

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-495T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing U.S. borders is the responsibility of DHS, in collaboration with other federal, state, local, and tribal entities. Within DHS, CBP is the lead agency for border security and is responsible for, among other things, keeping terrorists and their weapons, criminals and their contraband, and inadmissible aliens out of the country. In recent years, GAO has reported on a variety of DHS collaborative mechanisms and efforts to assess its use of border security resources.

This statement addresses (1) DHS's efforts to implement collaborative mechanisms along the southwest border and (2) DHS's efforts to assess its use of resources and programs to secure the southwest border. This statement is based on GAO reports and testimonies issued from September 2013 through February 2017 that examined DHS efforts to enhance border security and assess the effectiveness of its border security operations. GAO's reports and testimonies incorporated information GAO obtained by examining DHS collaborative mechanisms, reviewing CBP policies and procedures for coordinating use of assets, analyzing DHS data related to enforcement programs, and interviewing relevant DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has previously made numerous recommendations to DHS to improve the function of collaborative mechanisms and use of resources for border security, and DHS has generally agreed. DHS has taken actions or described planned actions to address the recommendations, which GAO will continue to monitor.

View [GAO-17-495T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or GamblerR@gao.gov.

April 2017

BORDER SECURITY

DHS Could Strengthen Efforts to Establish Collaborative Mechanisms and Assess Use of Resources

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have implemented various mechanisms along the southern U.S. border to coordinate security operations, but could strengthen coordination of Predator B unmanned aerial system (UAS) operations to conduct border security efforts. In September 2013, GAO reported that DHS and CBP used collaborative mechanisms along the southwest border—including interagency Border Enforcement Security Task Forces and Regional Coordinating Mechanisms—to coordinate information sharing, target and prioritize resources, and leverage assets. GAO interviewed participants from the various mechanisms who provided perspective on successful collaboration, such as establishing positive working relationships, sharing resources, and sharing information. Participants also identified barriers, such as resource constraints, rotation of key personnel, and lack of leadership buy-in. GAO recommended that DHS take steps to improve its visibility over field collaborative mechanisms. DHS concurred and collected data related to the mechanisms' operations. Further, as GAO reported in June 2014, officials involved with mechanisms along the southwest border cited limited resource commitments by participating agencies and a lack of common objectives. Among other things, GAO recommended that DHS establish written interagency agreements with mechanism partners, and DHS concurred. Lastly, in February 2017, GAO reported that DHS and CBP had established mechanisms to coordinate Predator B UAS operations but could better document their coordination procedures. GAO made recommendations for DHS and CBP to improve coordination of UAS operations, and DHS concurred.

GAO recently reported that DHS and CBP could strengthen efforts to assess their use of resources and programs to secure the southwest border. For example, in February 2017, GAO reported that CBP does not record mission data consistently across all operational centers for its Predator B UAS, limiting CBP's ability to assess program effectiveness. In addition, CBP has not updated its guidance for collecting and recording mission information in its data collection system since 2014. Updating guidance consistent with internal control standards would help CBP better ensure the quality of data it uses to assess effectiveness. In January 2017, GAO found that methodological weaknesses limit the usefulness for assessing the effectiveness of CBP's Border Patrol Consequence Delivery System. Specifically, Border Patrol's methodology for calculating recidivism—the percent of aliens apprehended multiple times along the southwest border within a fiscal year—does not account for an alien's apprehension history over multiple years. Border Patrol could strengthen the methodology for calculating recidivism by using an alien's apprehension history beyond one fiscal year. Finally, CBP has not developed metrics that systematically use the data it collects to assess the contributions of its pedestrian and vehicle border fencing to its mission. Developing metrics to assess the contributions of fencing to border security operations could better position CBP to make resource allocation decisions with the best information available to inform competing mission priorities and investments. GAO made recommendations to DHS and CBP to update guidance, strengthen its recidivism calculation methodology, and develop metrics, and DHS generally concurred.