United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Committees

September 2009

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, and Information Sharing

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GAO-09-904SP

September 2009

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-09-904SP, a report to congressional committees

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, and Information Sharing

Why GAO Did This Study

While national security activities, which range from planning for an influenza pandemic to Iraq reconstruction, require collaboration among multiple agencies, the mechanisms used for such activities may not provide the means for interagency collaboration needed to meet modern national security challenges. To assist the 111th Congress and the new administration in developing their oversight and management agendas, this report, which was performed under the Comptroller General's authority, addresses actions needed to enhance interagency collaboration for national security activities: (1) the development and implementation of overarching, integrated strategies; (2) the creation of collaborative organizations; (3) the development of a well-trained workforce; and (4) the sharing and integration of national security information across agencies. This report is based largely on a body of GAO work issued since 2005.

What GAO Recommends

Since 2005, GAO has recommended that agencies incorporate desirable characteristics of national strategies, take actions to create collaborative organizations, address a wide range of human capital issues, and establish or clarify guidelines for sharing national security information. Agencies have taken some actions to enhance interagency collaboration, but much work remains.

View GAO-09-904SP or key components.
For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent at (202) 512-4300 or Jacquelyn Williams-Bridgers at (202) 512-3101.

What GAO Found

Based on prior work, GAO has found that agencies need to take the following actions to enhance interagency collaboration for national security:

Develop and implement overarching strategies. Although some U.S. government agencies have developed or updated overarching strategies on national security issues, GAO has reported that in some cases, such as U.S. government efforts to improve the capacity of Iraq's ministries to govern, U.S. efforts have been hindered by multiple agencies pursuing individual efforts without an overarching strategy. In particular, a strategy defining organizational roles and responsibilities and coordination mechanisms can help agencies clarify who will lead or participate in activities, organize their joint and individual efforts, and facilitate decision making.

Create collaborative organizations. Organizational differences—including differences in agencies' structures, planning processes, and funding sources—can hinder interagency collaboration, potentially wasting scarce funds and limiting the effectiveness of federal efforts. For example, defense and national intelligence activities are funded through separate budgets. Disagreement about funding from each budget led to the initial operating capability date being pushed back 1 year for a new space radar system. Coordination mechanisms are not always formalized or not fully utilized, potentially limiting their effectiveness in enhancing interagency collaboration.

Develop a well-trained workforce. Collaborative approaches to national security require a well-trained workforce with the skills and experience to integrate the government's diverse capabilities and resources, but some federal government agencies lack the personnel capacity to fully participate in interagency activities. Some federal agencies have taken steps to improve their capacity to participate in interagency activities, but personnel shortages have impeded agencies' ability to participate in these activities, such as efforts to integrate personnel from other federal government agencies into the Department of Defense's (DOD) new U.S. Africa Command. Increased training opportunities and strategic workforce planning efforts could facilitate federal agencies' ability to fully participate in interagency collaboration activities.

Share and integrate national security information across agencies. Information is a crucial tool in national security and its timely dissemination is critical for maintaining national security. However, despite progress made in sharing terrorism-related information, agencies and private-sector partners do not always share relevant information with their national security partners due to a lack of clear guidelines for sharing information and security clearance issues. For example, GAO found that non-DOD personnel could not access some DOD planning documents or participate in planning sessions because they may not have had the proper security clearances. Additionally, incorporating information drawn from multiple sources poses challenges to managing and integrating that information.

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Abbreviations

DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 25, 2009

Congressional Committees

As evidenced by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and other recent events, challenges to national security have expanded significantly from the traditional state-based threats of the Cold War era to include unconventional threats from nonstate actors. These new threats are diffuse and ambiguous and include terrorist threats from extremist groups, cyber attacks, drug trafficking, infectious diseases, and energy threats. They arise from multiple sources and—because their interrelated nature makes it difficult, if not impossible, for any single agency to effectively address them alone—they have required the U.S. government to enhance collaboration with interagency and international partners, among other actions.[1] In addition to changes in national security threats, the agencies involved in addressing these threats also have evolved. Beyond the traditional agencies of the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), other agencies involved in national security include the Departments of Homeland Security, Energy, Justice, the Treasury, Agriculture, and Commerce. While national security activities require collaboration among multiple agencies and often across federal, state, and local governments, the mechanisms used for national security activities—such as developing strategies, planning and executing missions, providing resources for those activities, and sharing information—are based on a framework established to meet threats posed by the Cold War and may not provide the means for interagency collaboration needed to meet modern national security challenges.

