



August 2023

BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

DOD Should Assess Delivery Delays in Train and Equip Projects and Improve Evaluations

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106275](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD uses security cooperation programs, including those authorized by Section 333 of title 10 of the U.S. Code, to build the capacity and capability of partner nations to address various global threats. DOD is required to report to Congress on the status of its Section 333 projects and to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its security cooperation programs.

The FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act includes a provision for GAO to review Section 333 assistance. This report examines (1) DOD's allocation of funding for Section 333 assistance in FYs 2018 through 2022, (2) the extent to which DOD delivered Section 333 assistance to partner nations as scheduled, and (3) the findings of DOD evaluations of Section 333 projects as well as the extent to which the evaluations met criteria for evaluation quality.

GAO analyzed DOD data for Section 333 projects, reviewed DOD evaluation policies and other relevant documents, and compared six Section 333 project evaluations to criteria for quality. GAO also interviewed DOD officials and contractors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOD to improve the timeliness of its Section 333 project deliveries and the quality of its project evaluations. DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-106275](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or kenneyc@gao.gov

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DOD Should Assess Delivery Delays in Train and Equip Projects and Improve Evaluations

What GAO Found

In fiscal years (FY) 2018 through 2022, the Department of Defense (DOD) allocated nearly \$5.6 billion through Section 333—one of its largest security cooperation programs—to build the capacity of partner nations' national security forces to conduct certain operations. This funding supported projects intended to provide equipment, training, services, and construction activities to the security forces of at least 90 partner nations to address threats such as terrorism and narcotics trafficking. DOD allocated nearly 16 percent of this funding to projects in Lebanon and Jordan. In FYs 2019 through 2022, 77 percent of allocations supported projects related to maritime and border security operations and counterterrorism operations.

Examples of Assistance DOD Has Provided to Partner Nations through Section 333



Sources: U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (left), U.S. Embassy Dushanbe (center), U.S. Embassy Dili (right). | GAO-23-106275

DOD delivered most Section 333 project activities after the estimated dates but does not monitor aggregate timeliness and has not analyzed the causes of delays. GAO's analysis of DOD data found that as of the end of FY 2022, 75 percent of deliveries were delayed relative to DOD's estimated dates. DOD monitors individual deliveries' timeliness but has not established a performance measure, such as a targeted percentage, that would let it regularly assess aggregate timeliness. Also, DOD has not systematically identified and analyzed factors contributing to delivery delays. Setting a performance measure for aggregate timeliness and systematically analyzing factors causing delays would help DOD ensure effective corrective measures.

DOD's evaluations of six Section 333 projects it completed in FYs 2017 through 2022 showed mixed results, but these evaluations were not high quality. DOD evaluations showed that four of the six projects improved the capabilities of partner nations' security forces and two projects did not because of unsuitable or unreliable equipment. However, GAO's analysis of the extent to which the evaluations met criteria for quality found weaknesses in their design, implementation, and conclusions. For example, the basis of the evaluations' conclusions was generally unclear, because the evaluations did not explain how evidence had been collected or summarized. Improving the quality of Section 333 project evaluations would help DOD to understand whether its projects were effective and to apply lessons learned from the evaluations to the development of new projects.

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Abbreviations

AM&E	assessment, monitoring, and evaluation
DCI	data collection instrument
DOD	Department of Defense
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
OUSD-P	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Section 333	section 333 of title 10 of the U.S. Code

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August 29, 2023

Congressional Committees

A variety of challenges, including terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, threaten the security of the United States and of its allies. To build partner nations' capacity to address such threats, the U.S. government provides assistance through security cooperation programs—a key tool for achieving U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives.¹

Section 333 of title 10 of the U.S. Code (Section 333) authorizes the Department of Defense (DOD) to conduct or support a program or programs providing equipment and training to foreign partners' national security forces for the purpose of building their capacity to conduct specific operations.² The assistance authorized by Section 333 replaced multiple capacity-building programs,³ including the Global Train and Equip program,⁴ and constitutes one of DOD's largest security

¹*Security cooperation* refers broadly to Department of Defense interactions with foreign security establishments that build and develop allied and partner security capabilities and capacity for self-defense and multinational operations, provide the U.S. armed forces with access to the foreign country during peacetime or a contingency operation, and build relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests. Security cooperation includes activities such as the transfer of defense articles and services; military-to-military exercises; military education, training, and advising; and capacity building of partner security forces. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (Sept. 9, 2022).

²10 U.S.C. § 333.

³According to DOD, Section 333 replaced programs associated with the following four authorities: "Section 1204, Authority to Conduct Activities to Enhance the Capability of Foreign Countries to Respond to Incidents Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction," "Section 2282, Building Capacity of Foreign Security Forces," "Section 1033, DOD Assistance for Counter-Narcotics Activities by Certain Countries," and "Assistance to the Government of Jordan for Border Security Operations."

⁴The Global Train and Equip program was also known as the Section 1206 program, as it was originally authorized in section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006. See Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206, 119 Stat. 3136, 3456 (2006). The Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 authorized a permanent Global Train and Equip program codified at 10 U.S.C. § 2282, and the program was often referred to as Section 2282. See Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1205(a)(1), 128 Stat. 3292, 3533 (2014). The fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act repealed 10 U.S.C. § 2282 and replaced it with 10 U.S.C. § 333. Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1241, 130 Stat. 2000, 2497 (2016).

cooperation programs.⁵ In 2016 and 2018, we reviewed DOD efforts to build the capacity of its foreign partners to counter terrorism through the Global Train and Equip program.⁶

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 contains a provision for us to review security cooperation authorized by Section 333, including describing projects that DOD implemented using Section 333 authority—which this report refers to as Section 333 projects—and assessing DOD’s evaluations of such projects.⁷ In this report, we examine (1) DOD’s allocation of funding for Section 333 projects from 2018 through 2022, (2) the extent to which DOD delivered Section 333 assistance to partner nations as scheduled, and (3) the findings of DOD’s Section 333 project evaluations and the extent to which the evaluations met criteria for evaluation quality.⁸

To describe how DOD allocated funding for Section 333 projects from 2018 through 2022, we analyzed DOD funding data for such projects and identified DOD’s allocations of funding by combatant command, country, and operation type.⁹ To examine the extent to which DOD delivered

⁵Although the authorizing legislation uses “program” to refer to individual assistance efforts, this report generally uses “program” to refer to the entirety of assistance authorized by Section 333 and uses “project” to refer to individual assistance efforts as proposed, approved, implemented, and assessed.

⁶See GAO, *Counterterrorism: DOD Should Fully Address Security Assistance Planning Elements in Global Train and Equip Project Proposals*, [GAO-18-449](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2018); *Counterterrorism: DOD Should Enhance Management of and Reporting on Its Global Train and Equip Program*, [GAO-16-368](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 18, 2016). Additionally, in 2017, we examined DOD’s evaluations of the Global Train and Equip program as part of a broader review of the quality, cost, and dissemination of foreign assistance evaluations. See GAO, *Foreign Assistance: Agencies Can Improve the Quality and Dissemination of Program Evaluations*, [GAO-17-316](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2017).

⁷Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 1204, 135 Stat.1541, 1959 (2021), amending a prior reporting requirement in Pub. L. No. 113–291, § 1205(f), 128 Stat. 3292, 3537 (2014). This report addresses sections (2)(A)(i-iii), (2)(B), (2)(F), and (2)(G) of the mandate, which includes provisions for us to report on the objectives of Section 333 programs, types of units receiving assistance, delivery and completion schedules, effectiveness in achieving their intended purpose, and analysis of the methodology used to evaluate effectiveness, among other things. We are also conducting a review of other aspects of DOD’s Section 333 projects.

⁸In this report, all years cited are fiscal years (Oct. 1–Sept. 30) unless otherwise noted.

⁹We did not analyze data on operation types for Section 333 projects in 2018 because DOD officials said the data were incomplete, and they were in the process of updating them.

Section 333 assistance to partner nations as scheduled, we analyzed DOD data on delivery timeliness for Section 333 project activities in 2018 through 2022. We assessed the extent to which deliveries of project activities, specifically equipment, training, services, and small-scale construction, were ahead of schedule, on time, or delayed. We determined that Principles 10 and 13 of standards for internal control in the federal government were significant to this objective.¹⁰ To determine the reliability of DOD's data, we took steps such as comparing funding data with underlying sources and interviewing cognizant agency officials. We determined that all of the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review.

To describe the findings of DOD's Section 333 project evaluations and examine the extent to which the evaluations reflected criteria for high-quality evaluations, we reviewed DOD's evaluations of projects implemented from 2017 through 2022 and completed before December 2022. We analyzed the evaluations' conclusions about the projects' success and summarized the reasons for these conclusions. To determine the extent to which the project evaluations reflected quality criteria, we assessed the evaluations against criteria related to the appropriateness of the design, data collection methods, and analysis that are found in high-quality evaluations.¹¹ Two reviewers assessed and agreed on each evaluation as *generally*, *partially*, or *not at all* meeting each criterion. Further, we reviewed the project evaluations to determine whether they contained evaluation reporting elements specified by DOD instructions. We also reviewed DOD documentation related to the project evaluations. In addition, we reviewed DOD's strategic evaluations of security cooperation efforts during calendar years 2013 through 2020 that officials said broadly related to Section 333 (see app. I). For more information about our scope and methodology, see appendix II.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2022 to August 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for

¹⁰GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

¹¹We developed these criteria for a 2017 report that reviewed the quality of foreign assistance evaluations; we based the criteria on a review of federal, international, and evaluation organization guidance and on our prior reports. These criteria relate to evaluation design, implementation, and conclusions. Evaluations that generally meet these criteria can be considered high quality and can help agencies and stakeholders identify lessons learned to inform future projects. See [GAO-17-316](#).

our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Section 333 Authority to Build Foreign Security Forces' Capacity

Since 2006, DOD has used Section 333 or similar authorities to provide assistance intended to build the capacity of partner nations' national security forces to conduct a variety of operations (see text box).

Statutory Authorities for Programs to Build Partner Nations' Security Capacity since 2006

Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2006 authorized the Global Train and Equip program as a temporary program for building the capacity of foreign nations' military forces to conduct counterterrorism operations or to participate in, or support, military and stability operations with U.S. armed forces.^a According to guidelines from the Departments of Defense and State, which implemented the program, the Global Train and Equip program was to be distinct from other security assistance programs, in that its projects were to respond to urgent and emergent needs and not overlap with other train-and-equip programs, among other things.

Section 2282 of the Fiscal Year 2015 NDAA authorized the Global Train and Equip program as a permanent program to provide assistance to build partner nations' capacity to conduct counterterrorism operations or participate in coalition operations benefiting U.S. national security interests.^b

The Fiscal Year 2017 NDAA repealed section 2282 of title 10 of the U.S. Code and created section 333 of the same title, authorizing the Department of Defense to provide assistance to build partner nations' capacity to conduct various security-related operations.

Source: GAO analysis of legal statutes and Departments of Defense and State guidance. | GAO-23-106275

^aPub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206, 119 Stat. 3136, 3456 (2006). The Global Train and Equip program authorized by this section was also known as the Section 1206 program.

