few of the newly created units, such as the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Unit.

⁴Department of State, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources, *Guidance for Performance Plan and Report* (2012, 2013).

reviewed documentation on the CT Bureau's performance measures, and discussed the CT Bureau's performance reporting efforts with cognizant State officials, we did not fully assess the reliability of these measures because our goal was to determine whether the bureau had established performance measures rather than describe the bureau's actual performance. We are publishing the performance results the CT Bureau reported to provide context and additional support for our finding that the bureau has assessed its performance. To examine the CT Bureau's program evaluation efforts, we reviewed evaluation reports and compared the number of evaluations the bureau completed against the number of evaluations required by State's February 2012 evaluation policy.⁵ We also compared the bureau's efforts to track and address recommendations from evaluations against internal control standards for the federal government⁶ and State's January 2015 evaluation guidance, which provides specific criteria and guidelines for evaluating State programs.⁷ In addition, we interviewed or obtained written responses from officials from State's Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources and Bureau of Budget and Planning to clarify State's performance reporting and evaluation requirements for bureaus and whether the CT Bureau had met the requirements. We also interviewed CT Bureau officials responsible for strategic planning and program monitoring and evaluation to obtain additional or clarifying information related to past or currently planned bureau efforts on performance reporting and evaluations.

To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau's coordination within State and other U.S. government entities on selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices and collaboration features, we reviewed agency documents and interviewed officials from various State regional and functional bureaus and other U.S. government agencies. Specifically, we spoke with officials representing regional bureaus—African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central Asian Affairs, and Western

⁵Department of State, *Program Evaluation Policy* (Feb. 23, 2012).

⁶Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *Management's Responsibility for Internal Control*, OMB Circular No. A-123 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 21, 2004) and GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 1, 1999).

⁷Department of State, *Guidance for Planning and Conducting Evaluations at the Department of State* (Jan. 2015).

Hemisphere Affairs—and officials representing functional bureaus or offices—Center for Strategic Communications; Conflict and Stabilization Operations; Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Economic and Business Affairs; Educational and Cultural Affairs; International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs; and International Organization Affairs. We also spoke with officials from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and the Treasury; United States Agency for International Development; the National Counterterrorism Center; and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. We focused on coordination on the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism Finance (CTF) programs because these programs involve coordination with large numbers of agencies and State entities and also represent strategic priorities for the CT Bureau. We used GAO's leading practices for implementing interagency collaborative mechanisms to better understand the extent and nature of collaboration between the CT Bureau and other bureaus within State and other U.S. government agencies on CT Bureau programs and compared CT Bureau's coordination efforts against these key collaboration practices.⁸ We devised a standard set of questions that incorporated questions provided in GAO's collaboration practices to ask State regional and functional bureaus and U.S. government agencies. We focused on six of the key collaboration practices: outcomes and accountability, bridging organizational cultures, leadership, clarity of roles and responsibilities, resources, and written guidance and agreements.⁹ We analyzed the information provided by State and agency officials against these practices to determine whether the collaboration between these entities and the CT Bureau on CVE and CTF were generally consistent with these practices.

⁸GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012). GAO identified a range of mechanisms that the federal government uses to lead and implement interagency collaboration, as well as issues to consider, such as key practices, when implementing these mechanisms. GAO developed these practices by conducting a literature review on interagency collaborative mechanisms, interviewing academic and practitioner experts in the field of collaboration, and reviewing their work. While the report focuses on interagency collaboration, we determined that most of the questions could be applicable for intra-agency collaboration.

⁹We did not review one additional key collaboration practice, which covers participants, because doing so would have required taking a comprehensive look across all the State bureaus and other U.S. government agencies to ensure that all the relevant participants in counterterrorism efforts were included and would have required an evaluation of their relevant resources, skills, and abilities to contribute, which was outside the scope of this report.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2014 to July 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Ancillary Efforts Managed by the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism

In addition to its key programs and activities, the Bureau of Counterterrorism manages or is responsible for a number of other counterterrorism-related efforts, including the following:

