

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. personnel engaged in efforts overseas have faced numerous threats to their security. To mitigate these threats and prepare U.S. personnel for work in high-threat environments, State established a mandatory requirement that specified U.S. executive branch personnel under chief-of-mission authority and on assignments or short-term TDY complete FACT security training before arrival in a high-threat environment. This report examines (1) State and USAID personnel's compliance with the FACT training requirement and (2) State's and USAID's oversight of their personnel's compliance. GAO reviewed agencies' policy guidance; analyzed State and USAID personnel data from March 2013 and training data for 2008 through 2013; reviewed agency documents; and interviewed agency officials in Washington, D.C., and at various overseas locations. This public version of a February 2014 sensitive report excludes information that State has deemed sensitive.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making several recommendations to improve oversight of compliance with the FACT training requirement. These include identifying a mechanism to readily determine the universe of U.S. personnel subject to the requirement, updating State's policy manual to reflect changes made to the requirement in June 2013, consistently verifying that all U.S. civilian personnel have completed FACT training before arriving in designated high-threat countries, and monitoring compliance with the requirement. State concurred with the recommendations and stated that it will take steps to address them. USAID did not specifically agree or disagree but noted it plans to take additional steps.

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COUNTERING OVERSEAS THREATS

Gaps in State Department Management of Security Training May Increase Risk to U.S. Personnel

What GAO Found

Using data from multiple sources, GAO determined that 675 of 708 Department of State (State) personnel and all 143 U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) personnel on assignments longer than 6 months (assigned personnel) in the designated high-threat countries on March 31, 2013, were in compliance with the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) training requirement. GAO found that the remaining 33 State assigned personnel on such assignments had not complied with the mandatory requirement. For State and USAID personnel on temporary duty of 6 months or less (short-term TDY personnel), GAO was unable to assess compliance because of gaps in State's data. State does not systematically maintain data on the universe of U.S. personnel on short-term TDY status to designated high-threat countries who were required to complete FACT training. This is because State lacks a mechanism for identifying those who are subject to the training requirement. These data gaps prevent State or an independent reviewer from assessing compliance with the FACT training requirement among short-term TDY personnel. According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, program managers need operating information to determine whether they are meeting compliance requirements.

State's guidance and management oversight of personnel's compliance with the FACT training requirement have weaknesses that limit State's ability to ensure that personnel are prepared for service in designated high-threat countries. These weaknesses include the following:

- State's policy and guidance related to FACT training—including its *Foreign Affairs Manual*, eCountry Clearance instructions for short-term TDY personnel, and guidance on the required frequency of FACT training—are outdated, inconsistent, or unclear. For example, although State informed other agencies of June 2013 policy changes to the FACT training requirement, State had not yet updated its *Foreign Affairs Manual* to reflect those changes as of January 2014. The changes included an increase in the number of high-threat countries requiring FACT training from 9 to 18.
- State and USAID do not consistently verify that U.S. personnel complete FACT training before arriving in designated high-threat countries. For example, State does not verify compliance for 4 of the 9 countries for which it required FACT training before June 2013.
- State does not monitor or evaluate overall levels of compliance with the FACT training requirement.

State's *Foreign Affairs Manual* notes that it is the responsibility of employees to ensure their own compliance with the FACT training requirement. However, the manual and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* also note that management is responsible for putting in place adequate controls to help ensure that agency directives are carried out. The gaps in State oversight may increase the risk that personnel assigned to high-threat countries do not complete FACT training, potentially placing their own and others' safety in jeopardy.