^bThe Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 authorized a permanent program codified at 10 U.S.C § 2282, and the program was often referred to as Section 2282. See Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1205(a)(1), 128 Stat. 3292, 3533 (2014).

Section 333 and subsequent amendments expanded the types of operations for which a partner nation could receive security cooperation assistance. Section 333 authorizes DOD to support capacity building for nine types of operations:

1. Counterterrorism
2. Counter-weapons of mass destruction
3. Counter-illicit drug trafficking
4. Counter-transnational organized crime

5. Maritime and border security
6. Military intelligence
7. Air domain awareness
8. Operations or activities that contribute to an existing international coalition operation that the Secretary of Defense determines to be in the national interest of the United States
9. Cyberspace security and defensive cyberspace

Under Section 333 authority, DOD has provided a variety of equipment, training, services, and small-scale construction activities to partner nations around the world. For example, a counter-illicit drug trafficking project provided intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment, such as sensors and radar, aircraft and related training. A cyberspace security and defensive cyberspace project provided communications and electronic equipment, such as networking switches, servers, desktop computers, and operator and maintenance training. Figure 1 shows examples of the types of support DOD has provided through Section 333 projects.¹²

Figure 1: Examples of Assistance DOD Has Provided to Partner Nations through Section 333 Projects



Sources: U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (left), U.S. Embassy Dushanbe (center), U.S. Embassy Dili (right). | GAO-23-106275

Section 333 projects have supported several types of civilian and military units.¹³ For example, projects have supported civilian defense units' efforts to counter weapons of mass destruction; national police units'

¹²DOD has also provided services through Section 333 projects, such as translation, logistical and field support, and technical services.

¹³We were unable to conduct a detailed analysis of the types of units receiving Section 333 assistance, because DOD data do not specify this information.

efforts to counter terrorism and illicit drug trafficking; and army, navy, and other military units' efforts to conduct a variety of security activities.

DOD Roles and Responsibilities for Section 333 Projects

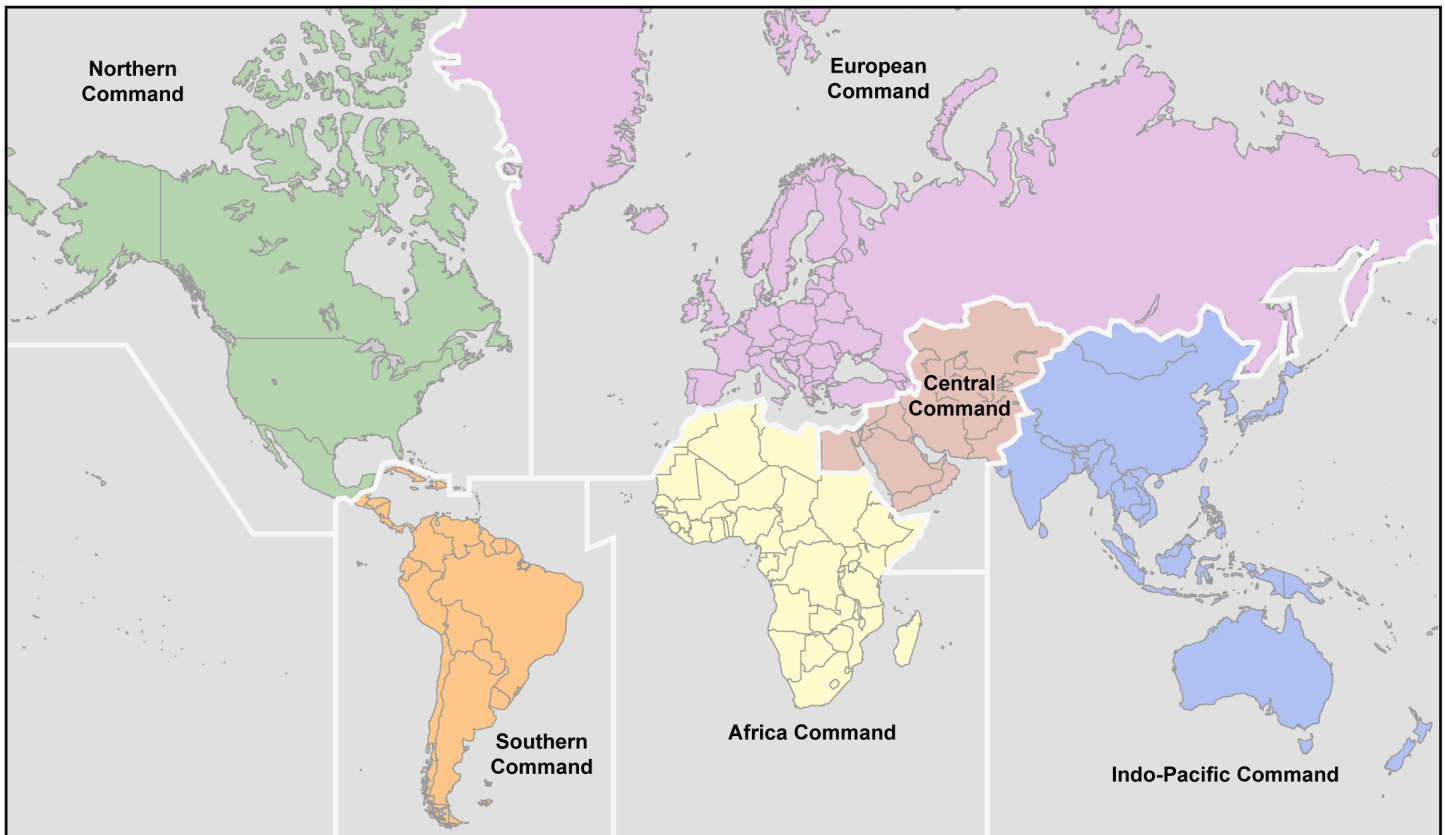
DOD's Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) is responsible for executing and administering, with guidance from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSDP), all DOD security cooperation programs and activities involving the provision of defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, loan, cash sale, or lease.¹⁴ Such programs and activities include those funded under Section 333 authority.

DOD's six geographic combatant commands are responsible for planning Section 333 activities and strategies for the regions and countries within their theaters of operations in accordance with the regional security goals and objectives outlined in their theater security cooperation plans. The combatant commands develop Section 333 project proposals and submit them to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff for approval. In addition, the combatant commands coordinate with partner nations and provide updates on the status of Section 333 projects to DSCA, according to DOD officials. Figure 2 shows DOD's six geographic combatant commands and their designated areas of responsibility.¹⁵

¹⁴10 U.S.C. § 382.

¹⁵Each of DOD's six geographic combatant commands has defined areas of responsibility and a distinct regional military focus. For example, the Africa Command is responsible for all the countries on the African continent except Egypt.

Figure 2: DOD's Geographic Combatant Commands and Areas of Responsibility



Source: Map Resources (map), GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-23-106275

DOD's implementing agencies, including the Army, Air Force, and Navy, are responsible for developing and implementing Section 333 projects. For example, the implementing agency prepares the security assistance agreement, procures equipment and services in accordance with DOD regulations, and oversees the transportation and delivery of equipment. The implementing agency is to share project plans, status, and changes with DSCA.

DOD Requirements to Notify Congress about Section 333 Projects

DOD is required to notify Congress of each project it intends to fund under Section 333 authority. DOD must submit a congressional notification for each project to the appropriate committees at least 15

days before initiating project activities.¹⁶ Each notification is to summarize project information such as the project's purpose; the amount and type of support to be provided; and the estimated cost, implementation timeline, and delivery schedule for the assistance provided. DOD may submit congressional renotifications for subsequent changes to projects, such as adjustments to scope or funding allocations.

In addition, DSCA is required to submit semiannual monitoring reports to appropriate congressional committees, providing information about the delivery and execution status, timeliness of delivery, and status of funds allocated for Section 333 projects in each recipient country.¹⁷

DOD Evaluation of Section 333 Projects

U.S. law requires DOD to maintain a program of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) for security cooperation programs and activities.¹⁸ In conducting this AM&E program, DOD must evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of security cooperation programs and activities in achieving desired outcomes.

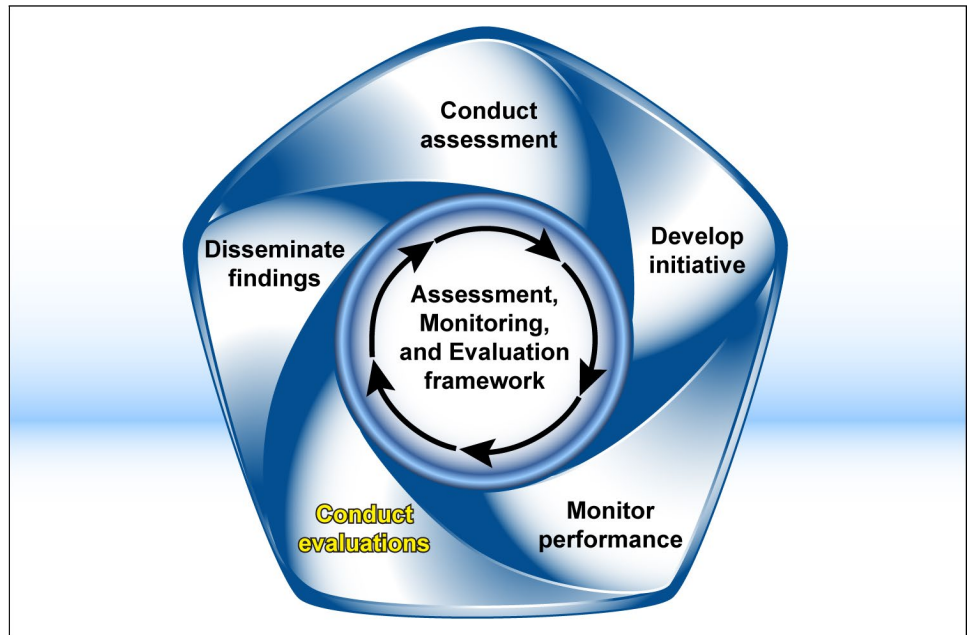
Evaluation is one component of a five-phase AM&E framework that DOD uses for its security cooperation planning and implementation cycle (see fig. 3). As the framework shows, DOD envisions that monitoring and evaluation of previous security cooperation projects will inform subsequent assessments of partner needs and security cooperation initiatives.

¹⁶DOD sends these notifications to the Senate Committees on Appropriations, Armed Services, and Foreign Relations and the House of Representatives Committees on Appropriations, Armed Services, and Foreign Affairs, in accordance with federal law. 10 U.S.C. § 301. According to DOD officials, although the department is not required by law to receive the committees' approval, as a matter of comity, DOD waits to receive the committees' approval before implementing a project. DOD officials noted that project implementation typically starts well after the required 15 days because project funding is rarely available before that time.

¹⁷Previously, 10 U.S.C. § 333 required DSCA to submit these monitoring reports on a quarterly basis, providing information for the preceding calendar quarter. The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 changed this requirement, requiring DOD to submit the reports on a semiannual basis and provide information for the preceding 180 days.

¹⁸10 U.S.C. § 383.

