



Highlights of [GAO-10-291](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

The illicit drug trade remains a challenge to the overall U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. Afghanistan produces over 90 percent of the world's opium, which competes with the country's licit agriculture industry, provides funds to insurgents, and fuels corruption in Afghanistan. Since 2005, the United States has allotted over \$2 billion to stem the production, consumption, and trafficking of illicit drugs while building the Afghan government's capacity to conduct counter narcotics activities on its own.

In this report, GAO (1) examines how the U.S. counter narcotics strategy in Afghanistan has changed; (2) assesses progress made and challenges faced within the elimination/eradication, interdiction, justice reform, public information, and drug demand reduction program areas; and (3) assesses U.S. agencies' monitoring and evaluation efforts. To address these objectives, GAO obtained pertinent program documents and interviewed relevant U.S. and Afghan officials. GAO has prepared this report under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making several recommendations to State and Defense to improve performance measurement of U.S. counter narcotics programs and evaluate justice reform efforts. State and Defense generally concurred with our recommendations.

[View GAO-10-291](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

AFGHANISTAN DRUG CONTROL

Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported, but Interim Performance Targets and Evaluation of Justice Reform Efforts Needed

What GAO Found

The U.S. counter narcotics strategy has changed emphasis across program areas over time to align with the overarching counterinsurgency campaign. The 2005 U.S. counter narcotics strategy focused on five program areas: elimination/eradication, interdiction, justice reform, public information, and alternative livelihoods. Since then, U.S. Department of Defense (Defense) policy and rules of engagement were changed to allow greater military involvement in Afghanistan counter narcotics efforts due to the ties between traffickers and insurgents. Furthermore, the U.S. counter narcotics strategy has shifted to align more closely with counterinsurgency efforts by de-emphasizing eradication, focusing more on interdiction efforts, and increasing agricultural assistance.

The United States' use of total poppy cultivation as a primary measure of overall counter narcotics success has limitations in that it does not capture all aspects of U.S. counter narcotics efforts. In recognition of this, the administration is attempting to develop measures that better capture overall counter narcotics success. U.S. agencies have reported progress within counter narcotics program areas, but GAO was unable to fully assess the extent of progress due to a lack of performance measures and interim performance targets to measure Afghan capacity, which are a best practice for performance management. For example, although Defense is training Afghan pilots to fly interdiction missions on their own, this program lacks interim performance targets to judge incremental progress. Furthermore, a lack of security, political will, and Afghan government capacity have challenged some counter narcotics efforts. For example, eradication and public information efforts have been constrained by poor security, particularly in insurgency-dominated provinces. In addition, other challenges affect specific program areas. For example, drug abuse and addiction are prevalent among the Afghan National Police.

Monitoring and evaluation are key components of effective program management. Monitoring is essential to ensuring that programs are implemented as intended, and routine evaluation helps program managers make judgments, improve effectiveness, and inform decisions about current and future programming. U.S. agencies in all counter narcotics areas have monitored program progress through direct U.S. agency oversight, contractor reporting, and/or third-party verification. For example, eradication figures were routinely reported by U.S. Department of State (State) officials and contractors, and verified by United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime monitors. U.S. agencies also conducted and documented program evaluations to improve effectiveness in the elimination/eradication, interdiction, and public information program areas. However, State has not formally documented evaluations of its justice reform program.