

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104672](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD views the SPP as a critical tool for conducting security cooperation activities and establishing and sustaining relationships with international partners. Since 1993, the SPP has expanded from 15 to 93 partner nations across six combatant commands.

GAO was asked to review DOD's oversight and resourcing of the SPP. This report describes 1) how the NGB has prioritized SPP funding; and evaluates the extent to which: 2) partner states have recorded completed SPP activities in a timely manner, and 3) DOD has addressed SPP stakeholders' understanding about which statutory authorities to apply when conducting SPP activities.

GAO reviewed guidance and documentation for the administration of SPP activities. GAO also reviewed fiscal year 2021 SPP activity data and selected a non-generalizable sample of 11 partner states to reflect a range of program expenditures, including two partner states from five combatant commands and the only one from a sixth combatant command. While not generalizable, the selected partner states provided additional insights into program activities. GAO also interviewed DOD, NGB, and partner state officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to DOD to prioritize partner states' timely recording of completed SPP activities, and to set a time frame for clarifying the use of statutory authorities that apply to SPP activities. DOD concurred with both recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104672](#). For more information, contact Tina Won Sherman at (202) 512-8461 or ShermanT@gao.gov.

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STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

DOD Should Ensure Partner States Record Completed Activities and Clarify Appropriate Authorities

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) State Partnership Program (SPP) funds the 54 state, territorial, and district National Guards (partner states) to conduct activities with international partners (partner nations). See figure. Beginning in fiscal year 2022, the National Guard Bureau (NGB) revised its resource allocation process to consider the strategic importance of partner nations in the allocation of SPP funding. NGB officials told GAO they have refined a resource allocation model used for the program to assign each partner nation to one of three prioritized groupings informed by the National Defense Strategy. The NGB plans to use the model's output to inform how it allots funding on a quarterly basis during fiscal year 2022.

Examples of the Department of Defense (DOD) State Partnership Program's Activities with the Czech Republic and Lithuania



Source: Department of Defense (DOD) photos by Airman 1st Class Alexander Schriener and Staff Sgt. Zane Craig. | GAO-22-104672

In fiscal year 2021, DOD implemented a new security cooperation data system that houses SPP information. GAO found that partner states have not been timely in recording completed SPP activities. Specifically, GAO found that 37 (5 percent) of 780 SPP activities had a completed status. For prior fiscal years, the NGB reported that personnel had completed more than 1,200 activities. The NGB is responsible for ensuring that all SPP activities are recorded in a timely manner in the security cooperation data system—the system of record. However, it has not prioritized partner states entering these in the data system. If the NGB prioritizes ensuring that partner states record completed SPP activities in a timely manner in the data system, DOD will have more reliable information that it can use for decision making and for its reporting to Congress.

DOD has guidelines that outline under which security cooperation statutory authorities the partner states may conduct SPP activities. However, GAO found partner states were confused about how to apply statutory authorities to an SPP activity. DOD approved establishing a working group to review and clarify the use of these statutory authorities and to issue clarifying guidance to support training of the security cooperation workforce, but the related action plan does not include a time frame for clarifying the guidance. By setting a time frame, DOD would better position the group to achieve timely progress in addressing partner states' confusion.