Figure 3: DOD's Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Framework



Source: GAO presentation of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-23-106275

A DOD instruction sets out the department's policy and responsibilities for AM&E of security cooperation plans, programs, and activities, including Section 333 projects.¹⁹ The instruction states that OUSD-P is responsible for oversight and management of security cooperation AM&E. Under OUSD-P's direction, DSCA is responsible for, among other things, adjusting policies, programs, and resource allocations as necessary to apply lessons and best practices learned from monitoring and evaluations.

DOD also has standards and guidelines for managing and conducting security cooperation evaluations.²⁰ DOD conducts two types of evaluations: (1) strategic evaluations, to measure the effectiveness of significant security cooperation initiatives, and (2) project evaluations, to

¹⁹Department of Defense, *Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*, DOD Instruction 5132.14.

²⁰Department of Defense, *Standards and Guidelines for Security Cooperation Independent and Self-Evaluation*.

assess particular projects.²¹ OUSD-P coordinates and facilitates the strategic evaluations, and DSCA is responsible for the project-level evaluations. DSCA also produces additional internal documents such as AM&E reports and other assessment and monitoring products for Section 333 projects.

DSCA's Section 333 project evaluations, known as post-activity evaluations, follow templates to assess the capabilities and performance of specific partner-nation units receiving assistance.²² Each evaluation focuses on support provided to a particular unit, usually as part of a broader initiative. DSCA manages these project evaluations, which independent contractors conduct.

The evaluations follow a similar structure to assess a unit's capabilities and performance before and after implementation of a Section 333 project. This assessment is based on the unit's operational effectiveness and training before and after receiving assistance. The evaluations also assess the extent to which five readiness factors, including individual specialty training and equipment readiness, affect the unit's capability and performance. Further, the evaluations look at 11 aspects of institutional capacity, such as command and control, intelligence, and resource management. Each evaluation template includes a section to list the equipment and training provided through the project as well as delivery dates and the overall estimated cost of the project.

DSCA officials said that they consider a number of factors when selecting Section 333 projects for evaluation, including the maturity of the project—that is, whether all equipment and training has been delivered and whether units have had time to internalize the training. Other considerations include the level of investment, the importance of the project in DOD's 5-year plan, and whether the contractor has other AM&E trips scheduled in the same country.

²¹DOD Instruction 5132.14 defines a significant security cooperation initiative as a series of activities, projects, and programs planned as a unified, multiyear effort to achieve a single desired outcome or set of related outcomes. Such initiatives usually involve multiple security cooperation tools and programs over multiple years to realize a country- or region-specific objective or functional objective. For more information about DOD's strategic evaluations and their findings and recommendations for Section 333 projects, see app. I.

²²DOD's AM&E contractor has developed 24 templates for Section 333 project evaluations. Each template is tailored to a particular partner-nation unit type and mission—for example, a land unit's counter-narcotics law enforcement capabilities and performance or a maritime unit's capabilities to perform surveillance operations.

DOD Allocated Nearly \$5.6 Billion in Funding for Section 333 Projects in 2018–2022

DOD Allocated Half of Funding for Section 333 Projects under Its European and Central Commands

From 2018 through 2022, DOD allocated nearly \$5.6 billion for Section 333 projects.²³ About half of this funding—approximately \$2.8 billion—was allocated for projects in the European Command’s and Central Command’s theaters of operation (see table 1), reflecting, according to DOD officials, the department’s strategic priorities.²⁴ The officials also noted that Section 333 replaced some authorities that had focused on certain regions or countries.²⁵

²³For the purposes of this report, the amounts that DOD allocated for Section 333 projects represent the projects’ estimated costs as notified to Congress, inclusive of any subsequent adjustments. DOD can fund Section 333 projects only from amounts that Congress authorized to be appropriated for a given fiscal year for department-wide operation and maintenance and that are available for DSCA for such programs and purposes. 10 U.S.C. § 333(g). Our analysis excludes projects that DOD data listed as canceled.

²⁴DOD lays out strategic priorities in guidance such as the National Defense Strategy, Guidance for Development of Alliances and Partnerships, and Defense Planning Guidance.

²⁵According to DOD, Section 333 replaced programs associated with the following four authorities: “Section 1204, Authority to Conduct Activities to Enhance the Capability of Foreign Countries to Respond to Incidents Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction,” “Section 2282, Building Capacity of Foreign Security Forces,” “Section 1033, DOD Assistance for Counter-Narcotics Activities by Certain Countries,” and “Assistance to the Government of Jordan for Border Security Operations.” See Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Programs Handbook, Fiscal Year 2022*, accessed April 27, 2023, <https://www.dscu.edu/documents/publications/security-cooperation-programs-handbook.pdf>.

Table 1: DOD Allocations for Section 333 Projects, by Geographic Combatant Command, 2018–2022

Dollars in millions

Geographic combatant command	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
European Command	392	261	297	249	388	1,588
Central Command	330	266	190	243	208	1,235
Africa Command	291	202	166	136	146	941
Indo-Pacific Command	119	183	196	168	227	894
Southern Command	139	94	110	108	124	574
Worldwide ^a	44	24	29	57	37	192
Northern Command	49	36	26	22	24	157
Total	1,363	1,066	1,014	983	1,153	5,580

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-23-106275

Notes: We used unrounded amounts to calculate the totals shown, which we rounded to the nearest dollar. Years shown are fiscal years. Amounts are shown according to the fiscal year in which DOD notified projects to Congress.

^a“Worldwide” refers to human rights training and transportation not pertaining to a single geographic combatant command that DOD implemented globally.

Proportionally, the Africa Command and Indo-Pacific Command saw the largest changes in shares of total allocations for Section 333 projects. Allocations for projects under the Africa Command decreased from 21 percent of total allocations for Section 333 projects in 2018 to 13 percent in 2022. During the same period, allocations for projects under the Indo-Pacific Command increased from 9 percent to 20 percent of the total allocations.

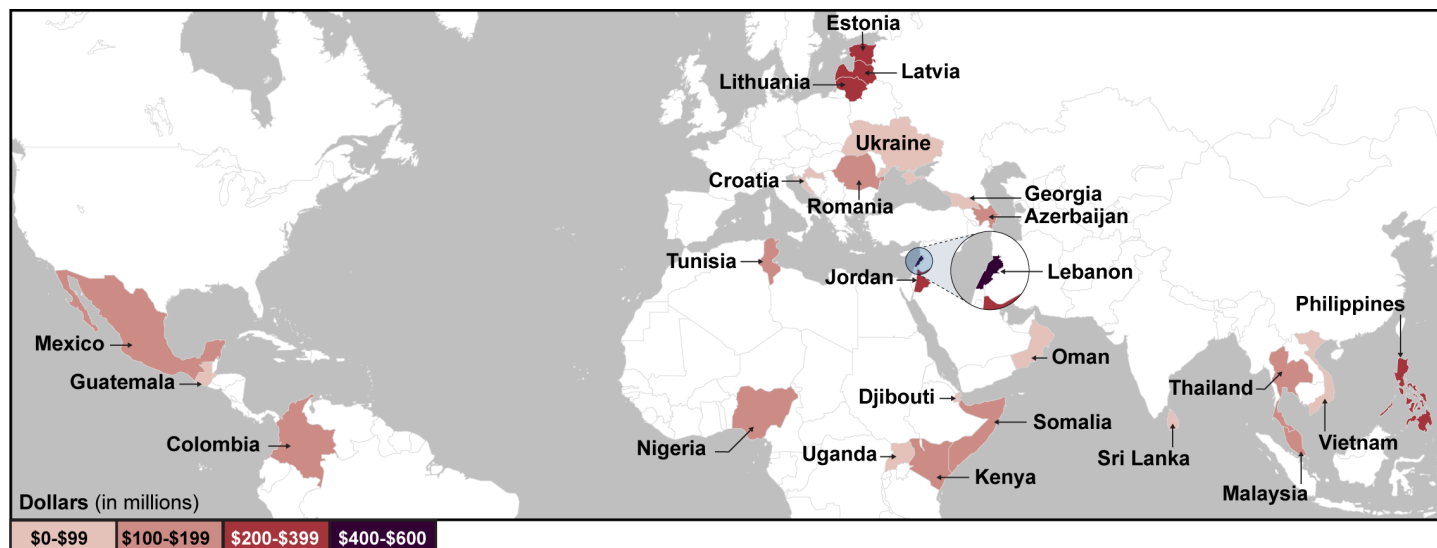
Over the 5 years from 2018 through 2022, DOD allocated funding for Section 333 projects in at least 90 countries. DOD allocated the largest amounts for projects in Lebanon and Jordan, which together accounted for nearly 16 percent of total allocations for Section 333 projects. Projects in Lebanon accounted for \$524 million, or more than 9 percent of the total allocations. Projects in Jordan accounted for \$358 million, or more than 6 percent of the total allocations. DOD officials said that the large share of allocations for projects in Lebanon and Jordan reflected DOD strategic and congressional priorities. Major Section 333 projects in Lebanon and Jordan included those related to close air support and air mobility enhancement.²⁶

²⁶Close air support is air action by aircraft against hostile targets that are in close proximity to friendly forces and that requires detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces.

By comparison, DOD allocated a total of about \$1.8 billion for related projects under the previous Global Train and Equip authority, Section 2282, in 46 countries in 2016 and 2017. Almost half of the funding allocated under Section 2282 supported projects in Lebanon and Jordan.²⁷

Figure 4 shows the 25 countries where DOD allocated the largest amounts of funding for Section 333 projects from 2018 through 2022. Collectively, allocations for projects in these countries accounted for about 70 percent of total funding.²⁸ After Lebanon and Jordan, the eight countries where DOD allocated the largest amounts for country-specific Section 333 projects are, in descending order, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Philippines, Tunisia, Colombia, Mexico, and Somalia. Total allocations for projects in each of these eight countries ranged between \$130 million and \$280 million.

Figure 4: Locations of Section 333 Projects That Received Largest Total DOD Allocations, 2018–2022



Source: GAO (analysis), Department of Defense (DOD) (data), Map Resources (map). | GAO-23-106275

Notes: The data shown identify the 25 countries where DOD allocated the largest amounts of funding for Section 333 projects. These projects, excluding those implemented in multiple countries, accounted for about 70 percent of total allocations.

²⁷DOD allocations of funding in 2016 and 2017 for Section 2282 projects in Lebanon and Jordan totaled \$856 million (47 percent). See [GAO-18-449](#).

²⁸This percentage does not include allocations for projects implemented in multiple countries.

Majority of Allocated Funding Supported Maritime and Border Security and Counterterrorism Operations

From 2019 through 2022, DOD allocated about \$3.1 billion—77 percent of total funding in those years—for Section 333 projects supporting maritime and border security operations and counterterrorism operations (see table 2).²⁹ During this period, projects supporting maritime and border security operations accounted for about \$2 billion (49 percent), and projects supporting counterterrorism operations accounted for \$1.1 billion (28 percent) of total allocations. From 2019 through 2022, allocations for maritime and border security projects increased from 37 percent to 62 percent of total annual allocations for Section 333 projects. Over the same period, allocations for counterterrorism projects decreased from 39 percent to 20 percent of total annual allocations. These trends reflected the largest changes in shares of allocations by operation type.

