

Why GAO Did This Study

The Departments of Defense (DOD) and State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and others are involved in economic development activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. In June 2006, DOD established the Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (Task Force) to support its related efforts. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2011 required that DOD, State, and USAID jointly develop a plan to transition Task Force activities to State, with a focus on potentially transitioning activities to USAID.

Under the authority of the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct work on his own initiative and with additional congressional direction, GAO identified (1) factors to consider in planning any transition of Task Force activities and (2) the extent to which the Task Force established guidance to manage its activities and has shared information with other federal agencies. GAO analyzed documents and interviewed multiple agency officials in Washington, D.C., Iraq, and Afghanistan.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Task Force develop written project management guidance and that DOD, State, and USAID develop an approach to integrate the Task Force into information-sharing mechanisms. DOD partially concurred with the first recommendation. The three agencies generally concurred with the second.

View [GAO-11-715](#) or key components. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

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DOD TASK FORCE FOR BUSINESS AND STABILITY OPERATIONS

Actions Needed to Establish Project Management Guidelines and Enhance Information Sharing

What GAO Found

As of June 2011, DOD, State, and USAID officials were discussing options for transitioning Task Force activities and preparing a response to the fiscal year 2011 NDAA requirements. Based on interviews with senior officials and a review of available data, GAO identified five factors to consider in planning for any transition of Task Force activities to USAID, which generally relate to how these agencies conduct their respective activities. First, although both the Task Force and USAID work to promote economic development, they generally take different approaches. The Task Force is a small, flat, flexible organization that generally conducts short-term initiatives, while USAID is a large agency that conducts short- and long-term projects. USAID officials noted that in addition to other activities, it focuses on efforts to improve the environment for investments whereas the Task Force focuses on brokering specific investment deals. Second, as part of DOD, Task Force employees are not subject to the same movement restrictions as USAID employees and have greater flexibility to visit project sites and access to military assets. Third, funding and staffing plans would need to be developed. For example, USAID's fiscal year 2011 budget and 2012 budget request did not take into account any needs to support Task Force activities. Fourth, while both agencies facilitate private sector investment, the nature and focus of their interactions with investors differ. For example, the Task Force actively identifies potential U.S. and non-U.S. investors and arranges meetings and provides logistical support for them, whereas USAID typically sponsors conferences to provide opportunities for prospective investors to share information. Given these differences, State and USAID officials agreed that the same type of private investment activities conducted by the Task Force may not continue at USAID. Last, the timing of a transition and impact on U.S. objectives will need to be considered. DOD, State, and USAID officials noted that because Task Force activities are important to supporting the U.S. goal of attracting investors, a transition in the near term may negatively impact these efforts.

While DOD and the Task Force have provided high-level direction for Task Force activities, the Task Force has not developed written project management guidance to be used by its personnel in managing Task Force projects. Such guidance could include important elements, such as project selection criteria, requirements to establish metrics, and monitoring and evaluation processes. As a result, the Task Force does not have the framework needed to ensure a standard operating approach, accountability, and consistent project management. The Task Force has generally focused its information-sharing efforts on senior officials in Afghanistan whereas efforts at the project management level have been more ad hoc. Mechanisms such as working groups exist for agencies involved in development activities to share information. However, the Task Force does not routinely participate, and DOD, State, and USAID have not identified how best to integrate the Task Force to share information on its activities. As a result, the U.S. government may not be positioned to fully leverage and coordinate its respective capabilities and efforts in support of achieving U.S. goals.