



July 2022

STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

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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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.

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| DOD | Department of Defense |
| SPP | State Partnership Program |
| NGB | National Guard Bureau |

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July 12, 2022

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable Steve Womack
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
House of Representatives

The Department of Defense (DOD) views the State Partnership Program (SPP) as a critical tool for conducting security cooperation activities and establishing and sustaining relationships with international partners.¹ Through the SPP, DOD conducts military-to-military and selected military-to-civilian engagements by pairing the 54 state, territorial, and district National Guards (hereafter partner states) with foreign countries (hereafter partner nations).² In a 2020 speech about implementing DOD’s National Defense Strategy, the then Secretary of Defense cited the SPP

¹DOD Directive 5132.03 defines security cooperation as all DOD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and partner nation military and security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations. DOD Directive 5132.03, *DOD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation* (Dec. 29, 2016). According to section 301 of title 10, U.S. Code, DOD’s security cooperation programs and activities means any program, activity (including an exercise), or interaction of DOD with the security establishment of a foreign country to achieve one of the following purposes: build and develop allied and friendly security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations; provide the armed forces with access to the foreign country during peacetime or a contingency operation; or build relationships that promote specific United States security interests. 10 U.S.C. § 301.

²The reference to 54 state, territorial, and district National Guards comprises the 50 U.S. states, three U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. For this report, we refer to all of these entities as “partner states.” Additionally, we refer to participating foreign countries as “partner nations.”

as a tool for strengthening alliances and building partnerships.³ According to the National Guard Bureau (NGB), multiple partner nations are now allies of the United States in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and several credit the support of their National Guard partner states with helping them make that possible.⁴ Additionally, the relationships that the SPP built have contributed to 16 partner nations asking to co-deploy with their partner states in various military operations in locations such as Iraq and Afghanistan following the attacks on September 11, 2001.

In May 2012, we reviewed the oversight framework, funding data, and prominent challenges for the SPP.⁵ We determined that the SPP did not have a comprehensive oversight framework with clear program goals, objectives, and metrics. We also found that there were challenges associated with how to fund SPP activities involving civilians. Further, we reported that information on SPP activities was incomplete and inconsistent, and that there was no common agreement on the type of information collected with the combatant commands. We recommended that DOD develop guidance for all stakeholders that includes agreed-upon definitions for data fields and rules for maintaining data. Further, we recommended that DOD complete its comprehensive oversight framework for the SPP, and issue guidance and conduct additional training on the appropriate use of funding for program activities, including those involving civilians. Since we issued that report, DOD has addressed all four of our recommendations.

You asked us to review DOD's oversight and resourcing of the SPP. In this report, we describe (1) how the NGB has prioritized SPP funding, and evaluate 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.

For objective one, we reviewed documentation related to strategic prioritization and the planned distribution of SPP funding. Specifically, we

³Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's speech, *Secretary of Defense Allies and Partners Remarks at Atlantic Council*, (Oct. 20, 2020).

⁴National Guard Bureau, *State Partnership Program 2030 Strategy* (Nov. 1, 2019).

⁵GAO, *State Partnership Program: Improved Oversight, Guidance, and Training Needed for National Guard's Efforts with Foreign Partners*, [GAO-12-548](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2012).

reviewed documents outlining DOD-wide strategic priorities, including the National Defense Strategy and other documentation addressing the strategic importance of international partnerships.⁶ We also reviewed a memo outlining changes to the distribution of funding for fiscal year 2022 SPP activities and documentation describing the resource allocation model NGB uses to inform decisions on the funding it provides for each partnership under the SPP.⁷ We also interviewed DOD and National Guard officials involved with distributing SPP funding to the partner states.

For objective two, we evaluated DOD's management of SPP data by comparing information in its data system to requirements in DOD instructions, NGB guidance, and standards for internal control pertaining to the use of quality information.⁸ We reviewed DOD's required annual SPP reports to Congress for fiscal years 2014 through 2019 to identify reported challenges to collecting or reporting SPP information.⁹ We reviewed documentation on the establishment of a new security cooperation data system and interviewed DOD and NGB officials knowledgeable of the transition to that data system. We also reviewed fiscal year 2021 SPP data and identified how many SPP activities were marked as complete. To assess the reliability of the data, we reviewed DOD's training materials and guidance about how users are to record an SPP activity as complete. Further, we interviewed DOD and NGB officials knowledgeable about the implementation of the data system. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for evaluating whether information on all completed SPP activities was recorded in a timely manner.

For objective three, we reviewed DOD guidance and documentation, statutory authorities relevant to conducting SPP activities, and the

⁶See DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Jan. 19, 2018).

⁷See Chief, National Guard Bureau J-5 International Affairs Division Memorandum, *Reference Guidance for Fiscal Year 2022 Distribution Cycle* (Sept. 29, 2021).

⁸See DOD Instruction 5111.20, *State Partnership Program (SPP)* (Oct. 12, 2016); National Guard Bureau, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide* (Nov. 23, 2020) (updated Aug. 30, 2021); and GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

⁹We selected this time frame because the first time DOD reported on the SPP to Congress covered fiscal year 2014 and the most current annual report available at the time of our audit work for this review was fiscal year 2019.

aforementioned DOD reports to Congress.¹⁰ We then collected data from a non-generalizable sample of SPP directors at 11 National Guard partner states on their experiences with the SPP, including planning and conducting activities. We selected two National Guard partner states from each of five combatant commands and one partner state from a sixth combatant command where there is only one partnership.¹¹ We selected the partner states with the greatest and least SPP-related expenditures in fiscal year 2019, according to data provided by the NGB.¹² We used data from fiscal year 2019 because the global coronavirus pandemic reduced the SPP program's expenditures due to travel restrictions in fiscal year 2020. Two analysts independently reviewed written responses to one interview question sent to 11 partner states about their experiences conducting SPP activities under section 341 of title 10, U.S. Code, both by itself or in conjunction with other security cooperation statutes. Each analyst assigned a status of either yes, no, or cannot determine for each of the 11 partner states to categorize if the written responses described whether the state had such an experience. The analysts discussed and reconciled all differences. We also reviewed a January 2022 independent strategic review of the SPP, which evaluated the program's contributions to DOD strategic objectives.¹³ Additionally, we reviewed and compared DOD's action plan for addressing identified SPP deficiencies to DOD guidance, federal internal control standards about evaluating issues and remediating deficiencies, and our work on key practices related to our High Risk series.¹⁴ We also interviewed officials from partner states, Joint

¹⁰See, for example, DOD Instruction 5111.20; National Guard Bureau, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide*; 10 U.S.C. § 341.

¹¹We selected two partner states from the following combatant commands: U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command. We also selected the only participating partner state in U.S. Northern Command. The selected partner states were: Colorado, Montana, Idaho, West Virginia, Hawaii, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Rhode Island, Vermont, Oklahoma, and the District of Columbia.

¹²We refined our sample to (1) exclude any partner state with an inactive partnership; (2) include three partner states that did not have a Bilateral Affairs Officer in at least one of its partnerships; (3) include two partner states with only one partnership; and (4) include at least one partner state that was part of an independent strategic evaluation.

