



Testimony before the Subcommittee on
Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade,
Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of
Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 2:00 p.m. ET
Tuesday, June 2, 2015

STATE DEPARTMENT

Preliminary Observations on the Bureau of Counterterrorism's Resources, Performance, and Coordination

Statement of Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., Director
International Affairs and Trade

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-655T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and combating these at home and abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. government. In 2010, the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), conducted at the direction of the Secretary of State, highlighted these global threats and, among other actions, recommended that State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism be elevated to bureau status. According to the 2010 QDDR report, the elevation of this office to a bureau would enhance State's ability to, among other things, counter violent extremism, build foreign partner capacity, and engage in counterterrorism diplomacy. In addition, the report stated that the bureau's new status would enable more effective coordination with other U.S. government agencies.

On the basis of preliminary results of ongoing work that GAO is conducting for this subcommittee and other congressional requesters, this testimony provides observations on (1) how the bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, (2) the extent to which the bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, and (3) the extent to which the bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on select programs is in line with key collaboration practices. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed and analyzed State and other U.S. government agency information and interviewed U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C. GAO expects to issue a final report on this work in July 2015, along with any related recommendations.

View [GAO-15-655T](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

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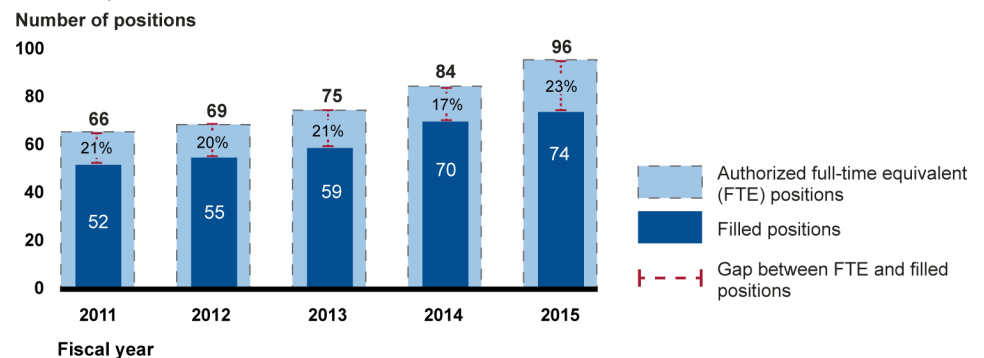
STATE DEPARTMENT

Preliminary Observations on the Bureau of Counterterrorism's Resources, Performance, and Coordination

What GAO Found

GAO's preliminary analysis shows that the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism has had an annual increase in authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions since fiscal year 2011 and has recently undertaken efforts to reduce a persistent staffing gap. The number of FTEs for the bureau increased from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, and over the same period the percentage of FTE vacancies ranged from 17 to 23 percent. The vacancies have included both staff-level and management positions. During GAO's ongoing work, the bureau indicated that the gaps between authorized and filled positions were due to several factors. These included an increase in FTEs that the bureau was authorized when it was established and postponement of some staffing decisions until the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, who assumed her position in 2014, had sufficient time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities. The bureau has recently made progress in filling vacant positions and reported having 10 FTE vacancies as of the end of May 2015.

Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Authorized Full-Time Equivalent and Filled Positions, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-655T

Note: Data are as of October 31 in the fiscal year represented.

GAO's preliminary analysis has found that the bureau assessed its progress toward achieving its foreign assistance-related goals but has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. Specifically, the bureau established indicators and targets for its foreign assistance-related goals identified in the bureau's first multiyear strategic plan, and it reported results achieved toward each indicator. Since its elevation to a bureau in fiscal year 2012, the bureau has also completed four evaluations of counterterrorism-related programs it oversees, resulting in 60 recommendations. GAO's preliminary results show that the bureau had addressed about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) as of April 2015 but had not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations.

GAO's preliminary analysis has also found that the bureau's coordination within State and with other federal agencies on the Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism Finance programs generally reflects key practices for collaboration. For example, with regard to identifying resources, in cases where the bureau funded other U.S. agencies partnering on these programs, the funding mechanism was clear and laid out in interagency agreements.

Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Keating, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity today to discuss our preliminary observations from our ongoing work looking at the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau).

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and countering terrorism both at home and abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. government. In 2010, the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) conducted by State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) focused on these global threats by recommending that State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (CT Office) be elevated to a bureau. According to the 2010 QDDR report, the elevation of the CT Office to a bureau would enhance State's ability to, among other things, counter violent extremism, build foreign partner capacity, and engage in counterterrorism diplomacy. In addition, the QDDR report stated that elevating the office's status would enable more effective coordination with other U.S. government agencies.

This testimony discusses our preliminary observations on (1) how the CT Bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, (2) the extent to which the bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, and (3) the extent to which the bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on select programs is in line with key collaboration practices.