- Issuing *Country Reports on Terrorism*, which are annual, mandated reports to Congress that provide, among other things, an assessment of each country in which acts of international terror of major significance occurred and an assessment of each country whose territory is being used as a sanctuary for terrorist or terrorist organizations.
- Co-chairing the Technical Support Working Group (TSWG), which enhances the counterterrorism technology and equipment capabilities of U.S. government agencies and elements involved in counterterrorism and antiterrorism activities. The TSWG implements five bilateral research and development agreements with international partners. The cooperative programs with Israel, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Singapore allow the United States to leverage foreign experience, expertise, resources, and infrastructure to address commonly-held technical priorities for combating terrorism.
- Leading the Counterterrorism Preparedness Program, a series of international exercises designed to strengthen the U.S. and partner nations' capacity to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks, especially those involving weapons of mass destruction.
- Leading the Foreign Emergency Support Team, which is the U.S. government's only interagency, on-call team poised to support embassies in responding to terrorist incidents worldwide.
- Preparing public designations of foreign terrorist organizations, designations that have legal consequences.¹

¹We issued a nonpublic report on the bureau's designation of foreign terrorist organizations on April 21, 2015; because of the sensitive nature of some information in that report, the Department of State deemed the report to be sensitive but unclassified. We also issued a public report on the same topic in June 2015. GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation Process and U.S. Agency Enforcement Actions*, [GAO-15-629](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 25, 2015).

Appendix III: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Description of Its Directorates and Offices

The Department of State’s (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau) is led by a Coordinator for Counterterrorism and is currently organized with four directorates and numerous offices and units that cover counterterrorism policy, strategy, planning, programming, and operations. According to the CT Bureau, the bureau’s final structure is pending until it has been approved by State’s management and incorporated into the department’s *Foreign Affairs Manual*. Pending incorporation into the *Foreign Affairs Manual*, the CT Bureau provided the following description of its directorates and offices.

Directorates

Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism

The Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism serves as the senior deputy and advisor to the Coordinator for Counterterrorism and has the authority to act on the Coordinator’s behalf in his or her absence. The Principal Deputy Coordinator is responsible for overall management of the bureau and, in consultation with the Coordinator, plans and supervises the substantive work of the bureau, including public affairs outreach strategies. The Principal Deputy Coordinator represents the bureau in department and interagency groups as well as supervises subordinate offices, as directed by the Coordinator.

Regional and Multilateral Affairs

The directorate is led by a Deputy Coordinator and is made up of two offices with a regional focus and one focused on multilateral affairs, according to the CT Bureau. The two regional offices—Office of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, and Office of South and Central Asia and the Near East—are engaged in day-to-day policy tasks and interactions that are managed by interagency working groups. This includes writing policy papers, providing policy guidance, and participating in interagency and within-State meetings to work on counterterrorism-related issues. The offices work very closely with State regional bureaus, focusing on terrorism-related issues, such as designation of terrorist groups or updates on terrorist threats or activities in a region or country.

The Office of Multilateral Affairs handles multilateral engagements of the CT Bureau and works with multiple partners including the United Nations. The office tracks the work of the multilateral organizations, sets the agenda on U.S. counterterrorism issues at multilateral meetings, and develops multilateral counterterrorism programs to cover capacity-building goals as well as other counterterrorism strategic priorities of the

CT Bureau and the rest of the U.S. government. One example of multilateral engagement is through the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which is an informal, multilateral counterterrorism platform that focuses on identifying critical civilian counterterrorism needs, mobilizing the necessary expertise and resources to address such needs, and generally enhancing global cooperation.

Homeland Security

The directorate is led by a Deputy Coordinator and covers three offices—Office of Homeland Security, Office of Terrorist Screening and Interdiction, and Office of Terrorist Designations and Sanctions, according to the CT Bureau. The Office of Homeland Security leads State’s efforts to deliver and implement core cross-cutting homeland security policies and programs that intersect with U.S. foreign policy development on counterterrorism issues and coordinates with other State bureaus and U.S. government agencies on homeland security issues such as border security, transportation security, and critical infrastructure protection. The Office of Terrorist Screening and Interdiction leads State’s policy development, interagency coordination, international engagement, and negotiations for the exchange of biographic terrorism screening information. It also coordinates programs to constrain terrorist mobility globally by helping countries at risk of terrorist activity or transit to enhance their border security capabilities. The Office of Terrorist Designations and Sanctions identifies and designates targets for listing as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and leads the mandated review of State’s designations under Foreign Terrorist Organization authorities. It also leads State’s coordination of policy on countering terrorism finance worldwide.

