

State Department Should Improve Investigations and Reporting of Foreign Partners' End-Use Violations

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A report to congressional committees.

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What GAO Found

The State Department is responsible for investigating and reporting end-use violations to Congress—that is, foreign partners' violations of requirements for the purpose, transfer, and security of defense articles and services they received from the U.S. government. State relies primarily on the Department of Defense (DOD) to identify incidents that could constitute violations. As of February 2025, DOD was tracking more than 150 incidents, many of them detected by DOD security cooperation organizations (SCO) at diplomatic posts. However, GAO found State has not provided clear guidance to DOD defining the types of incidents that warrant State's attention. Without such guidance, SCO officials told GAO they exercise professional judgement in deciding whether to inform State about incidents. As a result, State may be unaware of potential violations it needs to investigate.

Further, State's investigations of potential end-use violations are inconsistent, in part because its guidance for conducting investigations does not establish required actions or time frames. For example, for one potential violation, State officials gathered information, reviewed transfer agreements, and worked with SCO officials to resolve it. For another potential violation, State officials did not take any action. Moreover, State has not consistently documented the status or findings of its investigations since 2019. As a result, State does not have readily available information about foreign partners' compliance with arms transfer agreements. Such information could inform decisions about future arms sales. In addition, State has not shared its findings with SCO officials, who could implement measures to address violations or prevent their recurrence.

Status of State Department Investigations Is Missing for Many Incidents That Potentially Violated U.S. Arms Transfer Agreements as of February 2025



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-25-107622

Since 2019, State has reported three end-use violations to Congress, but State cannot show that it determined whether most known incidents met legal reporting criteria. Under law, State is required to report to Congress (1) substantial violations of purpose, transfer, and security requirements that may have occurred and (2) any unauthorized transfers that did occur. State documented in memorandums its determinations for three incidents. However, State officials could not provide similar documentation for more than 150 others. State officials said they do not have formal procedures for determining whether incidents meet the reporting criteria or for recording these determinations. Without guidance establishing such procedures, State cannot ensure it is reporting to Congress in accordance with the law. As a result, Congress may not have information to support oversight, such as considering legislation to prohibit transfers of defense articles and services to foreign partners that have violated their agreements.

Why GAO Did This Study

To enhance U.S. national security, the U.S. government provides defense articles and services, such as weapons and military training, to dozens of foreign partners around the world. Recipients agree to comply with legal end-use requirements that prohibit using the provided articles or services for unauthorized purposes, transferring them to unauthorized entities, and failing to keep them secure.

Congress included a provision in House Report 118-301 for GAO to review State and DOD procedures related to alleged violations of relevant end-use requirements of defense articles and services. This report examines the extent to which (1) State and DOD identify and track potential violations, (2) State investigates potential violations and communicates its findings to agency stakeholders, and (3) State reports appropriate incidents to Congress.

GAO reviewed laws and agency policies for guidance on identifying, investigating, and reporting potential violations to Congress. GAO also analyzed documentation and information about potential violations, State's investigations, and its reports to Congress. In addition, GAO interviewed agency officials in the U.S. and at 10 diplomatic posts, including during visits to five countries that GAO selected to reflect an array of incident types and geographic locations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations to State, including that it provide guidance to DOD for reporting incidents to State, update its guidance for investigating incidents, and develop guidance that establishes procedures for determining whether to report incidents to Congress. State agreed with these recommendations.