To examine how the CT Bureau's staffing resources changed since 2011, we reviewed and analyzed State data from fiscal years 2011 to 2015. We also interviewed State officials from the CT Bureau, Office of Inspector General, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources, and the Bureaus of Human Resources, Comptroller and Global Financial Services, Budgeting and Planning, and Administration. To assess the reliability of the staffing data, we compared information provided by State with staffing information in State's Congressional Budget Justifications and spoke to State officials regarding the processes they use to collect and verify the staffing data. Based on the checks we performed, we determined that these data are sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this engagement. To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, we reviewed bureau strategic plans, performance reports, program evaluation reports, and action plans for evaluation recommendations, as well as State policy and guidance documents outlining performance reporting and evaluation requirements

for bureaus. We also interviewed CT Bureau officials responsible for strategic planning and program monitoring and evaluation and interviewed or obtained written responses from State officials responsible for overseeing implementation of State's performance reporting and evaluation policies. To examine the extent to which the CT Bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on select programs is in line with key collaboration practices, we reviewed agency documents and interviewed officials from various State regional and functional bureaus; from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and the Treasury; and from USAID, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. We focused on the CT Bureau's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism Finance (CTF) programs because these programs involve coordination with large numbers of agencies and also represent strategic priorities for the CT Bureau. We used GAO's key features of collaboration mechanisms that agencies should consider when collaborating within and across the U.S. government to evaluate the extent and nature of collaboration between the CT Bureau and other bureaus within State and other U.S. government agencies.¹

Our preliminary analysis is based on our ongoing work, which is being conducted 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

¹GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012).

Evolution of State's CT Office to CT Bureau

In December 2010, the QDDR recommended the creation of the CT Bureau, to supersede the CT Office.² State elevated the CT Office to the CT Bureau in January 2012. According to State, one reason for elevating the CT Office to a bureau was that the office's responsibilities for counterterrorism strategy, policy, operations, and programs had grown far beyond the original coordinating mission. In the transition from CT Office to CT Bureau in 2012, some initial organizational changes occurred, such as a reduction from five to four Deputy Coordinators who oversee counterterrorism issue areas within the bureau as well as the creation of an executive office to provide management support to the bureau. The initial organizational changes also elevated the role of strategic planning and metrics and established a new policy and guidance unit.³

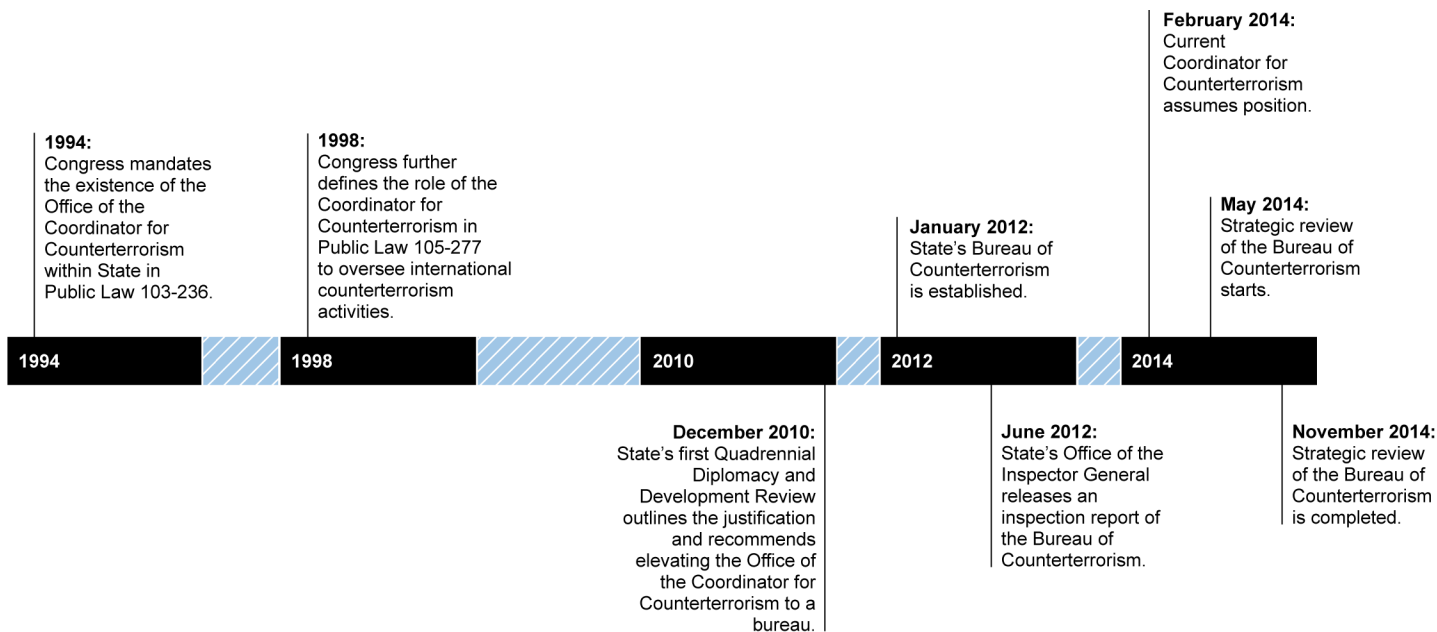
Our preliminary information shows that additional changes to the CT Bureau's organizational structure occurred starting in 2014, after the current Ambassador was confirmed as the Coordinator for Counterterrorism in February 2014. According to bureau officials, the Ambassador initiated a strategic review of the bureau's programs and what they were accomplishing to help form a clear picture of priorities, threats, and where the bureau's efforts and funding should be directed. The strategic review, which was completed in November 2014, led to a reorganization of the bureau and a shift in overall focus to a regional or geographic approach. As a result of the strategic review, the portfolio of the CT Bureau's Office of Programs has changed to reflect a more regional approach rather than an approach based on funding streams. According to CT Bureau officials, the shift is intended to encourage and facilitate cross-bureau discussions across the entire CT Bureau. Specifically, the portfolios of program officials have been broadened by

