

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106863](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Acts of international state sponsored terrorism resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of people. In 2015, the Justice for U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Act established the U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund. The Fund provides compensation to certain U.S. persons injured in acts of state sponsored terrorism. The Fund did not authorize a round of payments in January 2024 due to insufficient funds. The Fund's balance at the end of fiscal year 2023 was down to \$281 million.

The 2022 Fairness for 9/11 Families Act includes a provision for GAO to evaluate three specific options for increasing deposits to the Fund, including the impact of these options. This report addresses the potential effects of, among other things, (1) increasing the percentage of civil penalties and fines that are currently deposited to the Fund under existing statutes from 75 percent to 100 percent; (2) expanding the scope of the criminal offenses for which funds are deposited in the Fund; and (3) expanding the type of the civil penalties or fines for which funds are deposited in the Fund.

GAO reviewed Department of Justice and Treasury reports and analyzed data on all prior and current sources of deposits into the Fund from criminal and civil penalties and fines. GAO also conducted a literature review of funding mechanisms used by other government trust funds, and interviewed agency officials and representatives from groups representing or advocating for victims of state-sponsored terrorism.

View [GAO-24-106863](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or mcnelt@gao.gov.

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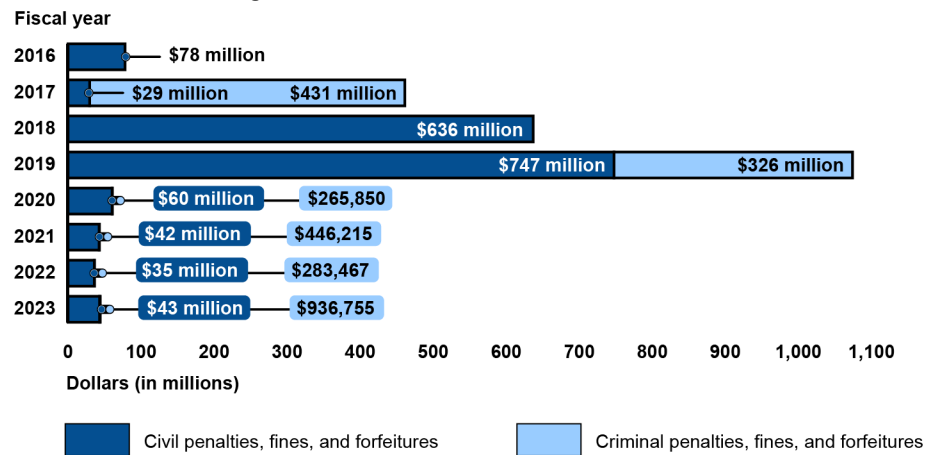
U.S. VICTIMS OF STATE SPONSORED TERRORISM FUND

Options for Increasing Deposits and Their Potential Impacts

What GAO Found

The U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund (Fund) was created in 2015 to provide compensation to certain U.S. persons injured in acts of state sponsored terrorism. It is financed through the collection of certain criminal or civil penalties, fines, and proceeds from asset forfeitures. From fiscal years 2016 through 2023, the Fund received deposits of about \$3.4 billion, including \$2.4 billion from civil and criminal receipts. Since 2020, the Fund has experienced a declining balance mostly attributable to lower deposits from civil and criminal penalties, fines and forfeitures.

Civil and Criminal Case Deposits to the U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Fund, Fiscal Years 2016 through 2023



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Justice data. | GAO-24-106863

GAO evaluated the three options for increasing deposits to the Fund, as identified in the 2022 Fairness for 9/11 Families Act, and identified potential impacts associated with each option. Specifically:

- **Increase percentage of civil fines and penalties deposited from 75 to 100 percent:** Using Department of Justice data from 2016 to 2023, GAO estimated this option would likely increase the annual amount deposited to the Fund in future years by about \$17 million, with a range of \$13 to \$23 million.
- **Expand scope of criminal offenses:** GAO found this option would result in an increase in deposits to the Fund. However, the change could adversely impact other funds and programs such as the Department of Justice's Assets Forfeiture Fund.
- **Expand type of civil penalties or fines:** GAO found this option may result in an increase in deposits to the Fund. For example, deposits may increase if applicable civil penalties were expanded to include providing material support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization. However, the change would result in an inconsistency in the types of covered actions for which penalties are deposited and the claimants eligible for the Fund.