¹³PBG Consulting, LLC, *State Partnership Program Strategic Evaluation Final Report* (Jan. 11, 2022).

¹⁴DOD Instruction 5111.20; [GAO-14-704G](#); and GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

Staff, NGB, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2020 to July 2022 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

Types of SPP Activities

The SPP is a DOD security cooperation program codified in title 10 of the U.S. Code.¹⁵ Section 341 provides that the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, is authorized to establish a program of activities to support U.S. security cooperation objectives between members of the 54 state, territorial, and district National Guards with a foreign country's military forces, security forces, or disaster and emergency response government organizations—with certain limitations.¹⁶

The SPP began in 1993 with 15 partner nations—including Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine—to help improve relations with former Soviet bloc countries and to reform their defense establishments after the end of the Cold War. Since then, it expanded to include 93 partner nations across six combatant commands to support the security cooperation objectives of the U.S. by developing enduring relationships with foreign countries

¹⁵See 10 U.S.C. § 341. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 amended title 10 to enact a new chapter on defense security cooperation, including inserting section 341, "Department of Defense State Partnership Program." Pub. L. No. 114-328, §§ 1241(a), 1246 (2016). Prior to the enactment of section 341, various statutes had governed SPP activities. See, e.g., National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-66, § 1205 (2013).

¹⁶10 U.S.C. § 341(a), (b). As an example of a limitation, all SPP activities must be conducted subject to the provisions of section 362 of title 10, U.S. Code, which generally prohibits the use of funds for assistance to units of foreign security forces that have committed a gross violation of human rights. See 10 U.S.C. § 362.

across the world.¹⁷ As part of the program, DOD sends members of the National Guard to partner nations or representatives of partner nations travel to the United States. Additionally, the partner states and partner nations engage in virtual activities.

Within the SPP, DOD pairs partner states with partner nations based on an assessment of the degree to which states' capabilities match a partner nation's security requirements—such as border, law enforcement, and port services—and match the requirements for its first-responder organizations. Through the SPP, partner states engage with a spectrum of partner nations' governmental organizations in various types of security cooperation activities. Examples of partner states' SPP activities include:

- **Key leader engagements and senior leader visits.** For example, in December 2021, the New York National Guard's assistant adjutant general and South Africa's new defense attaché had a meeting to gain agreement on future areas for cooperation.
- **Activities to promote interoperability, secure and maintain access, and foster or strengthen relationships.** For example, the Wisconsin National Guard visited Papua New Guinea in October 2021 to strengthen their new partnership and tour military facilities in the partner country.
- **Exchanges of expertise or best practices (i.e., subject matter expert exchanges).** For example, in 2021, the Maine National Guard and Montenegro held expert exchanges to compare how the two partners conduct operations.
- **Understanding and assessments of partner nation capabilities.** For example, the Georgia National Guard identified training needs for its partner nation—the country of Georgia—related to swift water rescue techniques and then, the training occurred in July 2021.
- **Planning efforts with the partner nation for future security cooperation activities.** For example, in December 2021, Lithuania's ambassador to the United States and its minister of defense met with senior leaders from the National Guard to discuss future initiatives.

¹⁷There are 11 combatant commands, each with a geographic or functional mission, that provide command and control of military forces during peacetime and war. The SPP supports the security cooperation objectives of U.S. European Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Southern Command, and U.S. Central Command. See appendix I for a list of SPP partnerships by geographic combatant command.

Figure 1 depicts SPP activities that occurred in September 2021.

Figure 1: Examples of Activities of the Department of Defense's (DOD) State Partnership Program



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

Notes: (Left) Members of the Nebraska and Texas Air National Guard participating in an exercise with their partner nation, the Czech Air Force, in the Czech Republic. (Right) Lithuanian soldiers participating in a platoon exchange with members of the Pennsylvania National Guard at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

DOD Responsibilities and Guidance for the SPP

Multiple DOD entities have responsibilities related to the SPP. See table 1 for a summary of DOD entities' selected responsibilities related to the SPP.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Responsibilities in the State Partnership Program (SPP) for Department of Defense (DOD) Entities

| DOD entity | Selected responsibilities related to the SPP |
|--|---|
| Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities under the authority, direction and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides strategic and policy guidance on prioritization of available resources for implementation of state partnerships and SPP activities Coordinates proposals to establish, modify, or disestablish partnerships |
| Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the Director, Joint Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinates, as appropriate, on proposals to conduct SPP activities Annually reviews anticipated SPP activities as provided to the National Guard Bureau Transmits to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities proposals from the combatant commands to establish, modify, or disestablish partnerships |

| DOD entity | Selected responsibilities related to the SPP |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Chief of the National Guard Bureau | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages and administers the program • Determines personnel and resource requirements • In coordination with the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force and combatant commands, establishes annual funding targets for SPP activities and support costs • Provides guidance to the 54 National Guards participating in SPP activities • Provides guidance to state Adjutant Generals on procedures for the establishment, modification, or disestablishment of partnerships |
| Commanders of six combatant commands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate on or approve, as appropriate, all proposed SPP activities • Review completed SPP activities • Nominate countries for partnership establishment, modification, or disestablishment |

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information. | GAO-22-104672

DOD has issued multiple pieces of guidance for the SPP. In 2016, the department issued DOD Instruction 5111.20, State Partnership Program (SPP), to establish policy, assign responsibilities, and provide guidelines for conducting the SPP, including details about the process for nominating and selecting new partners.¹⁸ Additionally, the NGB regularly updates a program management guide that provides National Guard partner states with detailed information for planning and executing SPP activities.¹⁹ Finally, the NGB issued its State Partnership Program 2030 Strategy document in November 2019.²⁰ This strategy document identifies four goals, 12 supported objectives, and five end states. This strategy document also includes that the SPP 2030 strategy is “inextricably linked” with the 2018 National Defense Strategy.