In our prior work, we have identified situations in which the lack of interagency collaboration has hindered national security efforts. For example, we have previously reported and testified that since 2005, multiple U.S. agencies—including the State Department, USAID, and

[1]For the purpose of this report we define "collaboration" as any joint activity by two or more organizations that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when the organizations act alone. We use the term "collaboration" broadly to include interagency activities that others have variously defined as "cooperation," "coordination," "integration," or "networking." GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

DOD—led separate efforts to improve the capacity of Iraq's ministries to govern, without overarching direction from a lead entity to integrate their efforts. We found that the lack of an overarching strategy contributed to U.S. efforts not meeting their goal of key Iraqi ministries having the capacity to effectively govern and assume increasing responsibility for operating, maintaining, and further investing in reconstruction projects.[2] Additionally, because of concerns about agencies' ability to protect shared information or use that information properly, other agencies and private-sector partners are sometimes hesitant to share information. For example, we reported that Department of Homeland Security officials expressed concerns about sharing terrorism-related information with state and local partners because such information had occasionally been posted on public Internet sites or otherwise compromised.[3]

Congress has recently taken steps to strengthen interagency collaboration for national security issues. For example, in the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress directed that the Secretary of Defense develop and submit to Congress a plan to improve and reform the department's participation in and contribution to the interagency coordination process on national security issues.[4] Similarly, in the fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress gave authority to the Secretaries of Defense and State and the Administrator of USAID to jointly establish an advisory panel to advise, review, and make recommendations on ways to improve coordination among the agencies on national security issues, including reviewing their respective roles and responsibilities. The panel would be comprised of 12 members with national recognition and significant experience in the federal government, the armed forces, public administration, foreign affairs, or development.[5]

[2]GAO, *Iraq and Afghanistan: Security, Economic, and Governance Challenges to Rebuilding Efforts Should Be Addressed in U.S. Strategies*, GAO-09-476T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 25, 2009); *Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Actions Needed to Address Inadequate Accountability over U.S. Efforts and Investments*, GAO-08-568T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 11, 2008); *Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: U.S. Ministry Capacity Development Efforts Need an Overall Integrated Strategy to Guide Efforts and Manage Risk*, GAO-08-117 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 1, 2007).

[3]GAO, *Information Sharing: The Federal Government Needs to Establish Policies and Processes for Sharing Terrorism-Related and Sensitive but Unclassified Information*, GAO-06-385 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 17, 2006).

[4]Pub. L. No. 110-181 § 952 (2008).

[5]Pub. L. No. 110-417 § 1054 (2008).

To better enable agencies to address today's national security challenges, a number of commissions, research institutions, and congressionally mandated studies have put forth proposals to reform part or all of the national security system. Proposals range from far-reaching restructuring of the system to smaller-scale proposals such as increasing resources for civilian agencies. A recurring theme of many of these proposals is the need for changes to improve interagency collaboration on national security matters.

Committed and effective leadership is a critical aspect of enhancing interagency collaboration for national security–related activities. We have previously reported that committed leadership by those involved in collaborative efforts from all levels of the organization is needed to overcome the many barriers to working across agency boundaries.[6] National security experts also note the importance of and need for effective leadership for national security issues. For example, a recent report by the Project on National Security Reform notes that the national security system requires skilled leadership at all levels and, to enhance interagency coordination, these leaders must be adept at forging links and fostering partnerships all levels.[7]

To assist the 111th Congress and the new administration in developing their oversight and management agendas, we have provided a set of enclosures on the challenges to enhancing interagency collaboration in national security activities. These enclosures expand on issues related to national security facing this Congress and the new administration discussed on GAO's transition Web site, http://www.gao.gov/transition_2009/index.php. Based on our prior work, to enhance interagency collaboration for national security, agencies need to enhance their efforts to do the following:

- *Develop and implement overarching strategies.* Although some U.S. government agencies have developed or updated overarching strategies on national security–related issues, we have testified and reported that in some cases U.S. efforts have been hindered by the lack of information on roles and responsibilities of organizations involved or coordination mechanisms to integrate their efforts. For example, in May 2007 we reported that the lack of an overarching strategy with clear roles and

[6]GAO-06-15.