DOD officials said that the large share of allocations for projects supporting maritime and border security and counterterrorism operations reflected DOD strategic priorities. The officials also noted that Section 333 had replaced authorities that were previously used for these types of operations.³⁰ Examples of maritime and border security projects included the funding of maritime vehicles and equipment, communications and electronics equipment, maintenance support, small arms, and ammunition. Examples of counterterrorism projects included cooperation related to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; special operations forces training; and countering improvised explosive devices.

²⁹DOD uses a different system to track allocations by operation type than it uses to track allocations discussed in the prior section of this report. Data on allocations by operation type reflect estimated project costs of which DOD originally notified Congress, exclusive of subsequent adjustments, whereas data on allocations discussed in the prior section include adjustments. Furthermore, the amount of total funding discussed in the prior section includes allocations for human rights training and transportation, which DOD's data on allocations by operation type do not include. Finally, complete data on allocations by operation type were available only for 2019 through 2022. As a result, data on allocations and total funding discussed in this section are not directly comparable to data on allocations and total funding discussed in the prior section. According to DOD officials, DOD has categorized some projects by multiple operation types; however, the officials noted in February 2023 that they now categorize projects by single operation types.

³⁰From 2006 through 2014, DOD's Global Train and Equip program was authorized to build the capacity of foreign partners to counter terrorism. In 2015, Congress expanded this program to also build the capacity of foreign partners to participate in coalition operations benefiting U.S. national security interests. See Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206, and Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1205(a)(1).

Table 2: DOD Allocations for Section 333 Projects, by Operation Type, 2019–2022

Dollars in millions

Operation type	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Maritime and border security	412	515	432	612	1,970
Counterterrorism	440	259	248	193	1,141
Drug trafficking	86	126	76	49	337
Multiple ^a	77	59	71	15	221
International coalition	35	22	34	25	115
Counter–weapons of mass destruction	21	44	0	7	71
Counter–transnational organized crime	37	32	4	0 ^b	73
Air domain awareness	n/a	n/a	0	61	61
Military intelligence	15	0	18	7	41
Cyberspace security and defensive cyberspace	n/a	n/a	1	11	12

Legend: n/a = not applicable

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-23-106275

Notes: Data on allocations by operation type are not comparable to those in other sections of this report because of differences in DOD’s management of the data. Complete data on operation types were available only for 2019 through 2022.

We used unrounded amounts to calculate the totals shown, which we rounded to the nearest dollar.

In January 2021, an amendment to Section 333 added “Air domain awareness” and “Cyberspace security and defensive cyberspace” as new operation types. Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 1201, 134 Stat. 3388, 3908 (2021).

Years shown are fiscal years. Amounts are shown according to the fiscal year in which DOD notified projects to Congress.

^a“Multiple” refers to projects that DOD classified under more than one operation type.

^bDOD allocated about \$0.3 million for counter-transnational organized crime projects in 2022.

Most Section 333 Deliveries Were Delayed, but DOD Does Not Monitor Aggregate Timeliness and Has Not Analyzed Causes of Delays

Three-Quarters of Section 333 Deliveries Scheduled for 2018–2022 Were Delayed

Our analysis of DOD data showed that as of the end of 2022, three-quarters of the deliveries of Section 333 project activities scheduled for 2018 through 2022 were delayed relative to DOD’s congressionally notified delivery date estimates.³¹ DSCA officials said that they based estimated delivery dates on project timelines developed by implementing agencies and on congressionally mandated timeframes tied to the availability of funds for Section 333.³² DOD submits estimated project implementation timelines to congressional committees during the congressional notification process for Section 333 projects.

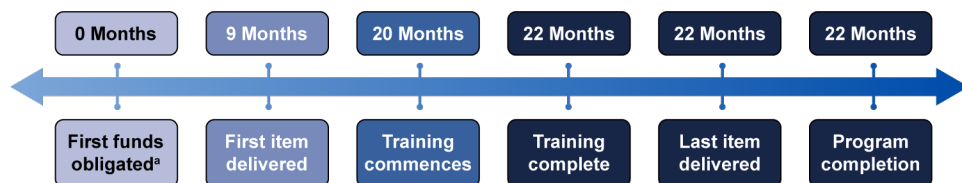
According to DSCA officials, implementing agencies develop these timelines—which are based on those of previous projects with similar scopes—during the project proposal phase. As figure 5 shows, the project timelines estimate the number of months needed to implement each project activity—such as delivery of equipment or training—following DOD’s first obligation of funding for the project. DSCA officials said that to estimate delivery dates for a project, they first estimate the date of DOD’s

³¹DOD officials noted that the data on Section 333 delivery timeliness reflect a point in time and are regularly updated through monitoring of ongoing deliveries. Deliveries are considered completed when all planned components (e.g., all articles and supplies comprising equipment) have been delivered. Delays included deliveries that were not completed as of the end of 2022. Our analysis excludes cancelled deliveries.

³²Section 333 provides cross-fiscal year authority, making funds available for projects that begin in a given fiscal year and conclude no later than the end of the second fiscal year. Under this authority, if equipment or training is delivered under a Section 333 project before the end of the fiscal year after the fiscal year in which the project begins, funding associated with the provision of certain assistance necessary to ensure that the recipient unit achieves full operational capability for such equipment or training may continue into the 2 full fiscal years after the partner country has received the equipment or training. DOD interprets “delivery” under this authority to mean delivery of the equipment to the U.S. government, not delivery to the partner country.

first obligation, typically by adding 6 months to the date when DOD notified Congress of the project. They then calculate delivery dates according to the project timeline DOD submitted to Congress.

Figure 5: Example of Section 333 Project Implementation Timelines Included in DOD’s Congressional Notifications



Source: GAO presentation of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-23-106275

^aAccording to DOD officials, DOD estimates that the first obligation of funds will occur approximately 6 months after the department notifies Congress of the project.

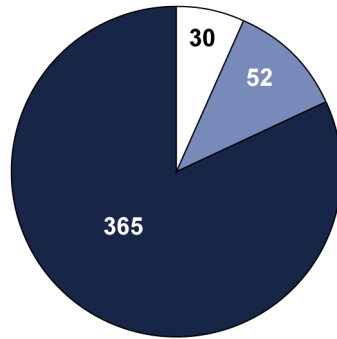
DSCA’s required monitoring reports to congressional committees include information about the timeliness of deliveries, relative to the estimated delivery dates, of Section 333 project activities. For each project, DSCA tracks the timeliness of deliveries—whether deliveries are ahead of time, on time, or delayed—for four types of activities: equipment, training, services, and small-scale construction.³³

Our analysis of data from DSCA’s monitoring report covering activities through 2022 showed that for activities with an estimated delivery date from 2018 through 2022, 11 percent of deliveries were completed ahead of time and 14 percent on time. However, 75 percent of deliveries were delayed. Specifically, 82 percent of equipment deliveries, 68 percent of training deliveries, 72 percent of services deliveries, and 95 percent of small-scale construction deliveries were delayed. Of equipment deliveries that were delayed and later completed during 2018 through 2022, nearly 55 percent were completed at least 1 year after the estimated delivery date. Figure 6 shows the timeliness of equipment, training, services, and construction deliveries during this period.

³³For the purposes of this report, “equipment” refers to what DOD calls defense articles and supplies.

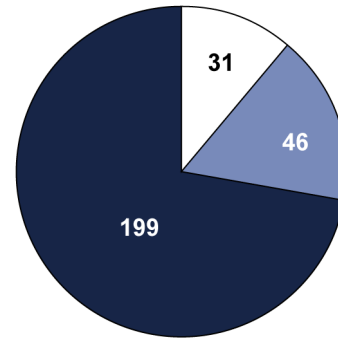
Figure 6: Timeliness of DOD Deliveries of Section 333 Project Activities with Estimated Delivery Dates in 2018–2022

Equipment deliveries



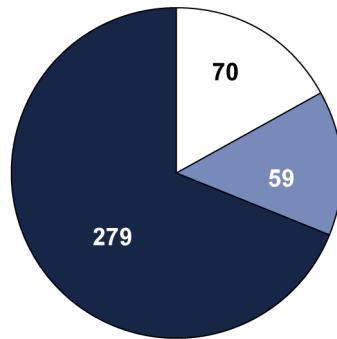
Total deliveries = 447

Services deliveries



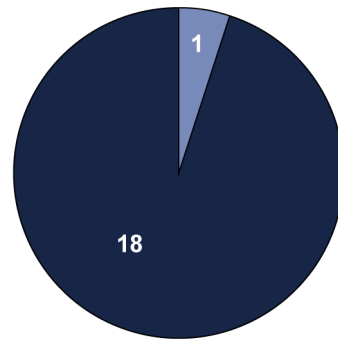
Total deliveries = 276

Training deliveries

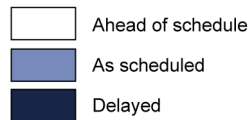


Total deliveries = 408

Construction deliveries



Total deliveries = 19



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-23-106275

Notes: “Construction” refers to small-scale construction activities.

Section 333 projects may involve any combination of the four types of activities shown; thus, the number of project activities is not equivalent to the number of projects DOD implemented during this period.

DOD data record delivery timeliness on the basis of delivery dates that DOD had previously estimated and reported to Congress.

Years shown are fiscal years.

DSCA Does Not Monitor Overall Delivery Timeliness and Has Not Analyzed Factors Contributing to Delays

DSCA Does Not Monitor Timeliness of Section 333 Deliveries at an Aggregate Level

When we shared the results of our analysis with DSCA officials, they told us that, although they monitor the timeliness of individual deliveries, they do not monitor delivery timeliness for Section 333 projects at an aggregate level. According to the officials, DSCA has not established a performance measure for aggregate timeliness, such as a percentage of activities to be delivered by the estimated dates.³⁴ Standards for internal control in the federal government state that management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks.³⁵ In doing so, management may conduct reviews at the functional or activity level to compare actual performance to planned or expected results. Management may also establish and review performance measures, such as targeted percentages or milestones indicating a level or degree of performance.

Delivery delays can limit the efficiency and effectiveness of security cooperation efforts. For example, DSCA officials said that equipment delivery delays have led to the cancellation of planned training for Section 333 projects because funding for the projects expired. In addition, a Section 333 project evaluation noted that some equipment deliveries were not completed because implementing agencies were unable to execute procurement contracts before funds expired. According to DOD and Department of State officials, the delivery speed of Section 333

³⁴We have previously reported on delays in delivering security cooperation equipment and services. In 2012, we reported that DSCA did not consistently measure delivery of security assistance against estimated delivery dates and did not have a delivery timeliness performance metric. As a result, DSCA could not assess delivery timeliness trends. In response to our recommendation, DOD established a performance metric for delivery of items purchased through the foreign military sales process, which included a standard for delivery of the first item within 180 days of implementing the security assistance agreement for at least 50 percent of an implementing agency's total projects. See [GAO-13-84](#). DOD later rescinded this metric because the 2018 NDAA required DOD to establish foreign military sales milestones and standard timelines, which noted that such milestones and timelines may vary depending on the complexity of the foreign military sale. Pub. L. No. 115-91, § 887, 131 Stat. 1283, 1506 (2017). In 2017, we recommended that DOD collect and analyze performance metric data on the delivery of equipment and services provided through foreign military sales. As of May 2023, DOD had not addressed these recommendations. See [GAO-17-703](#).

