Central American Police Training

State and USAID Should Ensure Human Rights Content Is Included as Appropriate, and State Should Improve Data

What GAO Found

Agencies have established objectives and delivered training to professionalize police in Central America’s Northern Triangle but have not consistently done so to promote police respect for human rights. U.S. strategies include objectives to professionalize police, and the Departments of State (State) and Defense (DOD) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have delivered related training (see figure). These strategies also highlight the importance of police respect for human rights, but agencies have few objectives or other control mechanisms to ensure police receive related training. For instance, none of the 14 State projects and 2 of the 8 USAID projects that GAO reviewed had such objectives. Officials said this is because objectives were designed to be broader in focus. DOD also does not have objectives but has other control mechanisms to ensure its training includes human rights content. Federal standards for internal control call for managers to establish control mechanisms consistent with priorities. Without them, it may be difficult for State and USAID to ensure that training supports agencies’ goals to promote police respect for human rights.

Police in Honduras Receiving Training from U.S. Department of Defense Trainers

DOD, State, and USAID collect information on police training, but State lacks readily available, reliable data on the number of police trained—a key indicator in the U.S. Strategy for Central America. State’s data are not readily available because, according to officials, the process to track training is decentralized and data are not consolidated. Further, GAO found State’s fiscal year 2017 police training data to be unreliable because, among other reasons, the data did not include training delivered by some implementers. Officials noted that State did not have sufficient internal control mechanisms and staff in place to collect data as it expanded police training in the Northern Triangle. Without such data, State cannot accurately assess its efforts in Central America.

What GAO Recommends

To improve oversight of police training in the Northern Triangle, State and USAID should design control mechanisms to ensure human rights content is included as appropriate, and State should improve police training data. State and USAID concurred.

September 2018

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