[7]Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, Va.: Nov. 26, 2008).

responsibilities led two law enforcement agencies—which were unknowingly working with different foreign law enforcement agencies in their efforts to assist foreign nations to identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists—to move in on the same subject. According to foreign and U.S. law enforcement officials, this action may have compromised other investigations.[8] Our prior work has found that strategic direction is required as the basis for collaboration toward national security goals. Defining organizational roles and responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination can help agencies clarify who will lead or participate in which activities, organize their joint activities and individual efforts, facilitate decision making, and address how conflicts would be resolved, thereby facilitating interagency collaboration.

- *Create collaborative organizations.* Agencies have different organizational structures, planning processes, and funding sources to plan for and conduct their national security activities, which can hinder interagency collaboration. This can result in a patchwork of activities that waste scarce funds and limit the overall effectiveness of federal efforts. For example, differences in organizational structures for interacting with other nations require agencies to coordinate with a large number of organizations in their regional planning efforts, potentially creating gaps and overlaps in policy implementation and leading to challenges in coordinating efforts among agencies. Moreover, funding for national security activities is budgeted for and appropriated by agency, rather than by functional area (such as national security), resulting in budget requests and congressional appropriations that tend to reflect individual agency concerns. Given these organizational differences, adequate coordination mechanisms can facilitate the interagency collaboration needed to achieve integrated approaches to national security. We found that some agencies have established coordination mechanisms to facilitate interagency collaboration. For example, DOD, State Department, and USAID officials have established processes to coordinate projects in Iraq and Afghanistan related to humanitarian relief and reconstruction funded through the

[8]GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Law Enforcement Agencies Lack Directives to Assist Foreign Nations to Identify, Disrupt, and Prosecute Terrorists*, GAO-07-697 (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2007).

Commander's Emergency Response Program.[9] However, other mechanisms are not formalized or are not fully utilized, potentially limiting their effectiveness in enhancing interagency collaboration.

- *Develop a well-trained workforce.* Collaborative approaches to national security require a well-trained workforce with the skills and experience to integrate the government's diverse capabilities and resources, but some federal government agencies lack the personnel capacity to fully participate in interagency activities. For example, DOD's U.S. Africa Command was originally intended to have significant interagency representation, with experts from the Departments of State, the Treasury, and Agriculture, USAID, and other civilian agencies; however, due in part to a shortage of available personnel at those agencies, the command has received limited interagency participation.[10] Moreover, some federal government agencies do not have the necessary capabilities to support their national security roles and responsibilities. For example, in September 2009 we reported that 31 percent of the State Department's generalists and specialists in language-designated positions did not meet the language requirements for their position, an increase from 29 percent in 2005.[11] In addition, agencies' personnel systems do not always facilitate interagency collaboration, with interagency assignments often not being considered career-enhancing or recognized in performance management systems, which could diminish employees' interest in serving in interagency efforts. Two tools could facilitate federal agencies' ability to fully participate in interagency collaboration activities: (1) increasing training opportunities, which can help personnel develop the skills and understanding of other agencies' capabilities needed to facilitate interagency collaboration, and (2) focusing on strategic workforce planning efforts, which can support agencies' efforts to secure the personnel resources needed to collaborate in interagency missions.

[9]The Commander's Emergency Response Program was designed to enable local commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility. See GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight and Interagency Coordination for the Commander's Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan*, GAO-09-615 (Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2009), and *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Better Guide Project Selection for Commander's Emergency Response Program and Improve Oversight in Iraq*, GAO-08-736R (Washington, D.C.: June 23, 2008).

[10]GAO, *Defense Management: Actions Needed to Address Stakeholder Concerns, Improve Interagency Collaboration, and Determine Full Costs Associated with the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-09-181 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 20, 2009).

[11]GAO, *Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*, GAO-09-955 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2009).