³⁵[GAO-14-704G](#), Principle 10.

DSCA Has Not Analyzed Factors Contributing to Delays

processes is a challenge that can negatively affect U.S. relations with partner nations.

Establishing a performance measure such as a targeted percentage for on-time deliveries for Section 333 projects would allow DSCA to regularly assess deliveries' aggregate timeliness. These assessments would enhance DSCA's ability to monitor its performance and could help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of security cooperation with partner nations.

DSCA has not systematically identified and analyzed factors contributing to delays in deliveries of Section 333 project activities. Standards for internal control in the federal government state that management should use quality information to achieve the entity's objectives, to make informed decisions, and to evaluate the entity's performance in achieving key objectives and addressing risks.³⁶

DSCA officials were aware that many Section 333 projects encountered delivery delays, but they were unable to substantiate the relative importance of various factors that contributed to delays. Officials attributed delivery delays to factors that included recent external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain shortages, and war in Ukraine.³⁷ However, our analysis showed that delivery delays were common before the external shocks that officials cited. For example, 75 percent of equipment deliveries with estimated delivery dates in 2018 through the end of the second quarter of 2020 (Mar. 31, 2020) were delayed. DSCA officials also said that internal issues throughout the process of planning and implementing projects may affect deliveries. For example, officials noted that timeframes for receiving congressional approval for projects may be longer than anticipated and the process for procuring equipment may be lengthy. Moreover, they said that many deliveries for Section 333 projects were delayed in relation to estimated delivery dates in part because the estimated dates were not realistic.³⁸

³⁶[GAO-14-704G](#), Principle 13.

³⁷We did not independently determine the factors that contributed to the delays.

³⁸DSCA officials said that, in their view, congressionally mandated timeframes do not facilitate realistic delivery timeframes given the lengthy procurement process for equipment. DSCA has submitted legislative proposals to extend mandated timeframes by an additional 2 years; however, officials noted that Congress has not enacted these proposals into law.

DSCA has not systematically identified and analyzed the factors contributing to delivery delays, because it does not consistently collect information about these factors from implementing agencies. DSCA officials said that they had not identified countries or types of equipment where delays may be more prevalent. They also said that they had limited awareness of factors contributing to delivery delays, because implementing agencies and other stakeholders manage the implementation and delivery process for individual projects.³⁹

DSCA has monitored delivery status for individual projects by discussing implementation progress through regular calls and annual performance reviews with combatant commands and implementing agencies. However, DSCA officials have not compiled information from these discussions and reviews to identify lessons learned about factors contributing to delivery delays. For example, DSCA officials noted that deliveries have been delayed when implementing agencies issued contracts substantially later than planned relative to DSCA's estimated date of first obligation.⁴⁰ Yet DSCA officials said that they did not know why implementing agencies took longer than planned to complete contracting and that they had not identified steps they could take to improve delivery date estimates.

DSCA officials noted that by the time they become aware of delivery delays, it is often too late to mitigate them. According to the officials, they could better understand and mitigate delivery delays through greater communication with implementing agencies. For example, officials could better understand which types of Section 333 projects are most challenging to provide within congressionally mandated timeframes. Working with implementing agencies to systematically identify and analyze the factors that contribute to delivery delays would strengthen DSCA's ability to mitigate and prevent these delays.

Further, using the results of this analysis to develop an action plan, in coordination with implementing agencies and other stakeholders, would help DSCA ensure that effective corrective measures are taken. Actions plans can help agencies articulate objectives and provide a roadmap for

³⁹Other stakeholders include entities that assist in implementing project activities, according to DSCA officials. For example, the officials noted that special operations forces and the Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism have provided training to partner nations through Section 333 projects.

⁴⁰According to DSCA officials, one aircraft delivery to a partner nation was delayed by 2 years, in part because the implementing agency did not award a contract for the aircraft until a year after the project's initiation.

how the agency plans to achieve progress.⁴¹ We have previously reported that an agency should develop an action plan that defines root causes and provides suggestive corrective measures, including steps necessary to implement solutions.⁴²

DOD's Section 333 Project Evaluations Showed Mixed Results but Were Not High Quality

Project Evaluations Found Mixed Results

Our review of DOD's six evaluations for Section 333 projects completed from 2017 through 2022 found that four of the six projects were successful in improving the partner nations' desired capabilities and two were not.⁴³ The six projects—implemented in Colombia, Jordan, Kosovo, Oman, and Tajikistan—aimed to improve the partner nations' capabilities to conduct border security, counterterrorism, and counter illicit drug trafficking operations.⁴⁴ All six projects provided equipment; in addition,

⁴¹GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

⁴²GAO, *Department of State: Integrated Action Plan Could Enhance Efforts to Reduce Persistent Overseas Foreign Service Vacancies*, [GAO-19-220](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2019).

⁴³We reviewed six evaluations that DOD completed and provided us before the end of December 2022 for Section 333 projects that it had implemented in 2017 through 2022. In July 2023, while reviewing a draft of this report, DOD provided three additional evaluations for projects it implemented in Jordan during this time period. Due to the timing, we were unable to include these additional evaluations in our formal review. However, a more limited review suggested that these evaluations appeared to be substantively equivalent to the six evaluations included in our review.

⁴⁴Allocations for these six projects ranged from about \$2.4 million to \$28.7 million and totaled approximately \$80 million combined.

four of the projects provided training,⁴⁵ two provided services, and one provided small-scale construction, specifically road paving.⁴⁶

The evaluations concluded that four of the six projects were successful in improving the partner nations' capabilities to conduct border security, counterterrorism, and counter-illicit drug trafficking operations. For example, one evaluation concluded that Humvees provided to a country's security forces strengthened their capability to traverse difficult terrain and transport equipment and thus to respond to crises and secure the border. An evaluation of support provided to a helicopter training center found the assistance improved the air force training squadron's capability to independently conduct flight, aircrew, and maintenance training and thus to conduct counter-illicit drug trafficking operations.

According to the evaluations, two of the six Section 333 projects failed to improve partner forces' intended capabilities as a result of unsuitable or unreliable equipment. DOD officials said that these equipment challenges reflected poor project design. Specifically:

- An evaluation of a \$7.6 million project found that a ground sensor system provided to a partner nation's border troops was not well suited to the environment and was not reliable. The system functioned for approximately 3 months before becoming inoperative because of factors such as insufficient battery life, damage to ground wiring by local fauna, and sensor failures in extreme temperatures.
- An evaluation of a \$12 million project found that mobile border-security-system trailers provided to a country's border brigade were unreliable. From 2019 through 2022, the trailers were operational for a total of approximately 3 months, according to the evaluation. The trailers were nonfunctional for extended periods, primarily because of problems with the electrical generators. The evaluation also noted that two of the trailers sustained damage in shipping and required extensive repairs. In addition, partner nation maintenance personnel

⁴⁵A fifth project was scheduled to provide training that was postponed and later cancelled. The evaluation did not explain the reason for the postponement or cancellation.

⁴⁶Some DOD security cooperation programs, including Section 333, are also required to provide human rights training. We recently reported on DOD's evaluation of this training. See GAO, *Security Assistance: DOD Should Improve Monitoring and Evaluation of Human Rights Training*, GAO-23-105701SU (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2023). DOD officials said that the training and equipment provided through Section 333 projects may be more sustainable when paired with institutional capacity-building. DOD can provide support for institutional capacity-building under Section 332 of title 10 of the U.S. Code and has reviewed this support in strategic evaluations. See app. I for more information.

were unable to independently maintain and repair the trailers, according to the evaluation.

DOD also conducts strategic evaluations of broader security cooperation initiatives that may include or be relevant to Section 333 projects. The eight strategic evaluations of security cooperation initiatives that we reviewed found these efforts were generally successful, although the evaluations noted some challenges.⁴⁷ For example, according to the evaluations, equipment provided as part of these efforts generally improved partner nations' capabilities, but some nations had difficulty maintaining the equipment. For more information about the findings of these strategic evaluations, see appendix I.

Project Evaluations Generally Did Not Meet Quality Criteria Reflecting International Best Practices

In general, the Section 333 project evaluations we reviewed did not meet criteria for assessing evaluation quality that reflect international best practices. Section 383 of title 10 requires DOD to, among other things, maintain a program of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation that includes evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of security cooperation programs and activities in achieving desired outcomes. Section 383 of title 10 also requires DOD to conduct these evaluations in accordance with international best practices. In addition, DOD's evaluation standards, guidelines, and instructions state that security cooperation evaluations should follow international best practices.⁴⁸

To determine international best practices for evaluation, we developed, for a previous report, criteria for assessing evaluation quality.⁴⁹ In preparing these criteria, we reviewed policies of federal agencies,

⁴⁷DOD provided eight strategic evaluations that were completed by December 2022 of security cooperation efforts implemented around the world from 2013 through 2020. DOD officials said these eight strategic evaluations broadly related to Section 333 or the Global Train and Equip program.

⁴⁸DOD's *Standards and Guidelines for Security Cooperation Independent and Self-Evaluation* state that the department's evaluations will adhere to U.S. government standards and international best practices for evaluation, such as those of the American Evaluation Association and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Similarly, DOD Instruction 5132.14, *Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise*, notes that evaluation standards will be based on the American Evaluation Association and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. While the instruction notes that evaluations will primarily be conducted at the strategic level, it also states that evaluations of other security cooperation activities may be conducted to improve performance or management and that these activity-level evaluations should generally follow the same standards.

⁴⁹See [GAO-17-316](#), p.9.

international organizations, evaluation organizations, and our previous reporting.⁵⁰

We found that DSCA's Section 333 project evaluations partially met six of seven quality criteria related to evaluations' (1) design, (2) implementation, and (3) conclusions and generally met one of the criteria (see table 3).⁵¹ Overall, we found limitations in the project evaluations' design, implementation, and conclusions, in part because they did not clearly link evidence, findings, and conclusions.⁵² Each of the evaluations assessed the capability and performance of a partner nation's security unit before and after a project's implementation. Each evaluation also considered how the unit's readiness and the partner nation's institutional support affected the unit's capability and performance.⁵³








⁵⁰These entities included the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and State; Millennium Challenge Corporation; U.S. Agency for International Development; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and American Evaluation Association.

⁵¹We examined DOD's project evaluations and did not assess supplemental or related AM&E documents or work papers. We did not assess the project evaluations against an eighth criterion—"Recommendations and lessons learned are justified by the available evidence"—because none of the evaluations included recommendations or lessons learned.

⁵²Our 2017 review of DOD's Global Train and Equip program evaluations from 2015 identified similar weaknesses related to the evaluations' design and implementation. We also found that the evaluations provided partial support for their conclusions. We recommended that DOD develop a plan to improve evaluation quality. See [GAO-17-316](#). In 2017 and 2018, DOD established an AM&E policy for security cooperation and increased staff dedicated to monitoring and evaluation.

⁵³Some evaluations reviewed more than one project that provided assistance to the same unit to build the same capacity. For example, the evaluation of support provided to a country's air force helicopter training center to improve counter-illicit drug trafficking operations assessed four consecutive projects. For the purposes of our review, we considered each evaluation as covering one project.