²In 1994 Congress mandated the existence of the CT Office within State to be headed by a Coordinator for Counterterrorism. In 1998 Congress further defined the role of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism to include overall supervision of resources for U.S. international counterterrorism activities, including policy oversight. Congress also established the Coordinator for Counterterrorism as the principal adviser to the Secretary of State on international counterterrorism matters, reporting directly to the Secretary of State.

³As the new CT Bureau began organizing itself, State's Office of Inspector General conducted a routine inspection of the CT Bureau in early 2012. U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Office of Inspections: Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism*, Report Number ISP-I-12-32A (Arlington, VA: June 2012).

requiring a cross-cutting look at programs across their assigned region. Figure 1 shows how the CT Office has evolved over the last two decades.

Figure 1: Timeline of Key Events Related to the Evolution of the Department of State’s (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State information. | GAO-15-655T

Our preliminary information shows other changes to the bureau’s organizational structure stemming from the strategic review, such as the changes in names of directorates and offices, their portfolios, or both to better reflect the new strategic approach and priorities of the bureau. For example, the portfolio for the multilateral affairs office was shifted and combined with the portfolio for the regional affairs office. In addition, a new office and two new units were created: (1) the Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives; (2) the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Unit; and (3) the

Countering Violent Extremism Unit. Appendix I depicts the organizational structure of the CT Bureau, as of May 2015.⁴

CT Bureau Programs, Activities, and Funding Allocations

The CT Bureau manages a range of programs and activities to assist partner nations around the world to combat terrorism, primarily through the following six programs:

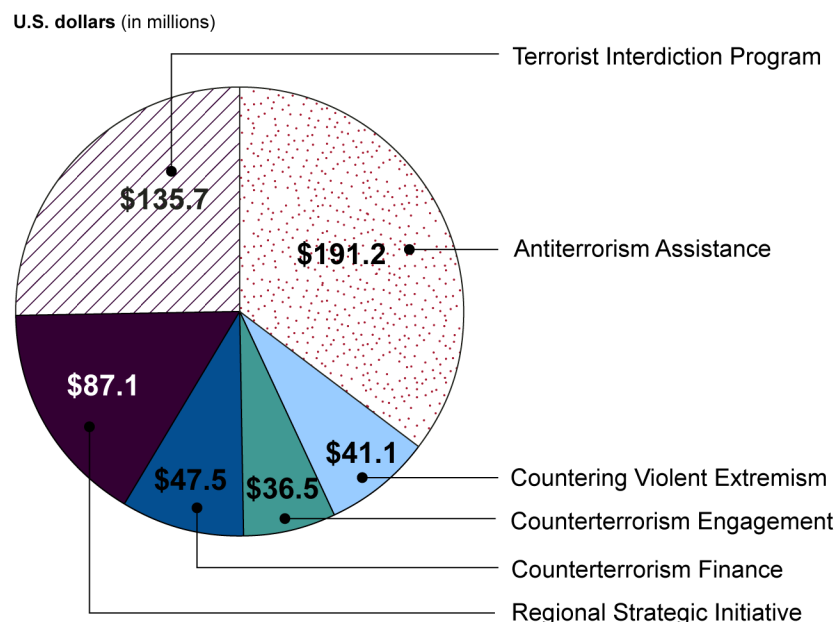
- **Antiterrorism Assistance:** in partnership with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security as the primary implementer, provides U.S. government antiterrorism training and equipment to law enforcement agencies of partner nations.
- **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):** entails programs and activities that work with partner nation civil society sectors and governments to undermine terrorist ideology and to address the underlying local grievances that drive at-risk individuals into violent extremism.
- **Counterterrorism Engagement:** entails programs and activities to build political will for counterterrorism at senior levels in partner nations.
- **Counterterrorism Finance (CTF):** entails programs and activities to build foreign partner capacity and to implement significant parts of the U.S. government's strategy to cut off financial support to terrorists.
- **Terrorist Interdiction Program:** provides the immigration and border control authorities of partner nations with a computer database system that enables identification of suspected terrorists attempting to transit air, land, or sea ports of entry.
- **Regional Strategic Initiative:** meets transnational terrorist threats with regional responses coordinated by each region's U.S. ambassadors in the field.

