

ANTITERRORISM ASSISTANCE

State Department Should Improve Data Collection and Participant Oversight



Highlights of [GAO-17-704](#), a report to the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

State's ATA program aims to enhance foreign partners' capabilities to prevent acts of terrorism, address terrorism incidents when they do occur, and apprehend and prosecute those involved in such acts. In fiscal years 2012 through 2016, State allocated about \$715 million to the ATA program, which it reports to have used to train about 56,000 security force officials from more than 34 partner nations. At least 2,700 of those participants were trained at facilities in the United States.

GAO was asked to review ATA program management. This report examines, among other objectives, (1) State's ability to oversee ATA participants trained in the United States and (2) the steps State has taken to ensure that facilities used for domestic ATA training align with applicable security requirements. GAO conducted fieldwork at two domestic training facilities selected because they provide tactical training; analyzed State and DHS data and documentation related to fiscal year 2012 through 2016 domestic training participants; and interviewed State and DHS officials, including those who oversee ATA training for three partner nations receiving significant ATA training. GAO also interviewed contractors who help implement the ATA program and analyzed related documents.

What GAO Recommends

State should ensure implementation of its data collection procedures and establish a process to confirm and document participants' return to their home countries. State agreed with both recommendations.

View [GAO-17-704](#). For more information, contact Jessica Farb at (202) 512-6991 or FarbJ@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Weaknesses exist in Department of State (State) Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program data and oversight of participants, including those trained in the United States. ATA course and participant data are incomplete and sometimes inaccurate, despite ATA's procedures for the collection of those data. ATA officials told GAO that procedures were not always followed. Without ensuring the implementation of procedures to collect complete and accurate program data, officials may not be able to accurately report the number of participants trained, in line with program performance indicators. Among participants trained in the United States since 2012, ATA has documented 10 participant unauthorized departures from ATA activities and provided related information to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for follow-up. In addition to these 10, ATA recently identified 20 ATA participants trained in fiscal years 2012 through 2016 for whom departure from the United States following the completion of training is unconfirmed. ATA officials told GAO there is no formal process to confirm participants' return to their home countries following the completion of training (see fig.). Without such a process, ATA may not be able to assess the extent to which it is using training in line with program goals. Further, State may not be able to provide information to DHS about participants whose failure to depart may warrant enforcement action.

State's Process for Overseeing Domestic ATA Training Participants

	Arrives in United States	Clears airport security screening	Arrives in home country
ATA participant activity	Escorted training and transit	Unescorted transit	
Available methods to detect unauthorized departures	- Escorted transit from and to airport ^a - Daily attendance throughout training	None	U.S. embassy conducts follow-up
Number of known unauthorized departures from FY 2012 - 2016 ATA activities	10 ▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	20 ▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	Not applicable
State process for notifying DHS of unauthorized departures from ATA activities	State alerts DHS 24 hours after discovering unauthorized departure ^b	No formal process	No formal process

Legend: State = Department of State; DHS = Department of Homeland Security; ATA = Antiterrorism Assistance; FY = fiscal year
Source: GAO analysis of Department of State information. | GAO-17-704

^aATA may or may not provide escort to the airport following the conclusion of training for participants who undertake personal travel, as permitted by the terms of their admission to the United States.

^bAs of January 2015.

State and the contractors who implement ATA training have taken steps to ensure that facilities used for domestic training align with applicable security requirements. State's ATA training contract requires the secure storage of weapons and explosives and that the contractors have the relevant federal, state, and local permits. State reports overseeing the contractors through the receipt of copies of relevant licenses such as those required for possessing explosives; visits to the training facilities, including surveys examining storage security; and frequent meetings. Both of the domestic tactical training facilities that GAO visited had relevant licenses and, during site visits, GAO observed some suggested security measures, including fences, secured gates, and security patrols.