

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-654](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has a national security interest in promoting stability in conflict-affected countries to prevent or mitigate the consequences of armed conflict, according to the 2017 National Security Strategy. State, USAID, and DOD have reported that a collaborative government approach is an essential part of maximizing the effectiveness of U.S. efforts in conflict-affected areas.

GAO was asked to review U.S. conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization efforts abroad. This report (1) describes examples of conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization efforts that U.S. agencies and USIP conducted in Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria and their goals in fiscal year 2017 and (2) examines the extent to which U.S. agencies and USIP incorporated key collaboration practices to coordinate their efforts. GAO collected data from the agencies and USIP on their efforts and goals in Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria. GAO selected these countries based on U.S. national security interests, among other criteria. GAO reviewed agency and USIP documents, interviewed officials, and conducted fieldwork in Iraq, Nigeria, and Jordan. GAO assessed coordination against key practices identified by GAO to enhance interagency collaboration.

What GAO Recommends

State, USAID, and DOD should document agreement on their coordination for U.S. stabilization efforts through formal written guidance and agreements addressing key collaboration practices. The agencies concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-18-654](#). For more information, contact Jessica Farb at (202) 512-7114 or FarbJ@gao.gov.

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OVERSEAS CONFLICTS

U.S. Agencies Have Coordinated Stabilization Efforts but Need to Document Their Agreement

What GAO Found

The Departments of State (State) and Defense (DOD), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP)—an independent, federally funded institute—reported conducting various efforts to address conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization for Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria in fiscal year 2017. For example, in Iraq, State supported efforts to remove improvised explosive devices from homes and infrastructure (see figure); USAID contributed to the United Nations to restore essential services; DOD provided immediate medical trauma supplies to the World Health Organization to treat injured civilians; and USIP conducted facilitated dialogues to enable local reconciliation in areas liberated from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Example of U.S. Department of State Stabilization Effort in Iraq



Source: Department of State (photo courtesy of Janus Global Operations). | GAO-18-654

In conducting U.S. conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization efforts, State, USAID, DOD, and USIP have addressed aspects of key collaboration practices such as elements of bridging organizational cultures and leadership. However, the agencies have not formally documented their agreement on coordination for U.S. stabilization efforts through formal written guidance and agreements that address key collaboration practices. GAO found the following, for example, with regard to the extent key collaboration practices have been used by these entities.

Bridging organizational cultures: U.S. agencies have established various mechanisms to coordinate their efforts, such as interagency working groups and staff positions focused on coordination. USIP convenes interagency actors, including State, USAID, and DOD through various programs and events.

Defining outcomes and accountability: One or more agencies have established some common outcomes and accountability mechanisms for their stabilization efforts in Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria. Moreover, through an interagency review of U.S. stabilization assistance, State, USAID, and DOD identified a need to develop an outcome-based political strategy outlining end states for U.S. stabilization efforts and strategic analytics to track and measure progress, among other needs.

Written guidance and agreements: Although State, USAID, and DOD have developed a framework for stabilization, they have not documented their agreement on the key collaboration practices identified, such as defining outcomes and accountability and clarifying roles and responsibilities. According to key practices for enhancing interagency collaboration, articulating agreements in formal documents can strengthen collaborative efforts, and reduce the potential for duplication, overlap, and fragmentation.