Growth of the SPP and National Guard Roles and Responsibilities

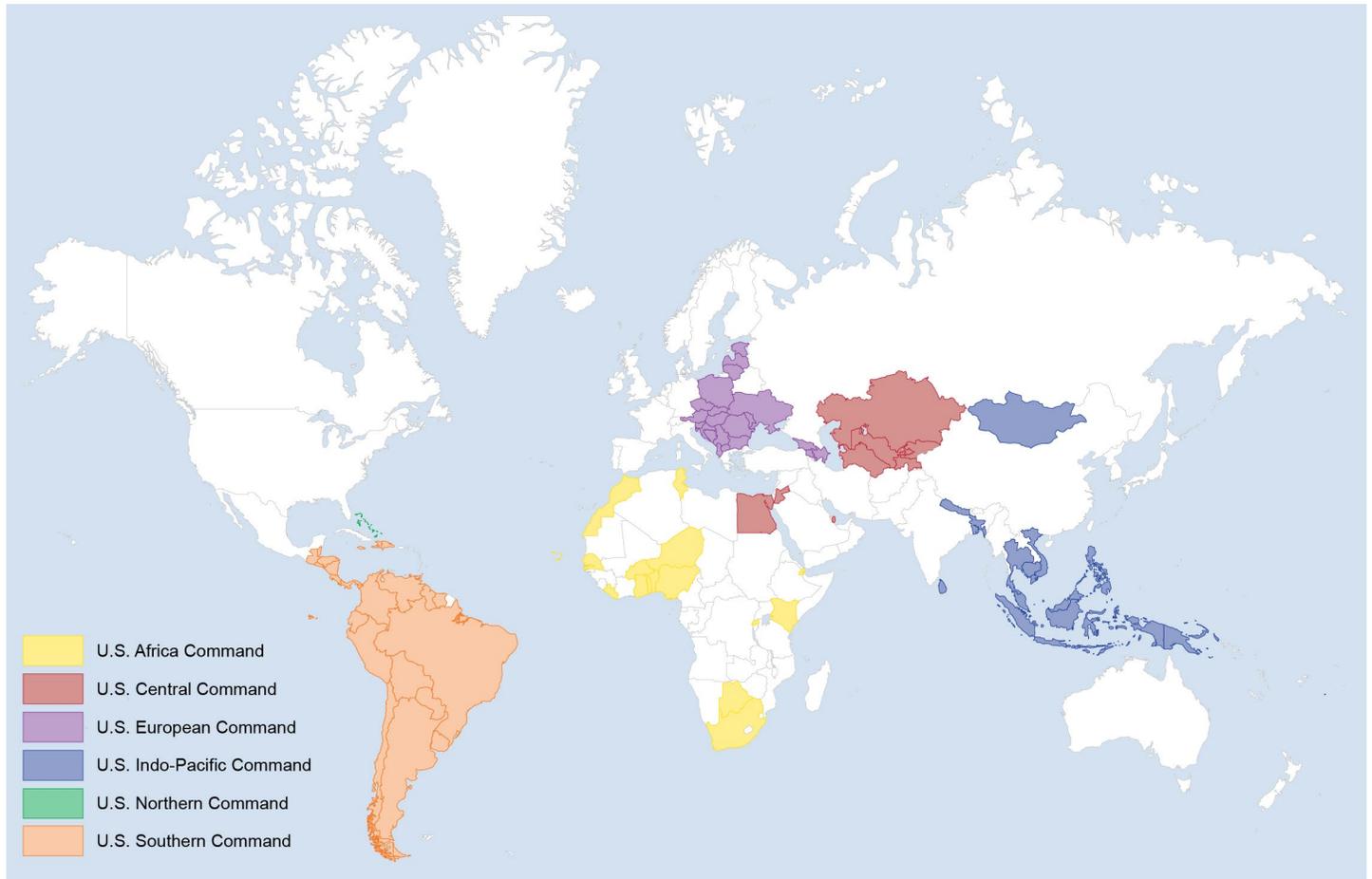
Since its inception in 1993 as a regional initiative where National Guard partner states were aligned with partner nations in Europe, the SPP has expanded into a worldwide program. Additionally, multiple partner states have been paired with more than one partner nation. As of January 2022, the SPP was involving the National Guard from all 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia and was involving partner nations in all six geographic combatant commands for a total of 85 partnerships (see figure 2).

¹⁸DOD Instruction 5111.20, *State Partnership Program (SPP)* (Oct. 12, 2016).

¹⁹See, e.g., National Guard Bureau, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide* (Nov. 23, 2020) (updated Aug. 30, 2021).

²⁰National Guard Bureau, *State Partnership Program 2030 Strategy* (Nov. 1, 2019).

Figure 2: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations, by Geographic Combatant Command



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

Within the National Guard, there are multiple key SPP stakeholders. The NGB provides guidance to the partner states participating in the program via the Chief of the NGB and the International Affairs Division in the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate. Further, the International Affairs Division has desk officers to establish and maintain consistent communication with the 54 partner states on all SPP issues. Additionally, each partnership is primarily managed by a state-level SPP Director (a full-time National Guard employee within each of the 54 National Guards) and a Bilateral Affairs Officer (normally a full-time National Guard

employee assigned to a partnership).²¹ The Adjutant General within each of the 54 partner states provides guidance to their respective state-level SPP Director and other leaders as well as participates in the SPP program activities—such as senior leader visits—as appropriate.

Funding for the SPP

The SPP is primarily supported by funding from the Air National Guard and Army National Guard Pay and Allowance and Operations and Maintenance appropriation accounts.²² These accounts fund pay, travel, and other expenses when members of the National Guard are engaged in an SPP activity as well as other program costs. The NGB allocates amounts from these accounts to partner states each year for use in planning and executing SPP activities. The combatant commands can also provide funding for SPP activities within their respective areas of responsibility, including from accounts associated with programs like the European Deterrence Initiative and other combatant commander activity funds.²³

NGB Has Changed How It Prioritizes Funding for SPP Partnerships

Beginning in fiscal year 2022, NGB changed how it plans to allocate funding to better target higher priority partnerships. The fiscal year 2022 funding allocations for these partnerships are determined by an assessment of the National Defense Strategy and prior year expenditures. The funding allocation change occurred during the execution of the fiscal year 2022 budget after, according to a DOD official, an increase in funding available for the SPP program.

²¹A Bilateral Affairs Officer is assigned to the U.S. Embassy in a partner nation to assist with executing SPP activities and developing relationships with the partner nation and interagency partners. As of data provided in March 2022, there are 80 National Guard personnel serving as Bilateral Affairs Officers. The following five partnerships do not have a Bilateral Affairs Officer: Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines, Tajikistan, and Venezuela.

²²An appropriation is budget authority to incur obligations and to make payments from the U.S. Treasury for a specified purpose. An appropriation account is the basic unit of an appropriation generally reflecting each unnumbered paragraph in an appropriation act. It typically encompasses a number of activities or projects and may be subject to restrictions or conditions. GAO, *A Glossary of Terms Used in the Federal Budget Process*, [GAO-05-734SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2005).

²³The European Deterrence Initiative supports rotational force deployments, infrastructure investments, and capability building efforts in key locations throughout Europe. Additionally, DOD has previously funded SPP activities through the former Wales Initiative Fund, which focused on funding 16 developing countries as an effort to enhance partner capacity and advance democratic reform.

Prior to fiscal year 2022, the NGB's process for allocating SPP funding to the partner states focused on helping ensure partner states could plan or conduct SPP activities. NGB officials stated that, in the past, NGB had given partner states the same amount of funding or distributed a set percentage of partner states' requested funding, among other approaches. DOD officials told us they applied these approaches to help ensure that every partner state could begin planning or conducting SPP activities for the year. However, NGB officials explained that before fiscal year 2022, they did not allocate funding based on the strategic importance of the partner nation.

Starting in fiscal year 2022, NGB officials have relied on a resource allocation model (model) that assigned each partner nation to one of three prioritized groupings that were informed by the National Defense Strategy.²⁴ Specifically, the NGB assigned 11 partnerships to the highest priority group, 18 partnerships to the next priority group, and 54 partnerships to the remaining priority group. The model combined the prioritized grouping and the amount obligated for each partnership during fiscal years 2017 through 2019 into an output that NGB used to increase the annual spending targets in line with those groupings. NGB officials stated that they took the model output and manually adjusted the spending targets for selected partnerships, based on discussions with the SPP stakeholders at the partner states and combatant commands. Further, according to a NGB memorandum, the NGB plans to use the funding targets to help inform how it allocates funding on a quarterly basis.²⁵

Partner States Have Not Been Recording All Completed SPP Activities in a Timely Manner

DOD has regularly reported that it has incomplete information on its SPP activities in annual reports from fiscal years 2014 through 2019. In fiscal year 2021, DOD implemented a new security cooperation data system including for SPP information, but we found that partner states have not been recording all SPP activities in a timely manner after they were completed in fiscal year 2021.