Our preliminary analysis shows that from fiscal years 2011 through 2014, the CT Bureau was allocated a cumulative total of \$539.1 million for these

⁴According to the CT Bureau, the bureau's final structure is pending until it has been approved by State's management and incorporated into the department's Foreign Affairs Manual.

six counterterrorism-related programs, as shown in figure 2.⁵ The majority of these allocations are from the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs account, which funds all six programs. Allocations from the Economic Support Fund support those Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism Engagement program activities that do not involve law enforcement entities.

Figure 2: Total Allocations of Funds to the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism for Six Counterterrorism-Related Programs, Fiscal Years 2011 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-655T

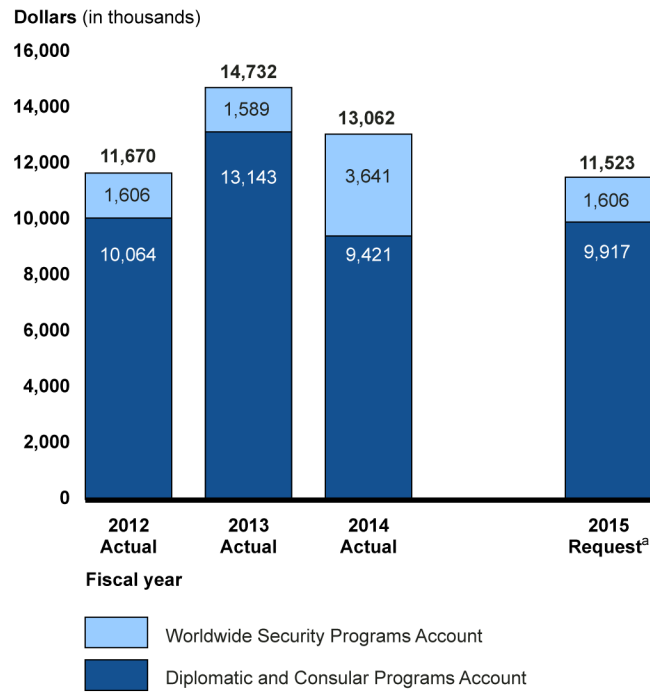
Note: The Bureau of Counterterrorism transitioned from an office to a bureau during fiscal years 2011 and 2012; therefore, allocations for these fiscal years cover the office and the bureau.

Our preliminary analysis shows that, in addition to the foreign assistance programming that the CT Bureau oversees and manages, the bureau's allocated resources include funding for the operations of the bureau. The CT Bureau receives funds from two sources to fund its core operations: the Diplomatic and Consular Programs and the Worldwide Security

⁵The CT Bureau requested \$104.4 million in allocations for fiscal year 2015 for these programs. State officials were unable to provide actual allocations for fiscal year 2015 because they were still working to finalize them at the time of our review.

Programs accounts. Figure 3 shows our preliminary analysis of the bureau's total allocations for its overall operations since fiscal year 2012. These allocations increased from \$11.7 million in fiscal year 2012 to \$14.7 million in fiscal year 2013, as the bureau was being established. The allocations then decreased to \$13.1 million in fiscal year 2014.

Figure 3: Funds Allocated for Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Operations Budget, Fiscal Years 2012 to 2014, and Allocations Requested for Fiscal Year 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-655T

Notes: The Bureau of Counterterrorism was established in the second quarter of fiscal year 2012; some of the funding shown for fiscal year 2012 covered the predecessor of the bureau, the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

^aAccording to the Bureau of Counterterrorism, the bureau has been using allocated funds from fiscal year 2014 until it receives approval within the Department of State for its fiscal year 2015 request.

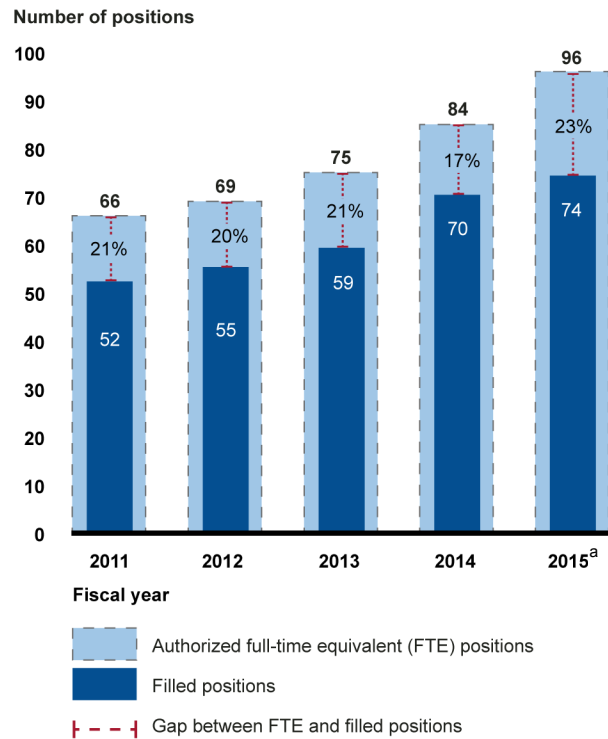
CT Bureau's Authorized Staffing Has Increased since Fiscal Year 2011; Recent Efforts Have Been Made to Reduce Staffing Gap