Table 3: Extent to Which DOD’s Six Section 333 Project Evaluations Met Our Criteria for Quality Related to Design, Implementation, and Conclusions

Design	
Evaluation questions align with project goals	
Performance indicators are appropriate for measuring progress against performance goals	
Evaluation design is appropriate for answering evaluation questions	
Implementation	
Target population and sampling method for the evaluation are appropriate to answer the evaluation questions	
Data collection is appropriate to answer the evaluation questions	
Data analysis is appropriate to answer the evaluation questions	
Conclusions	
Conclusions are supported by the available evidence	

Legend: ● = Generally met, ◐ = partially met.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) Section 333 project evaluations. | GAO-23-106275

Note: We developed these evaluation quality criteria for a 2017 review examining the quality of federal agencies’ foreign assistance evaluations. See GAO, *Foreign Assistance: Agencies Can Improve the Quality and Dissemination of Program Evaluations*, [GAO-17-316](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2017).

Evaluation design. The project evaluations partially met two of three criteria we used to assess the evaluations’ design—specifically, the alignment of evaluation questions with project goals and the appropriateness of the evaluation design to address these questions. The evaluations generally met the third criterion—the appropriateness of the evaluations’ performance indicators for measuring progress.

In particular, the Section 333 project evaluations did not include specific questions to assess a unit’s change in capability and performance, although they could be inferred.⁵⁴ For instance, the evaluations included descriptions of the elements used for the baseline and final assessments of a unit’s capability and performance. They rated the units on several

⁵⁴DSCA officials said that although evaluation questions are not explicitly stated in evaluations, they are included in DOD’s train-and-equip assessment handbook. The handbook notes that the evaluation should assess whether the unit improved its capability and performance to an identified higher standard after the project’s implementation and whether those improvements could be traced to the project. An appendix to the handbook includes a list of assessment questions to consider.

factors related to capability and performance, using a 5-level scale progressing from 1, the lowest level, to 5, the highest.⁵⁵ Each level included brief bullet points describing the skills required for a rating at that level.⁵⁶ However, without specific questions, evaluations may not be implemented appropriately, because evaluation questions help determine the evaluations' design and methods.

In general, the indicators of success included in the evaluations were appropriate for measuring progress toward the projects' goals. However, although the project evaluations listed indicators of success with some target metrics, information about these metrics was not included in the evaluations. Additionally, the links between the indicators and the evaluations' assessments and conclusions were not clear. For example, an evaluation of a counterterrorism project identified the establishment of an effective supply chain of spare parts for equipment within 6 months as an indicator of the project's success. However, the evaluation did not provide any information about whether the project met this target.

Evaluation implementation. The project evaluations partially met each of the three criteria we used to assess the evaluations' implementation—the appropriateness of the target population and sampling method, of the data collection, and of the data analysis. The evaluations did not clearly describe the scope and methodology used, and five of the six did not discuss the strengths and limitations of the data collection and analysis at all.

Although the evaluations identified appropriate target populations (i.e., the units that received assistance), none of the evaluations explicitly stated the methods used to select samples of these populations or of the assistance provided. Specifically, it was unclear how the evaluator selected personnel to interview and equipment to examine or test.⁵⁷ If an

⁵⁵According to DOD's train-and-equip assessment handbook, a unit rated at level 1 would typically have limited resources and personnel available and would struggle to perform basic tasks. A unit rated at level 5 would have a high portion of necessary resources and personnel and would be able to perform most of the advanced tasks for its missions and operate throughout its area of operations nearly continuously.

⁵⁶Officials from DSCA's contractor conducting Section 333 project evaluations said that to attain a certain level, a unit does not have to demonstrate every skill described; rather, the levels reflect a composite rating.

⁵⁷Although the evaluations did not include a description of the methodology, DOD's train-and-equip assessment handbook directs evaluators to conduct discussions with the unit's commanders, staffs, operators, and maintenance workers in an operational environment, not at the ministry of defense or interior or other headquarters. Evaluators are also to consult with U.S. personnel who have recently worked with the unit.

evaluation does not clearly describe how sampling was conducted, it may raise questions about the quality of the evidence, including concerns regarding selection bias in the choice of samples, the sufficiency of the sample size for the findings, and the relevance of the evaluation's findings and conclusions. Without clear reporting about the selection of respondents to interview or of equipment to observe, it is difficult to know whether the selections were justifiable and whether samples were selected in a way that supports the project's objectives and the evaluation's conclusions.

The project evaluations included lists of equipment provided, implying that the units received the equipment and that it was being used. In some cases, the evaluations indicated that the evaluators had directly assessed the equipment. However, in other cases, the extent to which evaluators tested the equipment or determined whether it was delivered as planned was unclear. Additionally, none of the project evaluations assessed training provided as part of the projects, including whether it was delivered to the units or personnel who were to receive it.

The evaluations' data sources included open-source information, secondary sources, site visits, interviews with key informants, and information about the delivery of the major items of equipment. However, the evaluations did not discuss data reliability or methods for analyzing data. For instance, the evaluations did not explain how evaluators summarized or analyzed testimonial evidence from key informant interviews or identify any validity concerns related to interviews with a nonrandom selection of informants. Limited descriptions of the methods used for data collection and analysis raise questions about the quality of evidence and results. In addition, the lack of clarity in the analysis makes it difficult for the reader to determine whether the findings from this project have broader applicability.

Evaluation conclusions. In general, the evaluations lacked information needed to support their conclusions. First, deficiencies in data collection and analysis affected the validity of the project evaluations' conclusions. For example, the basis of the evaluation team's numerical rating of a unit's capability and performance was unclear. The decisions appeared to be based on military experts' opinions and judgements, which were primarily based on interviews and observations.⁵⁸ However, without more information about the interview data and the criteria used in the

⁵⁸An official from DSCA's contractor conducting Section 333 project evaluations said that the evaluation team lead assigns a performance level that most accurately reflects the capabilities of the unit. The methodology used does not include a second reviewer check.

evaluators' direct observations, the strength of the conclusions is difficult to determine.

Second, in general, the evaluations did not describe how the assessments of a unit's capability, performance, and readiness, and the partner nation's institutional capacity contributed to the evaluations' conclusions about the overall assessment of the unit. In one case, it was not clear how the evaluators concluded that a project achieved its desired effect, given that the overall level of the unit's capability and performance did not change between the baseline and final assessments. That evaluation determined that a project to provide assistance to build the capacity of a partner nation's counterterrorism operations was successful even though the evaluators assessed the unit's capability and performance as level 3 both before and after the project's implementation.

Evaluations did not generally meet the criteria for high-quality evaluations in part because they did not include all elements specified by DOD instructions for evaluation reports.⁵⁹ Specifically, none of the evaluations explicitly included evaluation design elements such as the purpose of the evaluation; evaluation questions; or a description of the evaluation's data collection methods, scope, and methodology. They also did not include a discussion of the data's limitations. Additionally, none of the evaluations included recommendations, even when they identified deficiencies.

DSCA officials told us in January 2023 that, because the project evaluations are a legacy product from a preexisting AM&E contract, changing the expectations for the evaluations would be challenging. The

⁵⁹DOD Instruction 5132.14 states that security cooperation evaluations should include nine reporting elements: an executive summary; an introduction and background; a description of program or activity; the purpose of the evaluation; evaluation questions; a description of the evaluation design, including data collection methods, scope, and methodology; a statement about the time period when the evaluation work was performed, time spent in the field, who performed the work, and the composition of the team; strengths and limitations of the collected data; and appendices for additional documents, including the evaluation's scope of work or terms of reference. The instruction also states that the overall conclusions should be logical inferences based on findings for each evaluation question and that findings requiring corrective action should have recommendations.

officials added that they awarded a new AM&E contract in Spring 2023 that they anticipated would produce higher-quality project evaluations.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, according to DSCA officials, supplemental AM&E products contain some elements that we found the project evaluations lacked. For example:

- Section 333 monitoring and evaluation plans include status updates and general observations about the achievement of indicators of success.
- DOD's AM&E reports include a section describing Section 333 projects' effects, which may include recommendations.⁶¹ For example, an AM&E report related to one of the project evaluations concluded that a partner nation's security forces appeared capable of using and maintaining the equipment and capabilities provided by Section 333 projects and other U.S. support. However, the report noted that limited national resources posed a challenge to longer-term sustainability, and it recommended that future Section 333 projects focus on long-term sustainability of equipment.
- The AM&E reports also include appendices with overviews of the visit and its methodology, which, according to DSCA officials, includes the methodology used for the Section 333 project evaluations.

Officials said that they also had attempted to address the project evaluations' deficiencies by developing a recommendation tracker. In addition to facilitating action on recommendations, the tracker links findings and recommendations by including specific actions to address implementation challenges identified in various AM&E products. For example, in response to a finding that a partner nation's maintenance technicians did not have sufficient English language skills, DSCA

⁶⁰DOD's AM&E contract for Section 333 project evaluations will expire at the end of 2023. The performance work statement for the new contract requires the contractor to develop monitoring and evaluation plans with indicators to measure changes in outputs and outcomes. The new contract also requires the contractor to produce country program monitoring reports to evaluate the effectiveness of completed projects. According to DSCA, these reports will provide analyses of how partner-nation units' capabilities and performance have changed relative to baselines and will include recommendations for improving project design and implementation. Further, the new contract includes a quality assurance and surveillance plan that, according to DSCA officials, more closely aligns the research methodology requirements with DOD's AM&E policy and guidance.

⁶¹When DSCA's AM&E contractor visits a country, they produce a report to assess, monitor, and evaluate various Section 333 projects in different stages of implementation in that country. If the AM&E contractor evaluates a project during this AM&E visit, they will produce a separate project evaluation, according to DSCA officials.

recommended that the project use interpreters or trainers proficient in the native language.

Although DSCA officials said that supplemental AM&E products include some of the elements of high-quality evaluations, ensuring that the evaluations themselves contain these elements would increase their reliability and usefulness. Including the elements specified by DOD's evaluation instruction would help the evaluations meet international standards for evaluation quality, ensuring that the evaluations' design and implementation are appropriate for measuring progress, answering evaluation questions, and producing evidence needed to support conclusions. Better-quality project evaluations would improve DOD's institutional understanding and learning about the effectiveness of Section 333 projects. Better-quality evaluations would also enhance the department's ability to apply lessons learned and best practices in designing similar projects and making resource decisions.

Conclusions

As one of DOD's largest security cooperation programs, Section 333 is an important tool for helping to build partner nations' capacity and capability to address global threats. However, we have identified persistent issues with the timeliness of deliveries and evaluations of progress in meeting the program's goals.

Although DOD data showed deliveries for three-quarters of Section 333 project activities scheduled for 2018 through 2022 were delayed, DSCA has not taken action to understand or address the delays at a programmatic level. Specifically, although DSCA monitors individual deliveries' timeliness, it lacks a performance measure that would allow it to regularly assess and monitor aggregate delivery timeliness. It also has not systemically identified and analyzed factors contributing to delivery delays, which can limit the effectiveness of security cooperation efforts and negatively affect U.S. strategic competitiveness. Establishing a performance measure such as a targeted percentage for the aggregate timeliness of Section 333 project deliveries could help DSCA monitor its performance and enhance the effectiveness of its assistance. In addition, working with implementing agencies to systematically identify and analyze factors contributing to delivery delays would strengthen DSCA's ability to mitigate or prevent delays. Moreover, using the results of this analysis to develop an action plan, in coordination with these agencies and other stakeholders, would help DSCA ensure that effective corrective measures are taken.