²⁴Since the resource allocation model was implemented only recently, we did not evaluate its quality or how the NGB assigned partnerships to one of the three prioritized groupings.

²⁵See Chief, National Guard Bureau J-5 International Affairs Division Memorandum, *Reference Guidance for Fiscal Year 2022 Distribution Cycle* (Sept. 29, 2021).

DOD Cited Concerns about Incomplete Information on SPP Activities

Since 2014, DOD cited in annual SPP reports to Congress the difficulty in collecting accurate information on the SPP and other security cooperation activities. Specific examples from DOD's annual SPP reports include:

- For the fiscal year 2014 report, DOD cited unspecified concerns about the original data generated by the combatant commands and the NGB.²⁶
- For the fiscal year 2015 report, DOD cited concerns about the integrity of the original data submitted by the combatant commands through the NGB.
- For the fiscal year 2016 report, DOD stated that the report was delayed due, in part, to the need for data reconciliation for many SPP activities with the SPP Directors in all of the 54 National Guards.²⁷
- For the fiscal year 2017 report, DOD stated that the report was delayed due to SPP personnel and other DOD security cooperation stakeholders having an incomplete understanding about the full range of SPP events and associated congressional notification requirements.²⁸
- For the fiscal year 2018 report, DOD stated that inaccuracies were initially found by the DOD Office of General Counsel, but that the final report to Congress accurately reflected SPP activity descriptions.²⁹

Starting with SPP activities conducted in fiscal year 2019, the SPP's statutory authority no longer required a separate annual report on the SPP and DOD began including this information in its annual report on all

²⁶In fiscal years 2014 and 2015, DOD provided annual reports to Congress on SPP activities under a provision of section 1205(e)(2) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-66, § 1205(e) (2013) (as amended).

²⁷DOD did not provide further explanation about what the data reconciliation issues were in its report to Congress. For fiscal years 2016 through 2018, DOD provided annual SPP reports under a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1246(a) (2016) (as amended).

²⁸DOD did not describe any details surrounding what the incomplete understanding was in its report to Congress.

²⁹DOD did not elaborate upon what the initial inaccuracies were in its report. However, DOD noted that the Office of the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation facilitated meetings among multiple general counsels in the department and that the final report accurately reflected SPP activity descriptions.

security cooperation activities.³⁰ In that fiscal year 2019 report, DOD noted that the data collection process required a labor-intensive manual data call to numerous DOD organizations that may have failed to accurately capture all data. Also, DOD stated that the data in the report may be incomplete.³¹ DOD officials told us that although the annual report covering fiscal year 2020 has not been issued, they followed the same manual process for collecting SPP data. In January 2022, DOD officials told us that they projected completing this report by May 2022.

DOD Developed and Implemented a New Data System That Includes SPP Activities

In 2019, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed that the department develop and maintain a new security cooperation data system to address a number of issues with collecting security cooperation information in the previous data system.³² In response, DOD developed Socium, which became the DOD enterprise-wide technology to facilitate and integrate planning, budgeting, collaboration, design, management, assessment, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting in support of all U.S. security cooperation activities.³³ For this data system, DOD is using a software development methodology that emphasizes iterative product development and delivery. That is, the software will be developed in iterations that are being continuously evaluated on their functionality, quality, and customer satisfaction.

The NGB's SPP Program Management Guide states that, as directed by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Socium is the database of record for all DOD security cooperation

³⁰Specifically, under section 386 of title 10, U.S. Code, DOD is required to provide an annual report that sets forth, on a country-by-country basis, a description of each program carried out by the department under certain security cooperation statutory authorities to provide training, equipment, or other assistance or reimbursement during the previous fiscal year. 10 U.S.C. § 386(a). This report includes programs carried out under section 341. See 10 U.S.C. §§ 341, 386(c)(1).

³¹According to DOD officials, these past reporting challenges from fiscal years 2014-2019 were due to limitations with the security cooperation data system in use at the time.

³²Specifically, DOD stated in a statement of work for developing the new system that the previous data system lacked basic functionality including security cooperation activity life-cycle management, alignment of activities to strategic guidance, institutionalizing a common operational picture, adaptability and scalability to encompass all security cooperation organizations, and interfacing with other security cooperation-relevant authoritative data sources.

³³See DOD, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget Estimates: Defense-Wide Justification Book Volume 5 of 5, Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, Defense-Wide* (May 2021).

activities, including the SPP.³⁴ The guide further states that the partner states are to use Socium as the main event tracker for all SPP-related activities.

After Socium became operational in fiscal year 2021, officials at NGB and partner states told us that the move to the data system has been challenging and that it has at times not been fully functional. DOD officials in charge of developing the data system have noted that it is a work in progress and that it was evolving to capture all information for SPP activities based on end-user feedback. For example, in a May 2021 memorandum, the NGB stated that inapplicable data fields to the SPP would be removed from future iterations of Socium.³⁵ Officials in charge of the development projected that its SPP module would be finished by the end of calendar year 2022.

Partner States Did Not Record All SPP Activities Completed in Fiscal Year 2021

Partner states have not been timely in recording all completed SPP activities. Most of the fiscal year 2021 SPP activities entered in the Socium data system did not have a status of “Complete”, which would indicate that the activity was finished and that all relevant data was recorded.

According to the Socium business rules, the data system is designed to capture security cooperation data from cradle-to-grave.³⁶ Data system users accomplish this by recording a systematic sequence of statuses that move a security cooperation activity—including an SPP activity—from beginning to end. Further, it is a data management resource that enables decision makers and planners to prioritize, support, and align security cooperation activities, including the SPP’s. Additionally, it serves as a planning tool, and provides the capability to track and produce execution data and produce data for activity evaluations. Also, the NGB’s SPP Program Management Guide identifies Socium as one of the key tools to assist SPP Directors with successful management of SPP activities.

³⁴NGB, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide* (Nov. 23, 2020) (updated Aug. 30, 2021).

³⁵Chief, National Guard Bureau J-5 International Affairs Division Memorandum, *Interim Guidance for Data Entry in Socium* (May 14, 2021).

³⁶Department of Defense Security Cooperation Agency and Deloitte, *Socium Business Rules* (Sept. 16, 2020).

Although the NGB has not publicly reported on the total number of SPP activities conducted in fiscal year 2021, the NGB has reported in its annual posture statement publications that National Guard personnel completed more than 1,200 SPP activities in each of fiscal years 2019 and 2020.³⁷ Moreover, a NGB official said that many SPP activities have not been recorded as complete within Socium since it became the new system of record. When we reviewed 780 SPP activities in the data system for fiscal year 2021, we found that 37 SPP activities (about 5 percent) had a status of Complete, which is part of the final phase in the system also known as the Closure phase.³⁸ Further, the Socium training guide for the SPP states that when an activity has a status of Complete, it is archived for future reference and no changes are allowed to the activity record.