Our preliminary analysis indicates that the CT Bureau's number of authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions has grown annually, and the bureau has recently undertaken efforts to reduce a persistent staffing gap. The bureau's number of FTEs grew from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, which is an increase of more than 45 percent.⁶ Figure 4 shows the number of FTEs within the bureau for fiscal years 2011 to 2015, along with the number of positions that were filled. While the bureau's current authorized level of FTEs for fiscal year 2015 is 96 positions, it had 22 vacancies as of October 31, 2014.⁷ Our preliminary analysis also shows that the percentage of vacancies in FTE positions in the bureau has ranged from 17 percent to 23 percent in fiscal years 2011 to 2015. According to the CT Bureau, these vacancies have included both staff-level and management positions. As of the end of May 2015, the number of FTE vacancies in the bureau had been reduced to 10 positions, most of which are in the Office of Programs, according to the CT Bureau.

⁶A position is the specified set of all duties and responsibilities currently assigned or delegated by competent authority and requiring full-time, part-time, or intermittent employment of one person. FTE positions include both civil service employees and Foreign Service Officers. Since 2013, the first full fiscal year that the CT Bureau was in operation, the total staff of the bureau has decreased from around 174 to 165, according to our preliminary analysis. The CT bureau's overall staff numbers include FTE positions and other positions such as detailees and contractors, both of which have decreased since fiscal year 2013. The non-FTE positions in the bureau include contractors, interns, fellows, detailees, and "When Actually Employed," the designation applied to retired State employees rehired under temporary part-time appointments.

⁷A vacancy is a position that an agency has allocated funds to pay for but that is currently not filled by an employee.

Figure 4: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Authorized Full-Time Equivalent Positions and Filled Positions, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-655T

Notes: Data are as of October 31 in the fiscal year represented. The Bureau of Counterterrorism was established in the second quarter of fiscal year 2012; the positions shown for fiscal years 2011 and 2012 were for the predecessor of the bureau, the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

^aAs of the end of May 2015, the number of vacancies in the Bureau of Counterterrorism had been reduced to 10 positions, according to the bureau.

According to State, to meet the personnel requirements associated with standing up the CT Bureau, the bureau received an authorized increase of up to 31 positions covering fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2014. According to the CT Bureau, some of these positions were initially filled within the first 6 months after the bureau was established. Filling the remaining positions was postponed until the current Coordinator for Counterterrorism had time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities, according to the CT Bureau. When the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, following the strategic review, deemed that more staff might be needed in newly created units, some of the authorized positions were used for that purpose. For example, one position was used to fill a management-level

position in the Office of Strategy, Plans, and Initiatives, according to CT Bureau officials.

According to CT Bureau officials, the bureau continues to look at its resource needs. As part of its resource request planning process for fiscal year 2017, the bureau's Executive Director reached out to all CT Bureau office directors to ask if their current staffing was sufficient, according to the CT Bureau. These staffing requests were entered into the bureau's annual planning and budgeting documents. We are continuing to analyze data on staffing gaps in the CT Bureau and expect to provide additional information in our final report. We will also continue to monitor the CT Bureau's workforce planning efforts.

CT Bureau Has Assessed Its Performance but Has Not Defined Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations

The CT Bureau utilized various means to assess its performance in fiscal years 2011 through 2014, including performance assessments and program evaluations. Our preliminary analysis indicates that the CT Bureau assessed its progress toward its foreign assistance-related goals but has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations.

Our preliminary analysis shows that the CT Bureau assessed its progress toward achieving its foreign assistance-related goals in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, as required by State policy.⁸ That policy requires bureaus to respond to an annual department-wide data call for foreign assistance-related performance information. Specifically, bureaus must identify indicators and targets for their foreign assistance-related goals, as defined in their multiyear strategic plans, and report results achieved toward each indicator for the prior fiscal year.⁹ As shown in table 1, the CT Bureau identified four foreign assistance-related goals in its first multiyear strategic plan and established quantitative indicators and

⁸To establish a baseline, we analyzed the fiscal year 2011 performance report for the CT Office. We analyzed information in the CT Bureau's performance reports for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. Department of State, Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources, *Guidance for Performance Plan and Report* (2012, 2013). The bureau's fiscal year 2014 performance report was not available at the time of our review.

⁹The multiyear strategic plan is a 3-year strategy that defines priority goals for the bureau. Those goals serve as the framework and basis for the annual performance reports from bureaus.

corresponding targets for each of those goals.¹⁰ It also reported results achieved for each indicator.¹¹

Table 1: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Performance Information for Foreign Assistance-Related Goals, Fiscal Years 2011 through 2013