- *Share and integrate national security information across agencies.* Information is a crucial tool in national security and its timely dissemination is critical for maintaining national security; however, agencies do not always share relevant information with their national security partners. More than 8 years after 9/11, federal, state, and local governments and private-sector partners are making progress in sharing terrorism-related information. For example, we reported in October 2007 that most states and many local governments had established fusion centers—collaborative efforts to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity—to address gaps in information sharing.[12] However, agencies may not always share all relevant information with their national security partners for a variety of reasons, including a lack of clear guidelines for sharing information with other agencies and security clearance issues. For example, we reported in May 2007 that non-DOD personnel could not access some DOD planning documents or participate in planning sessions because they may not have had the proper security clearances, hindering interagency participation in the development of military plans.[13] Additionally, we have found that incorporating information drawn from multiple sources poses challenges to managing and integrating that information. For example, we reported in December 2008 that in Louisiana, reconstruction project information had to be repeatedly resubmitted separately to state and Federal Emergency Management Agency officials during post–Hurricane Katrina reconstruction efforts because the system used to track project information did not facilitate the exchange of documents. Information was sometimes lost during this exchange, requiring state officials to resubmit the information, creating redundancies and duplication of effort. As a result, reconstruction efforts in Louisiana were delayed.[14]

As we discuss in the enclosures, we have made a number of recommendations to executive branch agencies, including DOD, the Departments of State and Homeland Security, USAID, and others, to address these issues in recent years. In commenting on draft reports, agencies generally agreed with our recommendations and, in some cases,

[12]GAO, *Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers*, GAO-08-35 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 30, 2007).

[13]GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning*, GAO-07-549 (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2007).

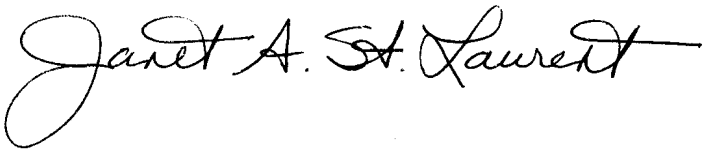
[14]GAO, *Disaster Recovery: FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program Experienced Challenges with Gulf Coast Rebuilding*, GAO-09-129 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2008).

identified planned actions or actions that were underway to address the recommendations. While agencies have taken some actions to enhance interagency collaboration, much work remains in developing and implementing overarching strategies, creating collaborative organizations, developing a well-trained workforce, and sharing and integrating national security information across agencies.

The issues discussed in the attached enclosures are largely based on completed GAO work. We reviewed GAO's body of work on interagency collaboration related to national security, which includes reports and testimonies on a variety of issues, including stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD's establishment of U.S. Africa Command, planning and coordination for an influenza pandemic, information sharing, critical infrastructure protection, disaster recovery, acquisitions and contracting, strategic planning, human capital, and foreign aid reform. We did not update the findings from those reports, but are reporting our findings as of the time the prior reports were issued. To frame the issues and place them in strategic context, we also examined studies from U.S. government agencies and research institutions. We developed the scope of these external studies through a literature review, followed by contacts with key researchers and organizations to ensure that our review included an overview of the significant work on challenges to collaboration on national security. We conducted this performance audit from February 2009 through September 2009. This report is generally based on completed GAO work that was performed 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 that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

We are sending copies of this report to the congressional committees listed below. In addition, we are sending copies of this report to the President and the Vice President of the United States and executive branch agencies. The report also is available at no charge on the GAO Web site at http://www.gao.gov. If you have any questions, please contact Janet A. St. Laurent at (202) 512-4300 or stlaurentj@gao.gov or Jacquelyn L. Williams Bridgers at (202) 512-3101 or williamsbridgersj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs can be found on the last page

of this report. For press inquiries, please contact Charles Young at (202) 512-3823. Key contributors to this report are included in appendix I.



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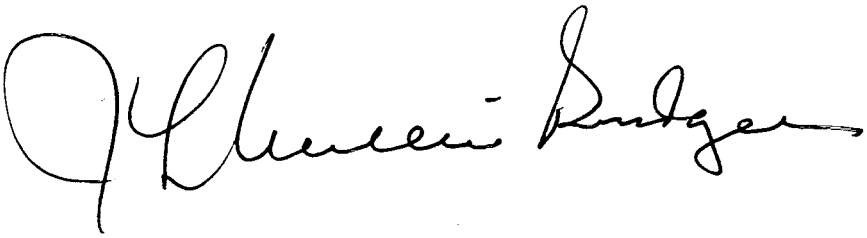

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Enclosure I: Developing and Implementing Overarching Strategies to Enhance Collaboration for U.S. National Security