According to a cognizant NGB official, there are several reasons why partner states have not always recorded timely entries in Socium about SPP activities upon their completion. First, the NGB official told us that partner states already provide similar information to the combatant commands, many of which use other data systems. Second, NGB and partner state officials told us that partner states had initially struggled with what types of data to enter into Socium since there were multiple inapplicable data fields in earlier iterations of the system. Finally, the same NGB official said that NGB is not using the data system because it does not yet have sufficient functionality to track and report SPP activities. For these reasons, the NGB has not made it a priority to ensure that partner states record timely, reliable information on completed SPP activities in DOD's data system of record. Instead, the NGB depends on other data systems and methods for information about these activities even though Socium is the database of record.

According to DOD Instruction 5111.20, the Chief of the NGB is responsible for ensuring that all SPP activities are recorded in the security cooperation data system in an accurate and timely manner and for providing guidance to the state adjutant generals and SPP Directors.³⁹ Additionally, the NGB's SPP Program Management Guide identifies the

³⁷NGB, *2022 National Guard Bureau Posture Statement: A Record Year of Being "Always Ready, Always There"* (2021); and NGB, *2021 National Guard Bureau Posture Statement: Force for the Future*.

³⁸The other three statuses are Activity Concept, Activity Execution, and Activity Evaluation. The other two phases are Concept and Execution.

³⁹DOD Instruction 5111.20.

NGB as responsible for ensuring that partner states keep information in the security cooperation data system up-to-date—specifically, ensuring that partner states are updating SPP activities in Socium within 30 days of activity completion. In addition, Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government notes that an agency’s management should use quality information to achieve the entity’s objectives. Further, Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government states that quality information is appropriate, current, complete, accurate, accessible, and provided on a timely basis.⁴⁰

DOD officials stated that a Socium development team will be dedicated to addressing the NGB’s data system concerns beginning in May 2022. However, partner states may continue to not record information in a timely manner upon completion of SPP activities. If the NGB prioritizes ensuring that partner states record information in a timely manner in Socium about completed SPP activities, DOD will be positioned to have more reliable information for internal decision-making purposes and reporting to Congress as the data system continues to evolve. Furthermore, complete information on SPP activities could reduce the continued need for time-consuming, manual data calls when fulfilling congressional reporting requirements, as has occurred in the past.

DOD Initiated but Has Not Clarified Plans to Address SPP Stakeholders’ Concerns about Applying Statutory Authorities for SPP Activities

DOD has developed guidelines that outline under which statutory authorities partner states may conduct SPP activities. However, partner states were confused about how to apply security cooperation statutory authority or authorities to an SPP activity, according to DOD and NGB officials and information obtained by an independent strategic review of the SPP.⁴¹ To address these concerns, DOD has plans to establish a working group to review and clarify the use of SPP statutory authorities and to issue clarifying guidance to support training of the security cooperation workforce, but did not set a time frame for clarifying the use of statutory authorities.

⁴⁰GAO-14-704G.

⁴¹PBG Consulting, LLC, *State Partnership Program Strategic Evaluation Final Report* (Jan. 11, 2022).

DOD Conducts SPP Activities under One or More Statutory Authorities

Partner states have conducted SPP activities under one or more statutory authorities, including those that are specific to security cooperation. DOD defines an SPP activity as any security cooperation activity authorized by law, supported by funds authorized to be appropriated to DOD for such activity, occurring between a state's National Guard personnel and the personnel of that state's SPP partner nation.⁴²

According to DOD reporting, partner states conduct certain types of SPP activities under section 341 of title 10, U.S. Code—the statute authorizing the establishment of SPP partnerships.⁴³ For example, according to DOD's fiscal year 2019 report on security cooperation activities, partner states have used the authorities under this section to conduct activities where subject matter experts interacted with their counterparts in the state's partner nation on topics such as aircraft maintenance and medical care. According to DOD reports to Congress on the SPP for fiscal years 2017 and 2018, all 54 partner states conducted at least one SPP activity under section 341.

According to NGB's fiscal year 2021 SPP Program Management Guide and multiple DOD and partner states officials, partner states can also conduct an SPP activity under section 341 in conjunction with another statute, such as section 332 or section 333 of title 10, U.S. Code.⁴⁴ Section 332 is a security cooperation statute that authorizes activities for building capacity for a partner nation's defense institutions. Section 333 is a security cooperation statute that authorizes activities for building partner nation capacity to conduct certain operations. Of the 11 partner states in our review, seven told us about their experiences conducting SPP activities under section 341 in conjunction with another security cooperation statute. Three partner states told us they did not have this

⁴²DOD Instruction 5111.20.

⁴³10 U.S.C. § 341. The NGB's fiscal year 2021 SPP Program Management Guide notes that section 341 does not, in and of itself, authorize activities intended to build partner capability and capacity. However, the guide lists activities it states can be conducted under section 341 alone, including key leader engagements and senior leader visits, exchange of expertise or best practices through subject matter expert exchanges, and activities to foster or strengthen relationships. *NGB, Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide*.

⁴⁴See NGB, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide*; 10 U.S.C. §§ 332, 333, 341. SPP activities carried out under sections 332 and 333 must also comply with certain additional requirements within those statutes, such as obtaining the Secretary of State's concurrence.

experience. The remaining partner state's response was unclear as to its experiences.

When conducting SPP activities under multiple statutory authorities, the NGB's training workshop and SPP Program Management Guide instruct partner states to comply with additional requirements, as illustrated by the following examples.

- Partner states must ensure that the concurrent use of the statutory authorities does not cause any irreconcilable contradictions. For example, the SPP activity cannot be characterized as both a training and a non-training event.
- Partner states must comply with all legal and policy requirements for each statutory authority relied upon. For example, the partner states must follow DOD procedures to ensure the Secretary of Defense notifies the appropriate committees of Congress when conducting activities to provide training and equipment to the partner nation's national security forces for the purpose of building capacity to conduct, among others, counterterrorism or defensive cyberspace operations under section 333.⁴⁵
- Partner states must use the appropriate funding source for each statutory authority. For example, partner states must use the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid appropriation account for appropriate activities conducted under certain statutory authorities.⁴⁶

DOD Has Plans to Address Stakeholders' Concerns about Which Statutory Authorities to Apply to SPP Activities

To address partner states and other stakeholder confusion, DOD has approved establishing a working group to review and clarify the use of SPP statutory authorities and issue clarifying guidance to support training of the security cooperation workforce. Partner states were confused about which security cooperation statutory authority or authorities to apply to an

⁴⁵National Guard Bureau, *Fiscal Year 2021 State Partnership Program (SPP) Program Management Guide*. When conducting activities under section 333 like those described above, the Secretary of Defense must submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a written and electronic notice, not later than 15 days before initiating the activities, of certain details of the activities. 10 U.S.C. § 333(e).

⁴⁶Specifically, the partner states must use the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid account for certain activities carried out under sections 2561, 2557, 407, 404, and 402 of title 10, U.S. Code.

