

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-674](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. national security is inextricably tied to the effectiveness of U.S. efforts to help foreign partners build their own security capacity. The United States has had a long-standing partnership with Colombia, a key part of which has been U.S. assistance to Colombia's aviation unit in counternarcotics efforts. RHTC is one of DOD's priority security cooperation programs. The Senate Committee on Armed Services has recognized that many security cooperation programs are key to U.S. military-to-military relations with foreign partners. Because of concerns regarding DOD's ability to assess the impact of these programs, the committee mandated GAO to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, and medium- and long-term results.

In this review, GAO assesses (1) U.S. government allocations, obligations, and disbursements for RHTC in fiscal year 2009 through May 2013; (2) the extent to which DOD has achieved its goal and targets for RHTC; and (3) DOD's progress, if any, in implementing its plans to nationalize RHTC (i.e., fully transfer the program's financial responsibility to Colombia). GAO interviewed DOD, State, and Colombian officials in Washington, D.C.; Alabama; Virginia; and Colombia. GAO also reviewed DOD documents and funding data.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD work with the government of Colombia to take steps to obtain information on Colombian graduates' use of skills obtained at RHTC in subsequent military assignments for at least 2 years after graduation. DOD concurred.

View [GAO-13-674](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

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BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

DOD Is Meeting Most Targets for Colombia's Regional Helicopter Training Center but Should Track Graduates

What GAO Found

In fiscal year 2009 through May 2013, the Department of Defense (DOD) allocated approximately \$73.9 million from its Counternarcotics Central Transfer Account to the Regional Helicopter Training Center (RHTC) in Colombia. As of May 2013, about \$47.0 million of this funding had been disbursed. Most of this funding was allocated to RHTC helicopter maintenance, including approximately \$31.1 million (42 percent) to a maintenance contract and about \$12.0 million (16 percent) for parts and tools. As of June 2013, the Department of State (State) had also allocated approximately \$382,000 from its Foreign Military Financing (FMF) account toward training of helicopter mechanics for RHTC.

DOD has largely achieved its goal and targets for RHTC but does not collect any information on RHTC's longer-term results that would allow DOD to evaluate the extent to which RHTC helps to meet Colombia's counternarcotics aviation needs. For example, DOD has, for the most part, met its goal of providing RHTC training in accordance with DOD standards by providing training similar to that provided by the U.S. Army. Furthermore, DOD has met one of its two targets related to the number of students enrolled at RHTC—it has met its target for the number of Mexican students enrolled each year but has not met its target for the number of Colombian students enrolled each year because of insufficient capacity to accommodate more students. Moreover, DOD has generally exceeded its target of an 85 percent graduation rate for students at RHTC. However, DOD does not track any information on whether RHTC pilot graduates use their skills obtained at RHTC in subsequent military assignments. Colombia committed to retain personnel in assignments related to their training for a minimum of 2 years after graduation and to provide data on these personnel to DOD. According to DOD officials, they have requested but not received these data for pilot graduates. DOD began to track the personnel assignments of mechanics trained at RHTC in January 2013 because DOD prioritized obtaining these data to ensure sufficient mechanics for future work at RHTC.

DOD has made some progress in its plans to nationalize RHTC, but it has also extended the timeline for nationalization and faces challenges in meeting the revised timeline. The United States and Colombia initially planned to fully nationalize Colombia's basic helicopter training school by July 2009. After they agreed in 2009 to expand the school into RHTC, DOD began to plan for a projected nationalization date of 2016. Subsequently, DOD extended it to 2018 because DOD recognized that Colombia would not be ready to take over financial responsibility for the facility as originally planned. DOD's current plans for full nationalization in 2018 include separate timelines for certain components, including (1) ground instruction and helicopter simulators; (2) helicopters, parts, and tools; and (3) helicopter maintenance and mechanics training. DOD is on target to first nationalize RHTC ground instruction at the end of fiscal year 2013, but nationalization of some other components, such as simulator maintenance and parts and tools, is now scheduled for later than DOD had planned. Under current plans, State will provide FMF funds to cover the costs of these delays. Some uncertainties may affect DOD's ability to adhere to the current nationalization timeline, including unclear commitment from Colombia to RHTC nationalization and uncertainty regarding future U.S. funding for the program.