Moreover, DOD's evaluations of Section 333 projects raise questions about the program's success in achieving legislative and programmatic goals. DOD's project evaluations concluded that two of six projects were

unsuccessful in building the intended capacity of partner nations' security forces, indicating that DOD could learn important lessons about designing effective Section 333 projects. However, the evaluations generally were not high quality, limiting their usefulness for identifying such lessons. Specifically, the evaluations lacked key information about the evaluations' design, and deficiencies in data collection and analysis affected the validity of their conclusions. Although DOD includes some elements related to high-quality evaluations in other AM&E products, including these elements in the evaluations themselves would increase their quality and thus their reliability and usefulness. Better-quality evaluations would help DOD understand how, why, and the extent to which specific projects contributed to building a partner nation's desired capabilities and achieving strategic objectives. Better-quality evaluations would also help DOD more easily apply lessons learned and best practices when developing, and allocating funding for, Section 333 projects.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following four recommendations to DOD:

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA establishes a performance measure, such as a targeted percentage for on-time deliveries for Section 333 projects, that will allow it to regularly assess and monitor the aggregate timeliness of deliveries for Section 333 projects. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA works with implementing agencies to systematically identify and analyze factors contributing to delivery delays for Section 333 projects. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA, in coordination with implementing agencies and other stakeholders, uses the results of its analysis of factors contributing to Section 333 delivery delays to develop an action plan to mitigate or prevent potential future delays. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA takes steps to improve the quality of Section 333 project evaluations to better align with international best practices, such as by including the reporting elements specified by the agency's evaluation instructions. (Recommendation 4)

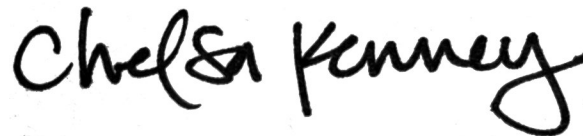
Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. DOD provided comments that we have reproduced in appendix III. In its comments, DOD agreed with our recommendations. DOD noted that the scope and complexity of Section 333 projects have increased. DOD also

stated that it would conduct an analysis to determine which types of projects are most challenging to deliver within the estimated timeframes and develop an action plan to mitigate delivery delays. In addition, DOD said it would work to improve the quality of Section 333 project evaluations.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or kenneyc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.



Chelsa Kenney
Director, International Affairs and Trade

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Appendix I: Summary of DOD Strategic Evaluations of Security Cooperation Efforts Related to Section 333

We reviewed eight Department of Defense (DOD) strategic evaluations of its security cooperation efforts¹ that officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy identified as broadly relevant to projects conducted under section 333 of title 10 of the U.S. Code (Section 333) or the Global Train and Equip program.² These strategic evaluations did not focus specifically on Section 333 projects, or detail the contributions of these projects, and some of the evaluations focused entirely on other DOD programs. However, they contained some conclusions and recommendations that could apply to Section 333 projects, according to DOD officials.³

The eight strategic evaluations addressed the following security cooperation efforts, respectively, that DOD conducted during the period from 2013 through 2020:

- Assistance to support the United States' strategic competition with China and Russia
- The Counter Islamic State Train and Equip Fund
- Institutional capacity building in Colombia
- Institutional capacity building in Indonesia
- Logistics-related support for peacekeeping in Somalia
- Logistics-related support to deter Russian aggression in the Baltics
- Maritime security cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean

¹DOD conducts broad strategic evaluations to measure the effectiveness of significant security cooperation initiatives. DOD Instruction 5132.14 defines a significant security cooperation initiative as a series of activities, projects, and programs planned as a unified, multiyear effort to achieve a single desired outcome or set of related outcomes. Such initiatives usually involve multiple security cooperation tools and programs over multiple years to realize a country- or region-specific objective or functional objective.

²Each strategic evaluation assessed a security cooperation effort that encompassed a variety of programs. In most cases, the extent to which the effort included any support provided as part of Section 333 projects was unclear. We did not assess the quality of the strategic evaluations because none focused specifically on Section 333 projects.

³DOD officials explained that security cooperation programs interact with each other and those that have their own authorities, such as the State Partnership Program, are often paired with Section 333. Similarly, the capabilities provided through Section 333 projects may be more sustainable when implemented with institutional capacity building, according to DOD officials.

- The State Partnership Program⁴

In general, the four strategic evaluations that reviewed the capability of partner nations' security forces found that U.S. security cooperation efforts improved their capabilities to some degree. However, the evaluations also found that the countries encountered challenges in sustaining the equipment provided through these security cooperation efforts.⁵ Providing equipment is a key component of Section 333 projects, which also provide training, services, and small-scale construction projects designed to build the capacity of partner nations' security forces.

Of these four strategic evaluations, two that specifically included Section 333 projects noted that a lack of training and budget to maintain the equipment affected the countries' longer-term capacity. For example, the evaluation of logistics-related assistance to five African nations to support peacekeeping in Somalia found that new equipment filled some capability gaps but security forces found it challenging to maintain the equipment. In particular, the evaluation noted that some of the new equipment was too technologically complex or expensive to fully maintain over time. Similarly, an evaluation of maritime security cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that the assistance generally improved counter-narcotics capabilities but that security forces struggled to maintain and repair the equipment provided, particularly because of budget issues. This evaluation also found that some of the equipment was not well suited to the partner forces' capacity or capabilities or to local conditions and factors.⁶

⁴The National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program links a U.S. state's national guard, either army or air force, with a partner nation's security forces in a cooperative relationship. The program aims to support U.S. security cooperation objectives by conducting activities to build partner capacity, improve interoperability, and enhance U.S. access and influence while increasing the readiness of U.S. and partner forces to meet emerging challenges, according to the National Guard. In July 2022, we reported on DOD's oversight and resourcing of the State Partnership Program. See GAO, *State Partnership Program: DOD Should Ensure Partner States Record Completed Activities and Clarify Appropriate Authorities*, [GAO-22-104672](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2022).

⁵The other four evaluations either did not assess the effect of equipment provided or assessed an effort that did not include the provision of equipment (e.g., security cooperation focused on institutional capacity building).

⁶The evaluation of logistics support to the Baltics to deter Russian aggression noted that sustainment had not been a focus of the security cooperation effort and that sustainment would require more maintenance and storage facilities. The evaluation assessing the Counter-Islamic State Train and Equip Fund stated that the program did not provide a maintenance plan to sustain equipment over time. The evaluation also noted that the program's intent was to provide direct combat support rather than build enduring capability as programs such as Section 333 aim to do.

Five strategic evaluations mentioned challenges caused by the slowness of security cooperation processes, such as planning and procurement. One of these evaluations noted that the length of time that may elapse between planning and implementation of Section 333 projects can mean that partner nations' needs may have changed by the time the projects are implemented. Specifically, the evaluation of maritime security cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean noted that partner nations' operations and equipment may change during the years from request to delivery. Further, according to an evaluation of assistance to support the United States' strategic competition with China and Russia, the perception of a lack of responsiveness and timeliness in U.S. security cooperation programs has occasionally prompted partner nations to seek assistance from strategic competitors.

Six of the eight strategic evaluations included recommendations that could apply to Section 333 projects. For example, the evaluation assessing maritime security cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean recommended that DOD select equipment and technologies that "meet critical mission criteria but are relatively simple, easier to deploy with and use, and less costly to use and support." As another example, the evaluation of assistance to support the United States' strategic competition with China and Russia suggested that DOD consider measures to improve the delivery timeliness of security cooperation support. Further, the evaluation of the State Partnership Program recommended that DOD develop a 5-year plan for integrating the program with other planned security cooperation efforts, especially those conducted under Section 333 authority. The evaluation found that the State Partnership Program could be more effective if paired with other security cooperation programs.

Seven of the strategic evaluations also examined more-indirect outcomes of the security cooperation efforts, such as their effect on U.S. relations with partner nations. Six of these seven evaluations found that U.S. security cooperation likely improved U.S. access, influence, or relations with partner nations. For example, the evaluation of institutional capacity building in Colombia concluded that the effort improved bilateral relations with Colombia and multilateral relations with the region, despite "a clear lack of intentionality and integrated planning towards this goal." Similarly, the evaluation that reviewed assistance to support the United States' strategic competition with China and Russia found that security cooperation efforts were "used effectively toward the achievement of strategic competition-related objectives, even though many activities were not originally planned or conceived for that explicit purpose."

Five of the eight strategic evaluations noted a lack of available data needed to assess potential changes in partner capabilities, capacity, performance, and related outcomes of the efforts. For example, the evaluation of maritime security efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean noted that the evaluators found very few systematic, repeated efforts to collect data on inputs, outputs, or outcomes. The evaluation of U.S. assistance to support strategic competition with Russia and China noted that limited data collection reduced DOD's ability to fully characterize security cooperation's effect on strategic competition objectives.

Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Section 333 of title 10 of the U.S. Code (Section 333) authorizes the Department of Defense (DOD) to conduct or support a program or programs to provide equipment and training to foreign countries' national security forces to build their capacity to conduct certain operations.¹

This report examines (1) DOD's allocation of funding for Section 333 projects from 2018 through 2022, (2) the extent to which DOD delivered Section 333 assistance to partner nations as scheduled, and (3) the findings of DOD's Section 333 project evaluations and the extent to which the evaluations met criteria for evaluation quality.² In addition, we reviewed DOD's strategic evaluations of security cooperation efforts during calendar years 2013 through 2020 that officials identified as broadly related to Section 333.

To describe DOD's allocation of funding for Section 333 projects from 2018 through 2022, we obtained and analyzed funding data for Section 333 projects for which DOD submitted congressional notifications during that period. DOD provided data on allocations and amounts reallocated for Section 333 projects according to the fiscal year when it notified Congress of the projects.³ We analyzed these data to determine the total amount of funding over the period, amounts allocated per combatant command and country, and changes in these allocations over time. We interviewed DOD officials to determine the strategic priorities driving these trends.

DOD provided separate data on funding allocated for Section 333 projects from 2019 through 2022 according to operation type.⁴ We analyzed these data to determine amounts allocated by operation type and changes in these allocations over time. We did not use these data to determine the total amount allocated, because these data were not directly comparable to the data we analyzed for 2018 through 2022. For

¹10 U.S.C. § 333.

²In this report, all years cited are fiscal years (Oct. 1–Sept. 30) unless otherwise noted.

³DOD's Defense Security Cooperation Agency's (DSCA) uses the same data in its Section 333 monitoring reports. 10 U.S.C. § 333 requires DSCA to submit monitoring reports to appropriate congressional committees, providing information about the delivery and execution status, timeliness of delivery, and status of funds allocated for Section 333 projects in each recipient country.