SPP activity, according to DOD and NGB officials and information obtained by an independent strategic review of the SPP.⁴⁷

DOD and NGB officials described partner state officials' confusion when deciding what security cooperation statutory authorities to apply to SPP activities. Specifically:

- **Confusion about applying section 341:** According to a Joint Staff official we spoke with, some SPP stakeholders perceive section 341 as a “catch-all” for partner states to carry out any SPP activity. However, the official said that section 341 is narrow, authorizing only the establishment of SPP partnerships. A cognizant NGB official stated that the confusion among partner states can lead to uncertainty about what SPP activities can be conducted using the funding that NGB allocates.
- **Confusion about applying section 341 with other statutory authorities:** Another cognizant NGB official shared examples of multiple partner states' draft descriptions of planned SPP activities with potential mismatches in applying section 341 in conjunction with other security cooperation statutory authorities. For instance, according to that official, there were activities in these draft descriptions that described training, but did not also cite section 321 of title 10, U.S. Code, which authorizes the U.S. armed forces to train with the military or other security forces of a friendly foreign country if the Secretary of Defense determines it is in the national security interest of the U.S. to do so.⁴⁸

The independent strategic review of the SPP found that a range of SPP stakeholders showed confusion over how to use section 341 in conjunction with other security cooperation statutory authorities for specific SPP activities.⁴⁹ The review based this finding on in-depth case studies of two partner states with three partner nations in two different combatant commands. In one case study, officials from the partner state and combatant command suggested that their confusion about the complexity of using multiple security cooperation statutory authorities precluded them from conducting a wider range of activities with the

⁴⁷PBG Consulting, LLC, *State Partnership Program Strategic Evaluation Final Report* (Jan. 11, 2022).

⁴⁸10 U.S.C. § 321(a).

⁴⁹PBG Consulting, LLC, *State Partnership Program Strategic Evaluation Final Report* (Jan. 11, 2022).

partner nation. In the other case study, the review reported that a partner nation representative stated that a partner state SPP official had promised funding and human resources for an SPP activity, but later conveyed that the “legalities” prevented the SPP activity from occurring. The independent review concluded that the nuances and complexities of using multiple security cooperation statutory authorities is challenging for SPP stakeholders.

In March 2022, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities approved forming a working group review and clarify the use of security cooperation statutory authorities for SPP activities and issue clarifying guidance to support training of the security cooperation workforce.⁵⁰ DOD officials initially proposed forming this working group in November 2021. The associated action plan includes these areas:

- **Purpose.** The group’s stated purpose would be to review and clarify the use of section 341 as a stand-alone statutory authority for SPP activities in addition to applying section 341 in conjunction with other statutory authorities.
- **Proposed Membership.** The organizations that would coordinate to form the group include the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Joint Staff, the combatant commands, NGB, and partner states.
- **Planned Outcome.** Once the group has completed its work, DOD would then issue clarifying guidance to support training of the SPP and security cooperation workforce.

DOD Has Not Set a Time Frame to Clarify the Use of Statutory Authorities

A DOD official told us that the working group members would be from the offices of general counsel in the organizations identified earlier in this report. Additionally, this official stated that the NGB is drafting an information paper to help provide scope for the working group. However, stakeholders, including the NGB, have not specified a time frame to clarify the use of statutory authorities for conducting SPP activities.

According to Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government, management determines appropriate corrective actions for internal

⁵⁰Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities Action Memo, *Strategic Evaluation of the State Partnership Program* (Mar. 23, 2022).

control deficiencies on a timely basis.⁵¹ Further, management completes and documents corrective actions to remediate internal control deficiencies on a timely basis. Additionally, according to DOD Instruction 5111.20, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau is responsible, through the state-level SPP Directors, for tracking all SPP activities conducted by the state partners, and National Guard deployments in support of such activities, as well as the appropriate legal authorities and sources of funding for SPP activities. Finally, key practices that we have identified state that effective action plans—which provide a roadmap for how an agency plans to achieve progress—should develop clear timelines, among other characteristics.⁵²

While DOD has approved establishing a working group to review and clarify the use of statutory authorities for SPP activities, DOD has not ensured that the action plan describing this working group includes timelines. By specifying a time frame for when this working group would take action, DOD would be better positioned in making timely progress to clarify the use of statutory authorities for partner states in conducting SPP activities.

Conclusions

The SPP is a key security cooperation tool for DOD to establish and sustain enduring relationships between partner states and partner nations. In fiscal year 2021, DOD implemented a new security cooperation data system to facilitate and integrate planning, management, and reporting in support of all U.S. security cooperation activities—including SPP activities. However, NGB has not ensured that partner states record timely, accurate information in Socium upon completion of all SPP activities, as required. Instead, the NGB has depended on other data systems and methods for information about these activities. If the NGB prioritizes ensuring that partner states are recording such information in a timely manner, DOD will be positioned to have reliable information for internal decision-making purposes and for reporting to Congress as the data system continues to evolve.

To address SPP stakeholder confusion, DOD has approved forming a working group to review and clarify the use of statutory authorities for

⁵¹See [GAO-14-704G](#). Internal control is a process effected by an entity's oversight body, management, and other personnel that provides reasonable assurance that the objectives of an entity will be achieved. These objectives and related risks can be broadly classified into the effectiveness and efficiency of operations.

⁵²GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

SPP activities, both for the use of section 341 of title 10, U.S. Code, as a stand-alone statutory authority and for using section 341 in conjunction with other statutory authorities. In addition, DOD has an action plan that identifies which offices will be represented on the working group. However, DOD has not determined timelines for this working group to complete its tasks. Setting a time frame for this working group to complete its tasks would better position it to achieve progress in addressing partner states' confusion about which statutory authorities to apply for SPP activities.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following two recommendations to DOD:

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Chief, National Guard Bureau, prioritizes partner states' timely recording of information on completed SPP activities into DOD's data system of record, Socium. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities—in collaboration with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the combatant commands—specify a time frame for clarifying the use of statutory authorities for conducting SPP activities. (Recommendation 2)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, which are reproduced in appendix II, DOD concurred with both of our recommendations and described ongoing and planned actions to address them. Specifically, DOD stated that Socium, the data system of record's iterative product development and delivery requirement process, will consider improvements to software and business rules to address data entry and querying functionality for SPP activities. Further, DOD acknowledged the need to record information about SPP activities in a timely manner for internal decision-making purposes and reporting to Congress as Socium continues to evolve. In addition, DOD stated that it was targeting the end of fiscal year 2022 to convene a working group to clarify the use of statutory authorities for conducting SPP activities. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of Defense. In addition, this 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) 512-8461 or ShermanT@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made significant contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



Tina Won Sherman
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States, by Geographic Combatant Command

This appendix contains maps showing which of the 54 state, territorial, and district National Guards (partner states) are paired with foreign countries (partner nations) via the State Partnership Program (SPP) as well as the year the partnership was established. Since the SPP supports the security cooperation objectives of six geographic combatant commands, the following maps are organized by command (see figures 3–8).