Operations

The directorate is led by a Deputy Coordinator and covers one office, the Office of Operations, and three units—the Technical Programs Unit, the Policy Unit, and the Coordination Unit, according to the CT Bureau. The directorate coordinates State’s interagency efforts to plan and conduct sensitive counterterrorism operations worldwide. It also coordinates interagency and military counterterrorism activities and leads the Foreign Emergency Support Team, which is the U.S. government’s interagency team poised to respond quickly to terrorist incidents worldwide.

Offices and Units

Office of the Executive Director

The Office of the Executive Director provides executive management and direction for the CT Bureau in areas related to budget and finance, human resources, information technology, and communications. The office keeps track of CT Bureau reporting requirements such as quarterly reports and congressional notifications in order to execute the foreign assistance budget. The office also liaises with other government agencies on counterterrorism programmatic and management issues such as budget and financial management, training, and continuity of operations.

Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives

The Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives identifies, sets, coordinates, monitors, and adjusts CT Bureau counterterrorism priorities at the strategic level. The priorities are based on the current threat environment, partnership priorities, and monitoring priorities. The office also manages the bureau's congressional affairs portfolio and provides broad guidance on counterterrorism policy and strategy to program implementers in State and other government agencies.

Office of Programs

The Office of Programs covers counterterrorism programming and implementation from a regional perspective focused on Countering Violent Extremism, Counterterrorism Finance, Antiterrorism Assistance, and Regional Strategic Initiative–funded programs and other counterterrorism-related programs. The office monitors the day-to-day activities at the program management level and makes sure that program implementers follow implementation agreements. The office also leads the monitoring and evaluation of programs to ensure that the programs follow statements of work with indicators.

Public Affairs Unit

The Public Affairs Unit covers several functions, among other things, that involve writing press guidance, speeches, public remarks, and congressional testimony for senior CT Bureau personnel. The unit reviews and clears reports from other offices within the CT Bureau and also clears press releases and guidance related to counterterrorism issues. The unit also promotes the CT Bureau's mission and events via social media. The unit is also involved in the tasking, coordinating, and drafting of State's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism*.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters
Unit

The Foreign Terrorist Fighters Unit, led by an ambassador-level Senior Advisor, leads State's and interagency efforts in engaging with foreign partners to prevent and interdict foreign extremist travel to Syria and Iraq. The unit coordinates bureau and interagency strategy and initiatives on the foreign fighter issue to advise principals on the latest developments surrounding this problem set. The unit screens cables, intelligence reports, and academic research, and briefs the Senior Advisor and other principals as necessary. The unit also meets with foreign partners to exchange information, coordinate actions, and assist in the development of press guidance on these issues.

Countering Violent
Extremism Unit

The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Unit was created to elevate and advance the CT Bureau's policy work on countering and preventing violent extremism. To accomplish this goal, the CVE policy unit helps formulate and develops department, interagency, diplomatic, and multilateral efforts and initiatives to identify and address the drivers of violent extremism. The unit also engages with and supports other CVE-specific and relevant elements within State and with other agencies.

Appendix IV: Allocations of Funds to the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism for Six Counterterrorism-Related Programs, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015

Foreign assistance allocations to the Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau) fund counterterrorism-related programs that the bureau oversees. These allocations increased from fiscal years 2011 to 2012 as the CT Bureau transitioned from an office to a bureau. These allocations decreased thereafter from \$154 million in fiscal year 2012 to \$110 million in fiscal year 2014, as shown in figure 8. The majority of these allocations are from the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs account, which funds all six counterterrorism-related programs listed in the figure. These programs support a variety of activities including antiterrorism training and equipment, building foreign partner capacity to counter violent extremism, counterterrorism engagement with foreign partners, and anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance training. Allocations from the Economic Support Fund support those Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism Engagement program activities that do not involve law enforcement entities. For fiscal year 2015, the CT Bureau requested \$104.4 million in allocations to fund the six programs.

