

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-771](#), a report to the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Drug trafficking organizations and gangs have expanded in Central America, threatening the security of these countries and the United States. Since 2008, the U.S. government has helped Central America and Mexico respond to these threats and in 2010 established CARSI solely to assist Central America. CARSI's goals are to create safe streets, disrupt criminals and contraband, support capable governments, and increase state presence and cooperation among CARSI partners. GAO reported on CARSI funding in January 2013 and was asked to further review CARSI and related activities in Central America.

This report (1) provides an updated assessment of U.S. agencies' funding and activities that support CARSI goals; (2) examines whether U.S. agencies took steps to consider partner country needs, absorptive capacities, and U.S. and non-U.S. investments when selecting CARSI activities; and (3) examines information on the extent to which U.S. agencies reported CARSI results and evaluated CARSI activities. GAO analyzed CARSI and complementary non-CARSI funding; reviewed documents on CARSI activities, partner country needs, and CARSI results; interviewed U.S. agency officials about CARSI and related activities; and observed CARSI activities in three countries.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State and USAID work with other agencies to assess progress in achieving the objectives of the interagency strategy for Central America. State and USAID concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-13-771](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or JohnsonCM@gao.gov.

September 2013

CENTRAL AMERICA

U.S. Agencies Considered Various Factors in Funding Security Activities, but Need to Assess Progress in Achieving Interagency Objectives

What GAO Found

Since fiscal year 2008, U.S. agencies allocated over \$1.2 billion in funding for Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) activities and non-CARSI funding that supports CARSI goals. As of June 1, 2013, the Department of State (State) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) obligated at least \$463 million of the close to \$495 million in allocated funding for CARSI activities, and disbursed at least \$189 million to provide partner countries with equipment, technical assistance, and training to improve interdiction and disrupt criminal networks. Moreover, as of March 31, 2013, U.S. agencies estimated that they had allocated approximately \$708 million in non-CARSI funding that supports CARSI goals, but data on disbursements were not readily available. U.S. agencies, including State, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Justice, use this funding to provide equipment, technical assistance, and training, as well as infrastructure and investigation assistance to partner countries. For example, DOD allocated \$25 million in funding to help Guatemala establish an interagency border unit to combat drug trafficking.

State and USAID took a variety of steps—using assessment reports, outreach meetings with host governments and other donors, and interagency meetings—to help identify and consider partner countries' needs, absorptive capacities, and related U.S. and non-U.S. investments when selecting CARSI activities. For example, State used an assessment report on crime scene investigation and forensic programs and capacities of six partner countries to inform decisions on selecting CARSI activities. In addition, USAID officials used assessment reports to help identify and consider partner country juvenile justice and community policing needs and absorptive capacities; these assessment reports included specific recommendations for designing and selecting juvenile justice and community policing projects in partner countries. Also, in one partner country, embassy officials used donor outreach meetings to identify another donor's significant investment in police intelligence in the partner country; the embassy consequently reduced funding for CARSI activities in that area.

While U.S. agencies have reported on some CARSI results, they have not assessed progress in meeting interagency objectives for Central America. State and USAID have reported some CARSI results through various mechanisms at the initiative, country, and project levels. For example, one embassy reported that its CARSI-supported anti-gang education project had expanded nationwide and taught over 3,000 children over 3 years of the program. However, U.S. agencies have not assessed their performance using the metrics outlined in a 2012 interagency strategy for Central America that were designed to measure the results of CARSI and related non-CARSI activities. GAO recognizes that collecting performance data may be challenging and that the metrics could require some adjustments. Nevertheless, assessing progress toward achieving the strategy's objectives could help guide U.S. agencies' decisions about their activities and identify areas for improvement. In addition to ongoing assessments of progress, GAO has concluded in prior work that evaluations are important to obtain more in-depth information on programs' performance and context. USAID is conducting an evaluation of its CARSI crime prevention programming to be completed in 2014. State officials said that they are planning to conduct an evaluation of some of their CARSI activities beginning in fiscal year 2014.