



Highlights of [GAO-09-883](#), a report to congressional requesters

COMBATING TERRORISM

U.S. Agencies Report Progress Countering Terrorism and Its Financing in Saudi Arabia, but Continued Focus on Counter Terrorism Financing Efforts Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government considers the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a vital partner in combating terrorism. The strong diplomatic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, founded more than 70 years ago, was strained by the Al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001, that were carried out in large part by Saudi nationals and killed thousands of U.S. citizens.

GAO was asked to report on (1) the U.S. government strategy to collaborate with and assist the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to counter terrorism and terrorism financing, and (2) U.S. government agencies' assessment of and the Saudi government's views on progress toward the goals of this strategy. GAO analyzed relevant U.S. and Saudi strategy, planning, and evaluation documents related to efforts since 2005, and discussed these efforts with subject matter experts and U.S. and Saudi officials in Washington, D.C., and Riyadh and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

GAO submitted a copy of this report to intelligence agencies, the National Security Council, and the Departments of Defense, Energy, Homeland Security, Justice, State, and Treasury for their review and comment.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the Secretary of State direct the U.S. mission in Saudi Arabia to reinstate certain targets related to preventing financing of terrorism outside of Saudi Arabia. State agreed with this recommendation.

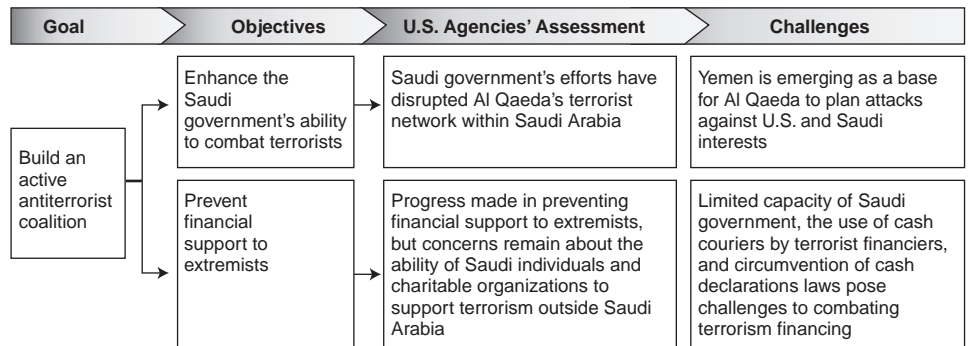
View [GAO-09-883](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Zina D. Merritt at (202) 512-5257 or merrittz@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The U.S. government strategy to collaborate with Saudi Arabia on counterterrorism utilizes existing diplomatic and security-related efforts to create an active antiterrorism coalition by enhancing the Saudi government's ability to combat terrorists and prevent financial support to extremists. These objectives are contained in Department of State's (State) Mission Strategic Plans (MSP) for Saudi Arabia for fiscal years 2006 through 2009, and also reflected in a January 2008 report from State to the Congress on its strategy for Saudi Arabia. The MSPs include performance targets to measure progress on efforts to combat terrorism and its financing, such as providing security training to the Saudi government, strengthening Saudi financial institutions, and implementation of relevant Saudi regulations.

U.S. and Saudi officials report progress on countering terrorism and its financing within Saudi Arabia, but noted challenges, particularly in preventing alleged funding for terrorism and violent extremism outside of Saudi Arabia. In April 2009, State assessed progress related to its goal of building an active U.S.-Saudi antiterrorist coalition as "on target." U.S. and Saudi officials report progress in enhancing the Saudi government's ability to combat terrorists, and note the Saudi government's efforts have disrupted Al Qaeda's terrorist network within Saudi Arabia. However, these officials noted Saudi Arabia's neighbor, Yemen, is emerging as a base from which Al Qaeda terrorists can launch attacks against U.S. and Saudi interests. U.S. and Saudi officials also report progress on efforts to prevent financial support to extremists, citing, for example, the Saudi government's regulations on sending charitable contributions overseas, and the arrest and prosecution of individuals providing support for terrorism. However, U.S. officials remain concerned about the ability of Saudi individuals and charitable organizations to support terrorism outside of Saudi Arabia, and noted limited Saudi enforcement capacity and terrorists' use of cash couriers as challenges. Despite these concerns, some performance targets related to countering terrorism financing were removed from State's current MSP. According to State officials, these changes were made either because a specific target was no longer considered feasible or because progress was made toward the target.

Goal, Objectives, Assessment, and Challenges of U.S. Collaboration with Saudi Arabia on Counterterrorism



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. agency information.