**Appendix IV: Allocations of Funds to the
Department of State Bureau of
Counterterrorism for Six Counterterrorism-
Related Programs, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015**

Figure 8: Actual and Requested Allocations of Funds to the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism for its Six Counterterrorism-Related Foreign Assistance Programs, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015

(Dollars in millions)

Counterterrorism-related program	Program description	FY 2011 actual	FY 2012 actual	FY 2013 actual	FY 2014 actual	FY 2015 request ^a	Total (excluding FY 2015)	Funding account(s)
Antiterrorism Assistance	Provides antiterrorism training and equipment to law enforcement agencies of partner countries	\$45.0	\$51.5	\$46.9	\$47.8	\$37.9	\$191.2	NADR
Countering Violent Extremism	Supports efforts to counter violent extremist narratives, increase partner capacity to stem terrorist recruitment, and provide alternatives to those most at risk of recruitment	15.5	12.8	13.3	0.0	10.0	41.1	NADR ESF
Counterterrorism Engagement	Supports efforts to build political will among foreign government officials and civil societies to address shared counterterrorism challenges	7.0	12.6	6.9	10.0	6.0	36.5	NADR ESF
Counterterrorism Finance	Provides funding for anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance training and technical assistance initiatives	10.0	12.3	13.0	12.2	11.4	47.5	NADR
Regional Strategic Initiative	Provides antiterrorism training and equipment to partner countries focused on addressing regional challenges	23.0	25.2	20.4	18.5	17.6	87.1	NADR
Terrorist Interdiction Program	Provides funding for the deployment of PISCES installations, including biometric enhancements, to partner countries vulnerable to terrorist travel ^b	37.5	39.6	37.1	21.5	21.5	135.7	NADR
Total		\$137.5	\$154.0	\$137.6	\$110.0	\$104.4	\$539.1	

FY Fiscal year

NADR Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs

ESF Economic Support Fund

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Notes: This figure reflects funds allocated to the Bureau of Counterterrorism. It does not include funds other U.S. government agencies may have been allocated to implement any of the counterterrorism-related programs listed. For example, the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security has been allocated funds to implement the Antiterrorism Assistance program.

^aDepartment of State officials were not able to provide actual allocations for fiscal year 2015 because they were working to finalize the allocations process at the time of our review. Accordingly, this column reflects the amount the Bureau of Counterterrorism requested from Congress for fiscal year 2015.

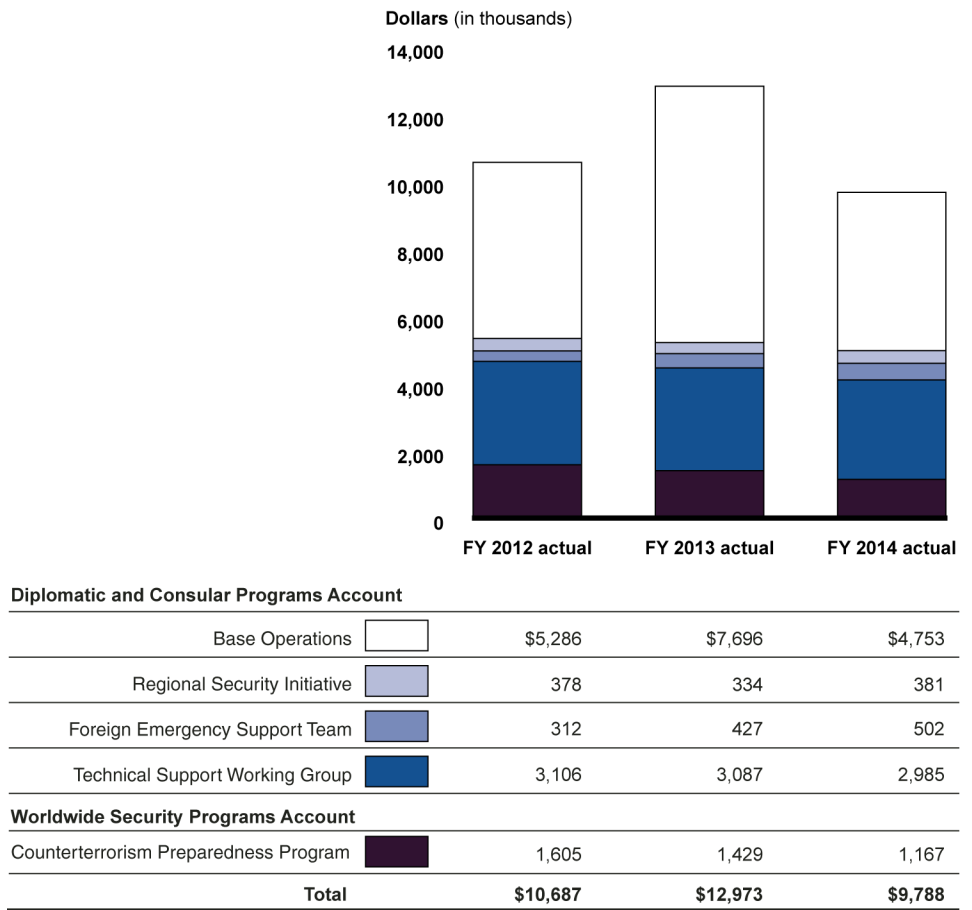
^bPISCES (Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System) is a software application that provides partner countries' border control officials with information that allows them to identify and detain or track terrorist suspects.

