

Why GAO Did This Study

Denying safe haven to terrorists has been a key national security concern since 2002. Safe havens allow terrorists to train recruits and plan operations against the United States and its interests across the globe. As a result, Congress has required agencies to provide detailed information regarding U.S. efforts to address terrorist safe havens.

In this review, GAO assesses the extent to which (1) the Department of State (State) has identified and assessed terrorist safe havens in its *Country Reports on Terrorism* and (2) the U.S. government has identified efforts to deny terrorists safe haven consistent with reporting requirements. To address these objectives, GAO interviewed U.S. officials and analyzed national security strategies; State reporting; and country-level plans for the Philippines, Somalia, and Yemen.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends State and the National Security Council (NSC) improve reporting on assessments of and U.S. efforts to address terrorist safe havens. State concurred with our recommendation on assessments. State partially concurred with our recommendation on U.S. efforts to address terrorist safe havens, citing other reports it completes related to counterterrorism. However, the additional reports cited by State do not constitute a governmentwide list of U.S. efforts to address terrorist safe havens. The NSC reviewed our report but did not provide comments on its recommendations.

COMBATING TERRORISM

U.S. Government Should Improve Its Reporting on Terrorist Safe Havens

What GAO Found

State identifies existing terrorist safe havens in its annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* but does not assess them with the level of detail recommended by Congress. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) requires State to include in its annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* a detailed assessment of each foreign country used as a terrorist safe haven. It also recommends that State include, to the extent feasible, details in the report such as actions taken to address terrorist activities by countries whose territory is used as a safe haven. Since 2006, State has identified terrorist safe havens in its *Country Reports on Terrorism*. In August 2010, State identified 13 terrorist safe havens, including the southern Philippines, Somalia, and Yemen. However, none of the assessments in State's August 2010 report included information on one of the four elements recommended by Congress—the actions taken by countries identified as having terrorist safe havens to prevent trafficking in weapons of mass destruction through their territories. Also, about a quarter of the assessments in State's August 2010 *Country Reports on Terrorism* lacked information on another element recommended by Congress—the actions taken by countries identified as terrorist safe havens to cooperate with U.S. antiterrorism efforts. Including this information in State's reports could help better inform congressional oversight related to terrorist safe havens.

The U.S. government has not fully addressed reporting requirements to identify U.S. efforts to deny safe haven to terrorists. In IRTPA and the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2010, Congress required the President to submit reports identifying such efforts. State responded to IRTPA with a 2006 report and subsequent annual updates to its *Country Reports on Terrorism*. However, efforts identified in State's August 2010 report include only certain efforts funded by State and do not include some State and other U.S. government agency funded efforts, such as those of the Departments of Defense and Justice. For example, our discussions with agency officials and analysis of agency strategic documents identified at least 14 programs and activities not included in State's reporting that may contribute to denying terrorists safe haven in Yemen. According to officials from the National Security Staff, the National Security Council is responsible for producing the report required by the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2010. As of March 2011, the report, which was due in September 2010, was not completed. According to agency officials, compiling such a list is challenging because it is difficult to determine if a given activity addresses terrorist safe havens or contributes to different, though possibly related, foreign policy objectives. While we recognize this challenge, a more comprehensive list that includes the efforts of all relevant agencies could provide useful information to Congress to enhance oversight activities, such as assessing U.S. efforts toward the governmentwide goal of denying terrorists safe haven.