⁴DOD tracks allocations by operation type using a different system. DOD officials said that the data on allocations by operation type serve as a security cooperation planning tool and are not considered a database of record. The officials also noted that 2018 data on operation types for Section 333 projects were incomplete; as a result, we did not include these data in our analysis.

example, data on allocations by operation type did not reflect adjustments to projects after DOD submitted congressional notifications and did not include human rights training and transportation costs.

We assessed the reliability of both sets of funding data by analyzing them for consistency and logic to identify and address observable issues. For example, we checked whether DOD had applied business rules for data entry consistently. We compared the data with data in the underlying sources, DOD's congressional notifications. We also interviewed DOD officials regarding the accuracy and completeness of the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting on the distribution of allocations by combatant command and country from 2018 through 2022 and by operation type from 2019 through 2022.

To describe the extent to which DOD delivered Section 333 assistance to partner nations as scheduled, we analyzed data on delivery timeliness for Section 333 project activities from 2018 through 2022. We determined that Principles 10 and 13 of standards for internal control in the federal government were significant to this objective.⁵ DOD provided data on delivery timeliness for activities associated with Section 333 projects, including equipment, training, services, and small-scale construction.⁶

We analyzed these data to determine the extent to which deliveries for project activities were ahead of time, on time, or delayed relative to estimated delivery dates notified to Congress. We interviewed DOD officials to identify factors contributing to these delays. We assessed the reliability of these data by analyzing them for consistency and logic and by interviewing agency officials regarding the data's accuracy and completeness. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting on the timeliness of activities scheduled to be delivered in 2018 through 2022.

To describe the findings of DOD's Section 333 project evaluations and examine the extent to which the evaluations reflected criteria for quality, we reviewed six DOD evaluations of Section 333 projects implemented in

⁵GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

⁶For the purposes of this report, "equipment" refers to what DOD calls "defense articles and supplies."

2017 through 2022.⁷ We analyzed the project evaluations' conclusions about the projects' success and summarized the reasons for these conclusions.

To examine the extent to which DOD's Section 333 project evaluations reflected quality criteria and appropriately supported findings with evidence, we assessed the evaluations against criteria we had developed for a 2017 report that reviewed the quality of foreign assistance evaluations from six federal agencies, including DOD.⁸ In addition, we reviewed U.S. law requiring DOD assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) of security cooperation⁹ and DOD instructions, standards, and guidelines regarding security cooperation AM&E policy.¹⁰ We also reviewed relevant department documents and interviewed cognizant officials from DOD and its AM&E contractor.

To develop the criteria that we used for our 2017 report, we reviewed and analyzed evaluation guidance from the six agencies, international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,¹¹ evaluation organizations such as the American Evaluation Association,¹² and prior GAO reporting. These criteria include necessary high-level elements of designing, implementing, and reporting

⁷We examined the project evaluations and did not review supplemental or related assessment, monitoring, and evaluation documents or work papers. DOD provided six project evaluations before the end of calendar year 2022. In July 2023, while reviewing a draft of this report, DOD provided three additional evaluations for projects implemented in Jordan in 2018 and 2019. We did not include these additional evaluations in our review. According to officials, DOD considers a number of factors when selecting Section 333 projects to evaluate, including the maturity of the project, the level of investment, the importance of the project in DOD's 5-year plan, and whether the contractor has other AM&E trips scheduled in the same country.

⁸See GAO, *Foreign Assistance: Agencies Can Improve the Quality and Dissemination of Program Evaluations*, GAO-17-316 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2017). The other five agencies were the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and State; Millennium Challenge Corporation; and U.S. Agency for International Development.

⁹10 U.S.C. § 383, Assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of programs and activities.

¹⁰For example, Department of Defense, *DOD Instruction 5132.14. Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise* (Jan. 13, 2017); *Standards and Guidelines for Security Cooperation Independent and Self-Evaluation*.

¹¹See Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Development Assistance Committee Guidelines and Reference Series, Quality Standards for Development Evaluation* (Paris, France: April 2010), accessed Nov. 10, 2016, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/55/0/44798177.pdf>.

¹²American Evaluation Association, *An Evaluation Roadmap for a More Effective Government*, accessed Nov. 10, 2016.

on evaluations that could serve as standards for various agencies and evaluation types. In particular, the criteria focus on evaluation design, data collection and analysis, and support for conclusions.

To ensure consistency in our review of the evaluations against these criteria, we used the same standardized data collection instrument (DCI) that we used for our 2017 report. The DCI contained evaluative questions against which the reviewers assessed evaluation quality as well as descriptive questions the reviewers used to gather information about the evaluations, such as their location. Each high-level criterion included subquestions about elements the reviewers considered in making overall decisions. We applied the criteria by using the following four-part scale for most of the evaluation questions and subquestions:

- **Generally addressed.** The evaluation mostly addressed the criterion's key elements, but did not completely address all elements in the sub-questions.
- **Partially addressed.** The evaluation showed one or more clear areas for improvement.
- **Not at all addressed.** The evaluation did not show that steps were taken to address the criterion.
- **Insufficient information.** Reviewers could not make a determination because of a lack of information in the evaluation.

We considered it a deficiency if an evaluation addressed a criterion partially or not at all or if it contained insufficient information to assess the extent to which it addressed a criterion. We examined the evaluation reports themselves; we did not consider evaluation plans and protocols, underlying documents, and other work papers, such as DOD's Assessment Handbook or AM&E trip reports, as evidence that the planned design was implemented.

Each evaluation review consisted of two consecutive reviews by staff who were experienced in, and familiar with, research methods as well as reviewing studies and evaluations across a wide range of subject areas and disciplines. The second reviewer saw the first reviewer's decisions and could review the first reviewer's notes on sources and justifications for decisions. The second reviewer indicated agreement or disagreement with the first reviewer's decisions. If the second reviewer disagreed, they proposed another decision. The first and second reviewers subsequently met to reconcile any differences.

We also reviewed DOD's Section 333 project evaluations to determine whether they contained the evaluation reporting elements specified by

DOD instructions.¹³ We used a DCI to record whether the evaluations included nine reporting elements, such as the purpose of the evaluation and a description of the evaluation design. We decided whether each evaluation report included, partly included, or did not include each reporting element. We also decided whether recommendations were not applicable, if, for example, the evaluation concluded the project was successful.

In addition, we reviewed DOD's strategic evaluations of significant security cooperation initiatives that DOD officials said broadly related to Section 333 or the Global Train and Equip program (see app. I).¹⁴ DOD provided eight strategic evaluations, completed by the end of 2022, of security cooperation efforts implemented around the world during calendar years 2013 through 2020. Each strategic evaluation assessed a broad security cooperation effort that encompassed a variety of programs. In most cases, the extent to which the effort included any Section 333 projects was unclear. We did not assess the quality of the strategic evaluations because none were designed to determine the effect of Section 333 projects. We reviewed each strategic evaluation to identify challenges in implementing the evaluation, the effects of the security cooperation effort, and recommendations and findings that could relate to Section 333 projects.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2022 to August 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe

¹³DOD Instruction 5132.14 states that security cooperation evaluations should include nine reporting elements: an executive summary; an introduction and background; a description of program or activity; the purpose of evaluation; evaluation questions; a description of the evaluation design, including data collection methods, scope, and methodology; a statement about the time period when evaluation work was performed, time spent in the field, who performed the work, and the composition of the team; strengths and limitations of the collected data; and appendices for additional documents, including evaluation scope of work or terms of reference. The instruction also states that the overall conclusions should be logical inferences based on findings for each evaluation question and that findings requiring corrective action should have recommendations.

¹⁴DOD Instruction 5132.14 defines a significant security cooperation initiative as a series of activities, projects, and programs planned as a unified, multiyear effort to achieve a single desired outcome or set of related outcomes. Such initiatives usually involve multiple security cooperation tools and programs over multiple years to realize a country- or region-specific objective or functional objective.

that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix III: Comments from Department of Defense

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2200

STRATEGY, PLANS
AND CAPABILITIES

Ms. Chelsa Kenney
Director, International Affairs and Trade,
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Kenney:

SUBJECT: Department of Defense (DoD) Response to the Draft GAO Report, 'Building Partner Capacity: DOD Should Assess Delivery Delays in Train-and-Equip Projects and Improve Evaluations (GAO Code 106275)'

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-23-106275, "Building Partner Capacity: DOD Should Assess Delivery Delays in Train-and-Equip Projects and Improve Evaluations" dated July 2023 (GAO Code 106275). DoD acknowledges receipt of GAO's Draft Report, and the Defense Office of Prepublication Security Review (DOPSR) has completed a sensitivity review. The subject draft report does not contain protected DoD information and the Department has cleared it for public release.

DoD appreciates the opportunity to respond to the four recommendations in the Draft Report with the responses below.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA establishes a performance measure, such as a targeted percentage for on-time deliveries for Section 333 projects, that will allow it to regularly assess and monitor the aggregate timeliness of deliveries for Section 333 projects.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department concurs with the recommendation to establish performance measures for Section 333 program execution. Section 333 authorizes DoD to provide training and equipment to the national security forces of foreign countries for the purpose of building the capacity of those forces for specified purposes. DoD will analyze possible performance measures that could be used to evaluate the timeliness and effectiveness of deliveries of capabilities for Section 333 projects, including training, services, equipment, and small-scale construction.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA works with implementing agencies to systematically identify and analyze factors contributing to delivery delays for Section 333 projects.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department concurs with the recommendation to work with implementing agencies to identify and analyze factors that contribute to delivery delays for

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Section 333 projects, which may include the sometimes lengthy timelines from program notification to contract award date.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA, in coordination with implementing agencies and other stakeholders, uses the results of its analysis of factors contributing to Section 333 delivery delays to develop an action plan to mitigate or prevent potential future delays.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department concurs with the recommendation to use the results of DSCA’s analysis of factors contributing to Section 333 delivery delays to develop an action plan to mitigate or prevent potential future delays, including any analysis of which types of Section 333 projects are the most challenging to deliver within the estimated timeframe. DoD has experienced an increase in the scope and complexity of the projects designed to meet the needs of our allies and partners. The action plan that will be produced will identify feasible mitigation measures, while bearing in mind the enduring challenges of building complex capabilities with partners within a compressed timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Director of DSCA takes steps to improve the quality of Section 333 project evaluations to better align with international best practices, such as by including the reporting elements specified by the agency's evaluation instructions.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department concurs with the recommendation to improve the quality of Section 333 project evaluations to better align with international best practices, including the evaluation standards cited in DoD Instruction 5132.14, “Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation (AM&E) Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise” (i.e., the American Evaluation Association and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). The Department will ensure that evaluations of Section 333 projects include the four principles specified in DoDI 5132.14, which should be incorporated into all evaluations conducted by DoD, as specified by that DoDI.

Please address further questions to the OUSD(P) primary action officer, Dr. Scott Buchanan, at 703-692-1660 or via email at scott.c.buchanan.civ@mail.mil

Sincerely,



Madeline Mortelmans
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of
Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities

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Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Chelsa Kenney, (202) 512-2964 or kenneyc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kara Marshall (Assistant Director), Daniela Rudstein (Analyst-in-Charge), Samuel Huang, Tania Uruchima, Chris Keblitis, Reid Lowe, Ashley Alley, Gergana Danailova-Trainor, Pamela Davidson, and Terrell Lasane made key contributions to this report.

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