Appendix V: Funds Obligated for the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Operations Budget, Fiscal Years 2012 to 2014

The Bureau of Counterterrorism receives funds from two sources to support its core operations: the Diplomatic and Consular Programs and the Worldwide Security Programs accounts. The base operations of the bureau cover all travel, the majority of contracts, supplies, staffing costs, telephone, information technology, and printing and equipment. Figure 9 shows the bureau's total obligations for its overall operations since fiscal year 2012. These obligations increased from fiscal year 2012 to 2013 as the bureau was being established. The base operations obligations then decreased from about \$7.7 million in fiscal year 2013 to about \$4.8 million in fiscal year 2014.¹

¹We are showing comparison obligations data between fiscal year 2013 and 2014 but not including fiscal year 2015 because comparable actual data for fiscal year 2015 will not be available until after the fiscal year is over, according to a Bureau of Counterterrorism official.

Figure 9: Funds Obligated for the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Operations Budget, Fiscal Years 2012 to 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Note: We excluded data for fiscal year 2011 obligations because the obligations reflected in the Diplomatic and Consular Programs account was part of other obligations the Office of the Executive Secretariat controlled. Data are as of October 2014.

The Bureau of Counterterrorism’s overall budget is made up of the following components: (1) Base Operations covers all travel, the majority of contracts, supplies, staffing costs, telephone, information technology, and printing and equipment for the bureau; (2) Regional Security Initiative covers the travel for the bureau’s six field coordinators based at U.S. embassies as well as two to four regional conferences per year that bring together personnel from the embassies from various regions to discuss counterterrorism policy and strategy for that region; (3) Foreign Emergency Support Team supports the Operations Directorate’s

activities, including its travel, equipment, and post support costs; (4) Technical Support Working Group supports the Operations Directorate's activities, including its travel and contribution to the Department of Defense; and (5) the Worldwide Security Program account covers the costs of the contracts related to staff and other direct costs supporting the Counterterrorism Preparedness Program.

Appendix VI: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Workforce Planning Efforts

According to the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau), it has used a number of ways to assess its resource and workforce planning needs. CT Bureau officials reported that it uses State's Domestic Staffing Model to establish human resource demand for its workforce and to also make staffing decisions across the bureau. According to the Office of Resource Management and Analysis in State's Bureau of Human Resources, bureau managers can use the data in the model to make various decisions on current levels of work and the personnel resources performing the work. For example, the baseline could provide insight into the level of effort being expended on each function and managers could assess whether their practices are consistent with bureau priorities. The Domestic Staffing Model contains grade and skill level information for personnel performing functions in each bureau, which allows the model to predict what type of personnel resources would be required to support the expected workload increases. Moreover, this in turn could provide valuable information for recruitment, succession planning, and training purposes. However, the most recent data collection for the Domestic Staffing Model was conducted in spring 2011, when the CT Bureau was the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism and thus the model does not reflect the current CT Bureau's organizational structure. According to State officials, the information for the CT Bureau will be updated in the Domestic Staffing Model by the end of 2015.

CT Bureau officials also reported that the bureau looks at its resource needs during the annual planning and budgeting process that entails CT Bureau directors analyzing or assessing the workload of the staff in their respective areas and providing detailed justification for each full-time equivalent staff position requested. All requests and justifications for additional full-time equivalent staff positions are vetted with the Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism and if approved, presented to the Coordinator for Counterterrorism for approval as part of the overall bureau budget request, according to the CT Bureau. Once updated, the Domestic Staffing Model, along with the annual planning and budgeting process, would be a reasonable approach at looking at workforce planning and consistent with best practices.