Performance indicator ^a	FY 2011 Target	FY 2011 Result	FY 2012 Target	FY 2012 Result	FY 2013 Target	FY 2013 Result
Goal #1: Counter violent extremism						
Number of students trained in activities, tools, and techniques related to Countering Violent Extremism	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA ^b	•
Number of Countering Violent Extremism programs directly related to U.S. government objectives implemented in-country by civil society and partner governments	NA	NA	•	•	•	•
Goal #2: Disrupt terrorist networks, including sponsorship, financial support, travel, and sanctuary^c						
Number of students trained in counterterrorism finance by U.S. government programs	NA ^b	•	•	•	•	•
Goal #3: Enhance host country civilian capacity and performance to deter, disrupt, and apprehend terrorists						
Goal #4: Strengthen multilateral and regional mechanisms^d						
Number of students trained in antiterrorism topics and skills through the Antiterrorism Assistance program	NA	NA	NA ^b	•	•	•
Number of Counterterrorism Engagement-funded multilateral training and capacity-building activities conducted by multilateral organizations that promote effective counterterrorism policies and programs	NA ^b	•	•	•	•	•
Number of U.S. government-assisted assessments on terrorism	•	•	•	•	•	NA ^e

FY = fiscal year

NA = indicator not applicable to fiscal year, so no target or result reported

• = target or result reported

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documents. | GAO-15-655T.

Notes: We analyzed information in the Bureau of Counterterrorism's performance reports for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. The fiscal year 2014 performance report was not available at the time of our review. We also analyzed the fiscal year 2011 performance report for the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism to establish a baseline to show what changes, if any, the Bureau of Counterterrorism had made with regard to its performance reporting efforts since being elevated from an office to a bureau in fiscal year 2012.

^aIn addition to the indicators identified in the table, the bureau was also tracking the number of publicly reported terrorism incidents in a given year worldwide as a "proxy" indicator to inform strategic planning.

¹⁰The CT Bureau's first multiyear strategic plan became effective with its submission to the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources in April 2012. In January 2015, the CT Bureau submitted its second multiyear strategic plan, which superseded the first.

¹¹We plan to provide the numerical data for these targets and results in our final report.

^bAlthough no target was set for the fiscal year, a result was reported. This is consistent with Department of State policy stating that bureaus are not required to set a target for the first fiscal year when an indicator is introduced but that a result can still be reported.

^cFor this goal, the bureau was also tracking three indicators related to the Terrorist Interdiction Program. These indicators are not presented in the table because the bureau determined them to be sensitive but unclassified information.

^dThese goals are presented together because the bureau established the same indicators for both.

^eNo result was reported because the indicator was discontinued in fiscal year 2013. It was discontinued because the bureau concluded that the number of assessments conducted is not a contributing factor to, and does not establish a measure of, the success of a program.

In addition to having assessed its progress toward achieving its foreign assistance-related goals, our preliminary analysis shows that since being elevated to a bureau in fiscal year 2012, the CT Bureau has completed four evaluations of counterterrorism-related programs it oversees. The number of completed evaluations meets the number of evaluations required by State's February 2012 evaluation policy.¹² As shown in table 2, the CT Bureau completed these evaluations during fiscal years 2013 and 2014 and focused primarily on evaluating programs providing training courses to law enforcement officials of partner nations, such as the Antiterrorism Assistance program in Morocco and Bangladesh. CT Bureau officials noted that, when deciding what programs to evaluate, the bureau took into consideration whether the evaluation would inform the priority programming and objectives of the bureau and produce results the bureau could use in future programming decisions and evaluation designs. To date, the CT Bureau has not evaluated the CVE program, which has been identified as a priority goal for the bureau.¹³

¹²Department of State, *Program Evaluation Policy* (Feb. 23, 2012). State's February 2012 evaluation policy required bureaus to complete two to four program evaluations over the 24-month period that began in fiscal year 2012. State modified its evaluation policy in January 2015 to require bureaus to complete at least one evaluation per fiscal year.

¹³As of May 2015, the CT Bureau was still working to finalize its program evaluation plans for 2015. We plan to provide this information in the final report.

Table 2: Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Program Evaluations Completed, Fiscal Years 2013 and 2014

Program evaluated	Program description	Evaluation date
Antiterrorism Assistance program in Morocco	Provided training courses to Moroccan law enforcement officials on, for example, cyber forensic and cyber security.	August 2013
Antiterrorism Assistance program in Bangladesh	Provided training courses to Bangladeshi law enforcement officials on, for example, critical incident response, border security, and investigative competence.	October 2013
Resident Legal Advisor and Intermittent Legal Advisor program	Placed advisors in 13 geographic areas to build partner nation investigative, prosecutorial, and judicial capacity in anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance.	December 2013
Regional Strategic Initiative program in Algeria	Provided training courses and technical assistance to the Algerian Gendarmerie Nationale on, for example, forensics, criminal investigations, and border security.	September 2014

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documents. | GAO-15-655T.

Our preliminary analysis indicates that the CT Bureau has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. The four program evaluations the CT Bureau completed during fiscal years 2013 and 2014 resulted in 60 recommendations; however, according to bureau officials, the bureau does not have a system for assigning time frames for the implementation of recommendations. The officials said program officers are assigned responsibility for following up on recommendations that impact their portfolio; however, the bureau does not have any policy or other guidance outlining the timing for addressing recommendations from evaluations. In response to questions during the course of our review, CT Bureau officials developed action plans to describe the status of efforts to address the 60 recommendations.¹⁴ On the basis of our review of these action plans, the CT Bureau reported having implemented about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) made

¹⁴At the onset of our review, the CT Bureau did not have a way to track the status of recommendations from evaluations. CT Bureau officials said our review prompted internal discussions within the bureau about creating a spreadsheet to track the status of recommendations. CT Bureau officials subsequently developed these action plans.

in the evaluations, as of April 2015. The bureau had put on hold or decided not to implement 4 recommendations; the remaining 28 were still being considered or were in the process of being implemented, or the bureau had made a commitment to implement them.