Issue Statement

National security challenges covering a broad array of areas, ranging from preparedness for an influenza pandemic to Iraqi governance and reconstruction, have necessitated using all elements of national power—including diplomatic, military, intelligence, development assistance, economic, and law enforcement support. These elements fall under the authority of numerous U.S. government agencies, requiring overarching strategies and plans to enhance agencies' abilities to collaborate with each other, as well as with foreign, state, and local governments and nongovernmental partners. Without overarching strategies, agencies often operate independently to achieve their own objectives, increasing the risk of duplication or gaps in national security efforts that may result in wasting scarce resources and limiting program effectiveness. Strategies can enhance interagency collaboration by helping agencies develop mutually reinforcing plans and determine activities, resources, processes, and performance measures for implementing those strategies.

Strategies can be focused on broad national security objectives, like the *National Security Strategy* issued by the President, or on a specific program or activity, like the U.S. strategy for Iraq. Strategies have been developed by the Homeland Security Council, such as the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*;[1] jointly with multiple agencies, such as the *National Strategy for Maritime Security*, which was developed jointly by the Secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security; or by an agency that is leading an interagency effort, such as the *National Intelligence Strategy*, which was developed under the leadership of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Congress recognized the importance of overarching strategies to guide interagency efforts, as shown by the requirement in the fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act for the President to submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report on a comprehensive interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication of the federal government, including benchmarks and a timetable for achieving such benchmarks, by December 31, 2009.[2] Congress and the administration will need to examine the ability of the

[1]The National Security Council also has developed strategies for national security issues. The National Security Council was established in 1947 to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies related to national security to allow agencies to collaborate more effectively. After September 11, the Bush administration created the Homeland Security Council. The Obama administration has combined the staffs of the Homeland Security Council and National Security Council.

[2]Pub. L. No. 110-417 § 1055 (2008).

executive branch to develop and implement overarching strategies to enhance collaboration for national security efforts.

Key Findings

Although Some Agencies Have Developed Overarching Strategies, the Lack of Information on Roles and Responsibilities and Lack of Coordination Mechanisms Can Hinder Interagency Collaboration

Desirable Characteristics for Strategies

In GAO-04-408T, we identified six desirable characteristics to aid agencies in further developing and implementing strategies, to enhance their usefulness in resource and policy decisions, and to better assure accountability. These characteristics are:

(1) why the strategy was produced, the scope of its coverage, and the process by which it was developed;
(2) the problems and threats the strategy is directed toward;
(3) what the strategy is trying to achieve, steps to achieve those results, as well as the priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results;
(4) what the strategy will cost, the sources and types of resources and investments needed, and where resources and investments should be targeted based on balancing risk reductions with costs;
(5) who will be implementing the strategy, what their roles will be compared to others, and mechanisms for them to coordinate their efforts; and
(6) how the strategy relates to other strategies and plans.

Although some U.S. government agencies have developed or updated overarching strategies since September 11, 2001, the lack of information on roles and responsibilities and lack of coordination mechanisms in these strategies can hinder interagency collaboration. Our prior work, as well as that by national security experts, has found that strategic direction is required as the basis for collaboration toward national security goals.[3] Overarching strategies can help agencies overcome differences in missions, cultures, and ways of doing business by providing strategic direction for activities and articulating a common outcome to collaboratively work toward.[4] As a result, agencies can better align their activities, processes, and resources to collaborate effectively to accomplish a commonly defined outcome. Without having the strategic direction that overarching strategies can provide, agencies may develop their own individual efforts that may not be well-coordinated with that of interagency partners, thereby limiting progress in meeting national security goals. Defining organizational roles and responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination—one of the desirable characteristics for strategies that we have identified in our prior work—can help agencies clarify who will lead or participate in which activities, organize their joint activities and individual efforts, facilitate decision making, and address how conflicts would be resolved.[5]

[3]See, for example, GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005); *Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas*, GAO-08-622 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 17, 2008); and Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, Va.: Nov. 26, 2008).

[4]GAO-06-15.