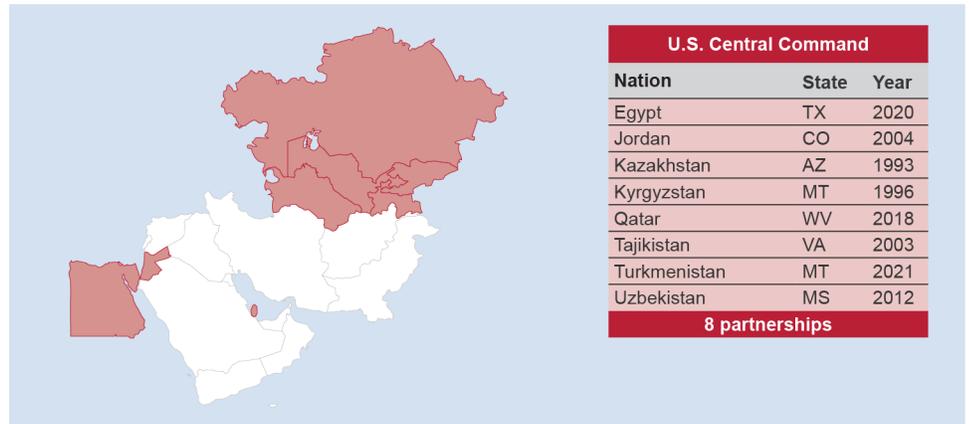
Figure 3: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States in U.S. Africa Command by Year of Establishment



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

**Appendix I: State Partnership Program's
Partner Nations and Partner States, by
Geographic Combatant Command**

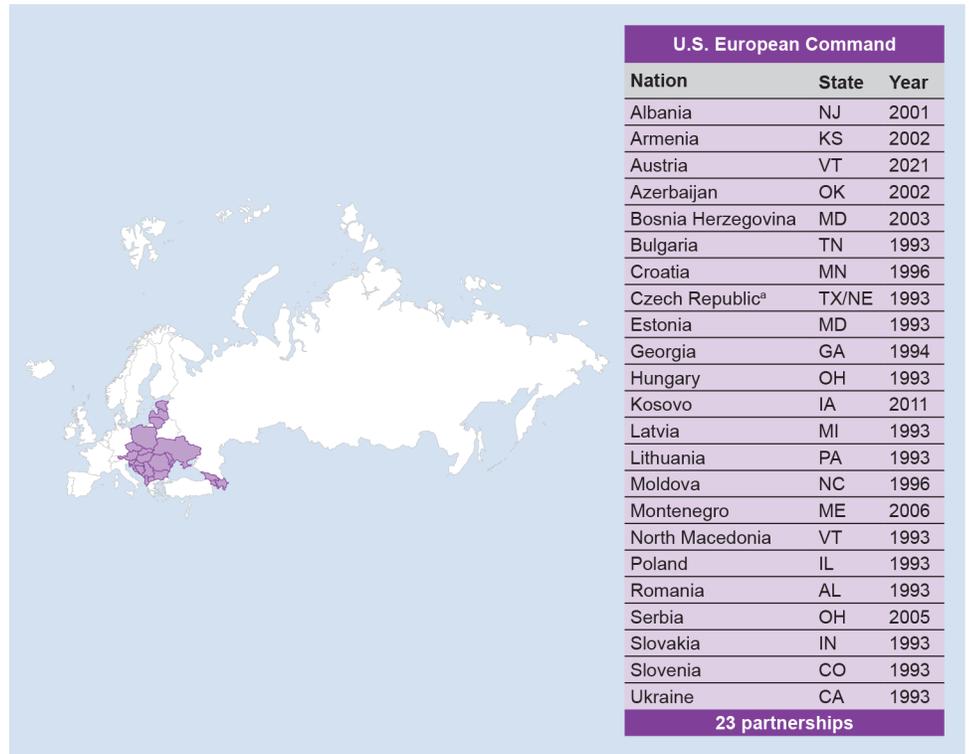
Figure 4: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States in U.S. Central Command by Year of Establishment



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

**Appendix I: State Partnership Program's
Partner Nations and Partner States, by
Geographic Combatant Command**

Figure 5: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States in U.S. European Command by Year of Establishment

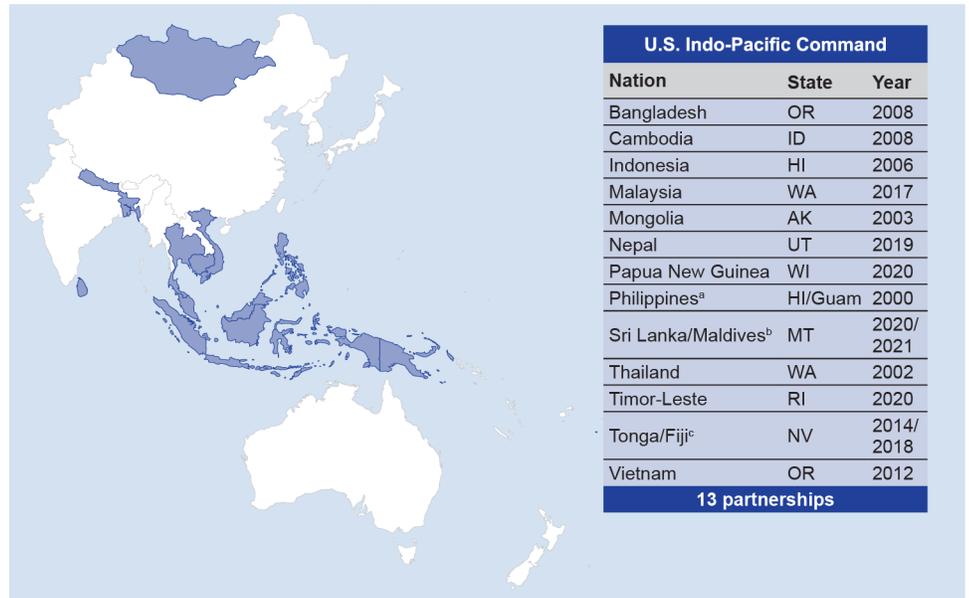


Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

^aThe National Guard Bureau counts the partnership between the Czech Republic and the Texas and Nebraska National Guards as one partnership.

**Appendix I: State Partnership Program's
Partner Nations and Partner States, by
Geographic Combatant Command**

Figure 6: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States in U.S. Indo-Pacific Command by Year of Establishment



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

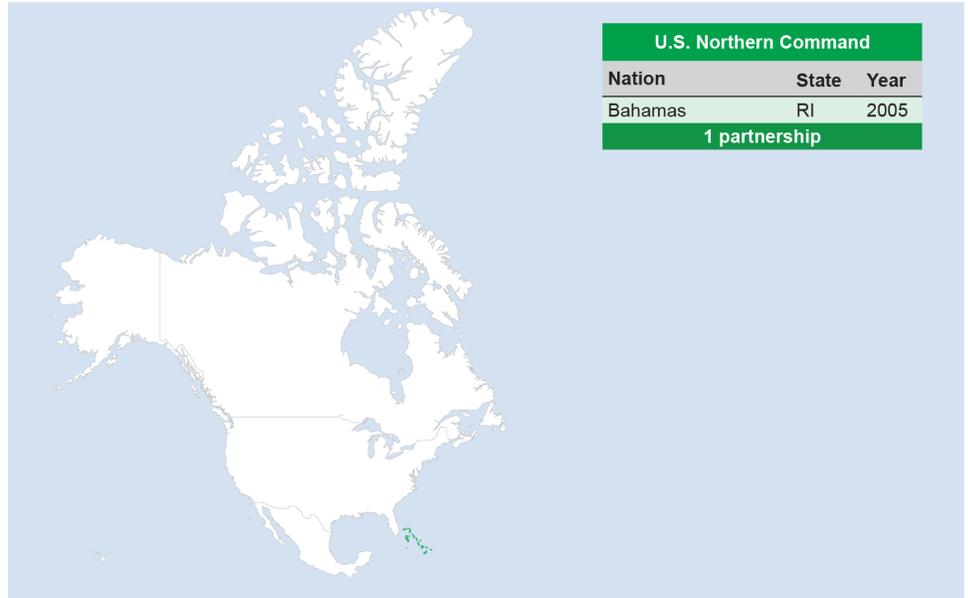
^aThe National Guard Bureau counts the partnership between the Philippines and the Hawaii and Guam National Guards as one partnership.