While the action plans are a positive first step to help the bureau monitor and track its progress in implementing recommendations, they do not address the need for the bureau to establish time frames for addressing recommendations from evaluations. Without specific time frames for completing actions in response to recommendations from evaluations, it may be difficult for the bureau to ensure that needed programmatic improvements are made in a timely manner or to hold its implementing partners accountable for doing so.

CT Bureau Collaboration on CVE and CTF Programs Is Generally Consistent with Key Practices

Our preliminary analysis shows that activities between the CT Bureau and other bureaus within State as well as with other U.S. government agencies on counterterrorism programs, specifically the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism Finance (CTF) programs, were generally consistent with key practices that GAO has identified for interagency collaboration in the areas of (1) outcomes and accountability, (2) bridging organizational cultures, (3) leadership, (4) clarity of roles and responsibilities, (5) resources, and (6) written guidance and agreements.¹⁵

- **Outcomes and accountability.**¹⁶ According to CT Bureau officials, in coordinating on CVE and CTF, the bureau and its partners have defined intended outcomes generally as collaborating on policy and programming decisions, sharing information, and ensuring that there is no duplication of existing or planned initiatives. When working with other U.S. government agencies, the CT Bureau generally has laid out the intended outcomes of coordination efforts in interagency agreements. Our preliminary analysis showed that within State, the goals of coordination may be articulated by the CT Bureau through

¹⁵GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012). We did not review one additional key collaboration practice, which covers participants, because we did not conduct a comprehensive review across all the bureaus at State that may coordinate on CVE and CTF programs.

¹⁶[GAO-12-1022](#). Having defined outcomes and mechanisms to track progress can help shape a collaborative vision and goals.

specific requests across regional or functional bureaus or messages defining and assigning specific tasks. We also identified accountability mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results or outcomes of counterterrorism programming.

- **Bridging organizational cultures.**¹⁷ Our preliminary analysis shows that while terminology may differ when discussing CVE, within State, some regional and functional bureau officials we spoke with said that they use a common definition for CVE and apply the CVE strategy and policy that the CT Bureau has developed for CVE programming. Similarly, some officials in other U.S. government agencies told us they agree on common terms and outcomes of counterterrorism programming as ideas are discussed between the CT Bureau and the implementing agency, if the bureau funds a program or grant. Our preliminary analysis also shows that there was frequent communication among collaborating agencies, including as it relates to CVE programs. Specifically, we found that frequency of communication between the CT Bureau and other State bureaus as well as other U.S. government agencies varied depending on the project or activity and ranged from daily to monthly interactions.
- **Leadership.**¹⁸ Our preliminary analysis shows that for CVE and to some extent CTF, officials at State and other U.S. government agencies were generally aware of the agency or individual with leadership responsibility for the particular counterterrorism program. Officials in State's regional bureaus stated that they are generally aware of when the CT Bureau would have the lead on counterterrorism issues versus the regional bureaus. In addition, officials noted that they receive relevant and timely information on CVE-related programming from the bureau. For the CTF program, our preliminary analysis indicates that there was some uncertainty among officials as to whom they should be working with on CTF programming, due to the recent reorganization of the CT Bureau.

¹⁷[GAO-12-1022](#). Developing common terminology and open lines of communication among collaborating entities can help ensure that misunderstandings are prevented.

¹⁸[GAO-12-1022](#). Having clear and consistent leadership can speed decision making and strengthen collaboration among agencies.

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- **Clarity of roles and responsibilities.**¹⁹ Our preliminary analysis shows that there was general clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the participants collaborating on CVE and CTF programs with the CT Bureau. For example, several State officials mentioned that for questions related to programs, such as CVE, they knew their point of contact in the CT Bureau and also what that person's portfolio encompassed.
 - **Resources.**²⁰ Our preliminary analysis indicates that, in cases where the CT Bureau funded U.S. government agencies on CVE or CTF programming, the funding mechanism was clear and laid out in the interagency agreements. Some agency officials told us that these agreements provide a standard process for providing funding from the CT Bureau to other agencies.
 - **Written guidance and agreements.**²¹ Our preliminary analysis shows that many of the agencies we spoke with had formal interagency agreements with the CT Bureau on CVE- or CTF-related programming or activities. The agreements described, among other things, the service to be provided, roles and responsibilities of each party, method and frequency of performance reporting, and accounting information for funding of the service provided. We found that most of the State bureaus we spoke with that coordinate with the CT Bureau on CVE and CTF programs did not have written agreements laying out the terms of the collaboration, but several State officials said that formalized agreements were not necessary because collaboration between bureaus within State is routine and the CT Bureau has been effective in sharing information pertaining to the CVE program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to assist with the oversight of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism. Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Keating, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared

¹⁹[GAO-12-1022](#). Discussing and documenting roles and responsibilities of collaborating participants can help with interagency decision making.