Best practices for effective strategic workforce planning should, among other things, address the following key principles:¹

- determine the critical skills and competencies that will be needed to achieve current and future programmatic results;
- develop strategies that are tailored to address gaps in number, deployment, and alignment of human capital approaches for enabling and sustaining the contributions of all critical skills and competencies; and
- monitor and evaluate the progress toward its human capital goals.

¹GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003). To develop the key principles, GAO reviewed documents from (1) organizations with governmentwide responsibilities for or expertise in workforce planning models and tools, such as the Office of Personnel Management, and (2) federal agencies recommended by several sources as having promising workforce planning programs. GAO also reviewed reports and testimonies on human capital issues.

Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State

Washington D.C. 20520

JUL 14 2015

Dr. Loren Yager
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Dr. Yager:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "COMBATING TERRORISM: State Should Evaluate Its Countering Violent Extremism Program and Set Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations." GAO Job Code 321038.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Jamal Jones, Foreign Affairs Office, Office of the Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Bureau of Counterterrorism, at (202) 647-1515.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris H. Flaggs".

Christopher H. Flaggs

Enclosure:

As stated.

cc: GAO – Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
CT – Tina Kaidanow
State/OIG - Norman Brown

**COMBATING TERRORISM: State Should Evaluate Its Countering
Violent Extremism Program and Set Time Frames for
Addressing Evaluation Recommendations**
(GAO-15-684, GAO Code 321038)

The Department of State appreciates the time and effort expended by GAO in its recently completed comprehensive review of the CT Bureau, and we welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We also appreciate that GAO highlighted in its report the many changes that CT Bureau has made over the past year to enhance the Bureau's strategic planning, program integration, and overall operations.

GAO's report makes two recommendations. The first is that the Department of State conduct an evaluation of its overseas Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program efforts. While we have conducted evaluations of select CVE projects and have fully complied with the Department's evaluation policy, State agrees with the recommendation to undertake a more comprehensive evaluation. We are currently assessing which programs would most benefit from third-party evaluation during the upcoming fiscal year and expect CVE to be included in our final determination. As GAO rightly notes, previous consideration of conducting a comprehensive evaluation of CT Bureau CVE programming had resulted in a determination that the programs had not been underway for a sufficient amount of time to warrant an evaluation of that scope. The CVE Program in CT was established in 2010, and CT Bureau received only limited funding for CVE activities the first several fiscal years. At this stage, we now have a number of programs that have been underway for a sufficient amount of time to benefit from an assessment of cross-cutting lessons learned.

It is also important to recognize that, while we have not yet undertaken a comprehensive CVE evaluation, we build monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into each of our projects systematically; in particular, we require each implementing partner to design an M&E plan for each project and dedicate a percentage of the project budget to implementing its respective M&E plan. CT has also developed standardized CVE results indicators that it shares with embassies and implementing partners, as relevant. Finally, we have conducted both third-party and internal evaluations of ongoing CVE programming and activities. For example, CT has put in place an independent evaluation for its ongoing Hausa Language Multimedia Platform, Arewa24. A baseline survey, conducted by a Nigerian firm with guidance from the University of Illinois Political Science Department, was conducted in January 2015. A second survey is tentatively

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scheduled for January 2016, and we expect to build longitudinal data-sets to track the evolution of channel viewer attitudes and behaviors.

The GAO report's second recommendation is that State establish specific timeframes for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. State agrees with the recommendation and will take steps to address it. However, based on our past experiences with third party evaluations, some of the recommendations will be implementable while others will lack relevance or involve factors beyond our control. We provided GAO during the course of its review with a number of examples where recommendations by the third party evaluators fit into the latter category. As such, State will commit to setting a timetable for reviewing each recommendation by a third party evaluator and implementing those actions that are deemed both implementable and worthwhile.

We thank the GAO again for their efforts on this project, and we look forward to continuing to address the issues identified in the GAO report.

Appendix VIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., (202) 512-7331, or johnsoncm@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Jason Bair (Assistant Director), Andrea Riba Miller (Analyst-in-Charge), Esther Toledo, Ashley Alley, David Dayton, Martin de Alteriis, and Laurani Singh made key contributions to this report. Tina Cheng, Steven Lozano, and Sarah Veale provided technical assistance.

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