^bThe National Guard Bureau counts the partnership between the countries of Sri Lanka and the Maldives and the Montana National Guard as one partnership.

^cThe National Guard Bureau counts the partnership between the countries of Tonga and Fiji and the Nevada National Guard as one partnership.

**Appendix I: State Partnership Program's
Partner Nations and Partner States, by
Geographic Combatant Command**

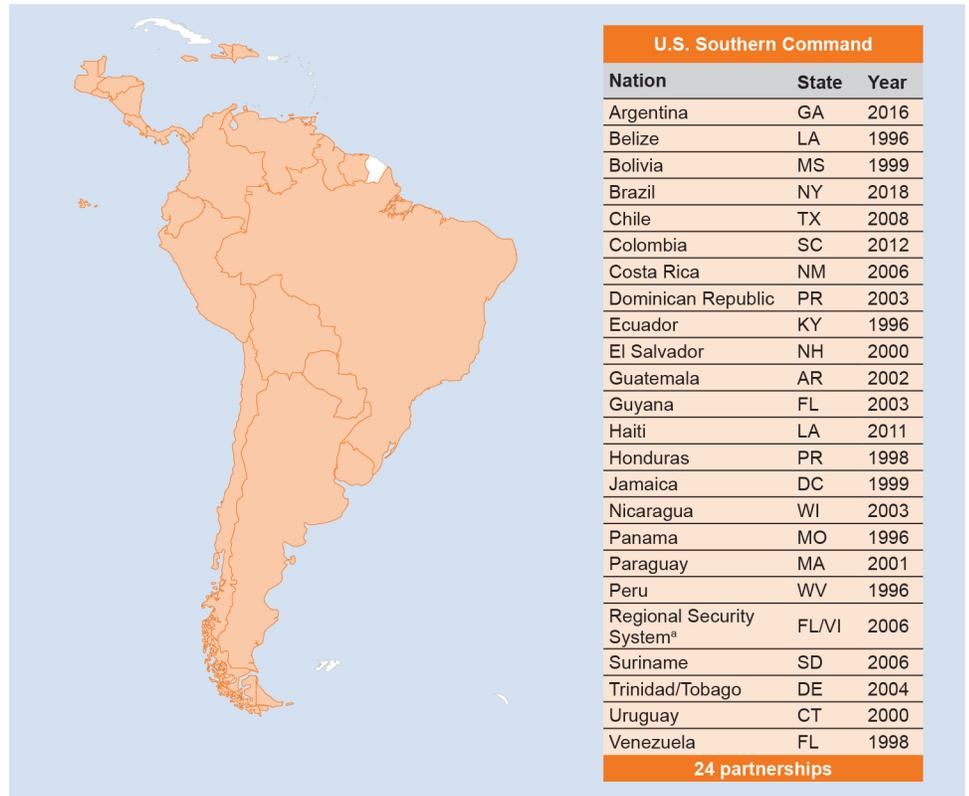
Figure 7: State Partnership Program's Partner Nation and Partner State in U.S. Northern Command by Year of Establishment



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

**Appendix I: State Partnership Program's
Partner Nations and Partner States, by
Geographic Combatant Command**

Figure 8: State Partnership Program's Partner Nations and Partner States in U.S. Southern Command by Year of Establishment



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-104672

^aThe National Guard Bureau counts the partnership between the Regional Security System and the Florida and U.S. Virgin Island National Guards as one partnership. The Regional Security System consists of seven nations: 1) Antigua and Barbuda, 2) Barbados, 3) Dominica, 4) Grenada, 5) Saint Kitts and Nevis, 6) Saint Lucia, 7) Saint Vincent and Grenadines.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

2200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2200

STRATEGY, PLANS
AND CAPABILITIES

JUN 17 2022

Ms. Tina Won Sherman
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Sherman:

Enclosed is the Department's response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-22-104672, "State Partnership Program: DoD Should Ensure Partner States Record Completed Activities and Clarify Appropriate Authorities," dated May 4, 2022 (GAO Code 104672).

Please direct any questions or comments regarding this response to my primary action officer, Dr. Scott C. Buchanan, scott.c.buchanan.civ@mail.mil, (703) 692-1660.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michelle Strucke".

Michelle Strucke
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Global Partnerships

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 4, 2022
GAO-22-104672 (GAO CODE 104672)

“STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM: DOD SHOULD ENSURE PARTNER STATES
RECORD COMPLETED ACTIVITIES AND CLARIFY APPROPRIATE
AUTHORITIES”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Chief, National Guard Bureau, prioritizes partner states recording of information on completed SPP activities in a timely manner into DOD’s data system of record, Socium. (Recommendation 1)

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs. As reported in the study, in fiscal year (FY) 2021, DoD implemented a new security cooperation (SC) data system in support of all DoD SC activities—including SPP activities. Socium’s iterative product development and delivery requirement process will consider improvements to software and business rules to address data entry and querying functionality for SPP activities under 10 U.S.C. §341, and in conjunction with other SC statutory authorities, targeted for the beginning of FY 2023. DoD acknowledges the need to record information about SPP activities in a timely manner for internal decision-making purposes and reporting to Congress as Socium continues to evolve.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities—in collaboration with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the combatant commands—specify a timeframe for clarifying the use of appropriate statutory authorities for security cooperation when conducting SPP activities. (Recommendation 2)

DoD RESPONSE: DoD concurs. As reported in the study, a January 2022 independent strategic review of the SPP concluded conducting SPP activities under 10 U.S.C. §341, in conjunction with other SC statutory authorities can be an indicator of an impactful partnership. DoD is continuing to improve SPP planners’ ability to leverage and synchronize SPP activities with other authorities to achieve DoD objectives. DoD is convening a working group targeted for the end of FY 2022 to review the use of SC statutory authorities when conducting SPP activities, and will issue clarifying guidance to support training of the SC workforce.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Tina Won Sherman at (202) 512-8461 or shermant@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, GAO staff who made key contributions to this report were: Guy A. LoFaro (Assistant Director), Scott Bruckner, Lisette D. Dubow, Mary Laura Ann Holland, Shvetal Khanna, Amie Lesser, Richard Powelson, Michael Silver, Carter Stevens, and Stephen K. Woods (Analyst in Charge, retired).

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