²⁰[GAO-12-1022](#). Identifying and leveraging resources can help ensure that the objectives of collaborative efforts can be accomplished.

²¹[GAO-12-1022](#). Establishing agreements can define and strengthen commitments by agencies to work collaboratively.

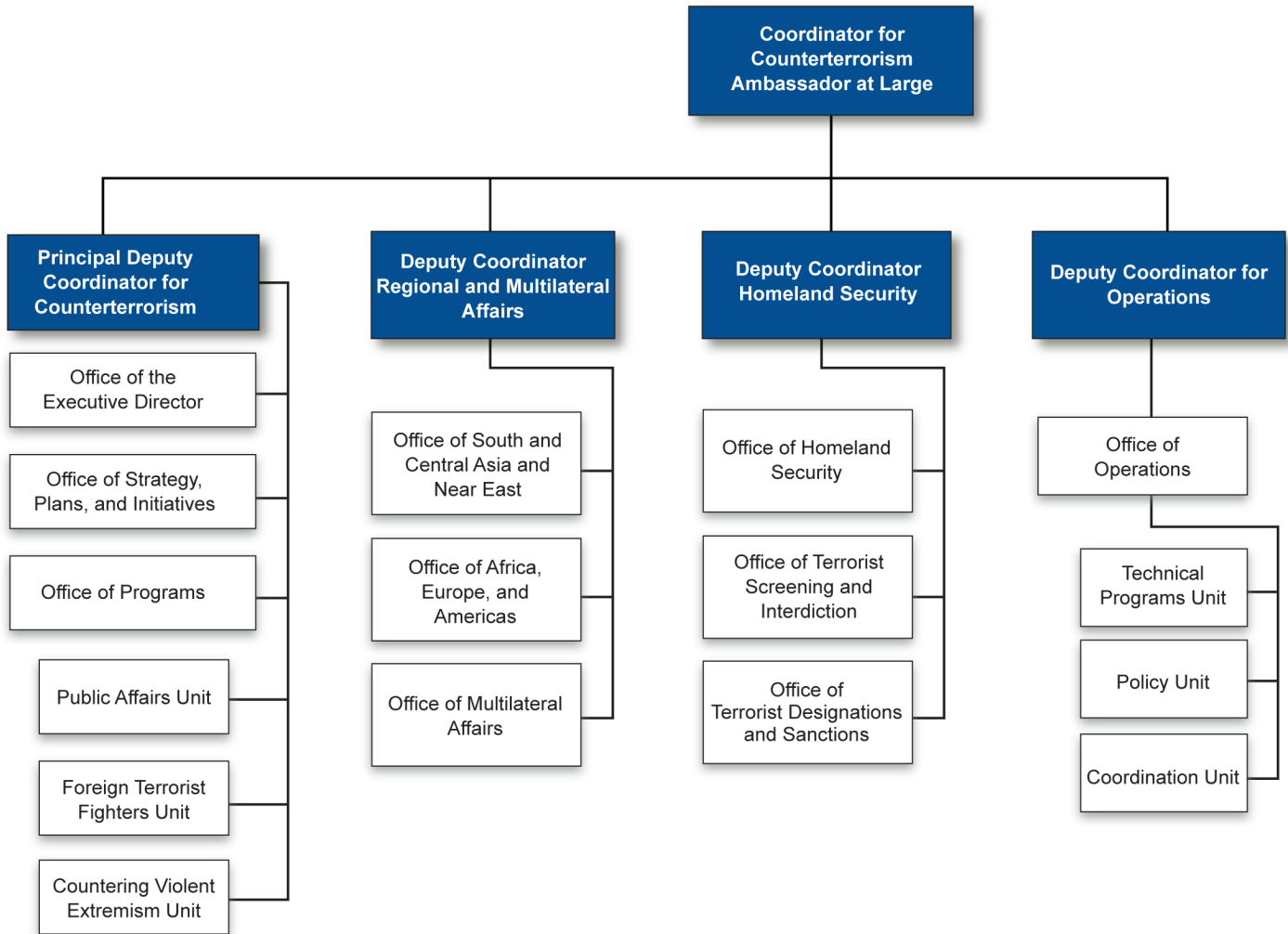
statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For further information regarding this statement, please contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., Director, International Affairs and Trade at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony included Jason Bair, Assistant Director; Andrea Riba Miller, Analyst-in Charge; and Esther Toledo. Technical support was provided by Ashley Alley, Mason Calhoun, Tina Cheng, David Dayton, Martin De Alteriis, and Sarah Veale.

Appendix I: Organizational Chart of the Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism, as of May 2015

Bureau of Counterterrorism Proposed Organizational Chart, May 2015



Source: Department of State. | GAO-15-655T

Note: According to Bureau of Counterterrorism officials, the bureau's final structure is pending until it has been approved by Department of State's management and incorporated into the department's Foreign Affairs Manual.

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