[5]GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, GAO-04-408T (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

The lack of overarching strategies that address roles and responsibilities and coordination mechanisms—among other desirable characteristics that we have identified in our prior work—can hinder interagency collaboration for national security programs at home and abroad. We have testified and reported that in some cases U.S. efforts have been hindered by multiple agencies pursuing individual efforts without overarching strategies detailing roles and responsibilities of organizations involved or coordination mechanisms to integrate their efforts. For example, we have found the following:

- Since 2005, multiple U.S. agencies—including the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Department of Defense (DOD)—had led separate efforts to improve the capacity of Iraq's ministries to govern without overarching direction from a lead entity to integrate their efforts. As we have testified and reported,[6] the lack of an overarching strategy contributed to U.S. efforts not meeting their goal of key Iraqi ministries having the capacity to effectively govern and assume increasing responsibility for operating, maintaining, and further investing in reconstruction projects.[7]

- In July 2008 we reported that agencies involved in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership had not developed a comprehensive, integrated strategy for the program's implementation.[8] The State Department, USAID, and DOD had developed separate plans related to their respective program activities that reflect some interagency collaboration, for example, in assessing country needs for development assistance. However, these plans did not incorporate all of the desirable

[6]GAO, *Iraq and Afghanistan: Security, Economic, and Governance Challenges to Rebuilding Efforts Should Be Addressed in U.S. Strategies*, GAO-09-476T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 25, 2009); *Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Actions Needed to Address Inadequate Accountability over U.S. Efforts and Investments*, GAO-08-568T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 11, 2008); *Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: U.S. Ministry Capacity Development Efforts Need an Overall Integrated Strategy to Guide Efforts and Manage Risk*, GAO-08-117 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 1, 2007).

[7]The State Department hired a contractor in 2008 to develop a strategic planning document for ministry capacity development in Iraq. Additionally, the United States shifted its emphasis to helping Iraqi ministries execute their capital investment budgets based on the update to the U.S. strategy in Iraq in 2007.

[8]The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is a multiyear, multiagency effort to support diplomacy, development assistance, and military activities to strengthen country and regional counterterrorism capabilities and inhibit the spread of extremist ideology. Key agencies in the effort are the State Department, USAID, and DOD, with the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs as the program lead.

characteristics for strategies that we have previously identified. For example, we found that roles and responsibilities—particularly between the State Department and DOD—were unclear with regard to authority over DOD personnel temporarily assigned to conduct certain program activities in African countries, and DOD officials said that disagreements affected implementation of DOD's activities in Niger. DOD suspended most of its program activities in Niger in 2007 after the ambassador limited the number of DOD personnel allowed to enter the country. State Department officials said these limits were set in part because of embassy concerns about the country's fragile political environment as well as limited space and staff available to support DOD personnel deployed to partner countries.[9]

- At the time of our May 2007 review, we found that the State Department office responsible for coordinating law enforcement agencies' role in combating terrorism had not developed or implemented an overarching plan to use the combined capabilities of U.S. law enforcement agencies to assist foreign nations to identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists. Additionally, the national strategies related to this effort lacked clearly defined roles and responsibilities.[10] In one country we visited for that review, the lack of clear roles and responsibilities led two law enforcement agencies, which were unknowingly working with different foreign law enforcement agencies, to move in on the same subject. According to foreign and U.S. law enforcement officials, such actions may have compromised other investigations. We also reported that because the national strategies related to this effort did not clarify specific roles, among other issues, law enforcement agencies were not being fully used abroad to protect U.S. citizens and interests from future terrorist attacks.[11]

- In our work on the federal government's pandemic influenza preparedness efforts, we noted that the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services share most federal leadership roles in implementing the pandemic influenza strategy and supporting plans; however, we

[9]GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Actions Needed to Enhance Implementation of Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*, GAO-08-860 (Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2008).

[10]Three strategies that provide some strategic-level guidance for U.S. law enforcement agencies to help foreign nations identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists are the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, and the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism.*

[11]GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Law Enforcement Agencies Lack Directives to Assist Foreign Nations to Identify, Disrupt, and Prosecute Terrorists*, GAO-07-697 (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2007).

reported that it was not clear how this would work in practice because their roles were unclear. The *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* and its supporting implementation plan described the Secretary of Health and Human Services as being responsible for leading the medical response in a pandemic, while the Secretary of Homeland Security would be responsible for overall domestic incident management and federal coordination. However, since a pandemic extends well beyond health and medical boundaries, to include sustaining critical infrastructure, private-sector activities, the movement of goods and services across the nation and the globe, and economic and security considerations, it is not clear when, in a pandemic, the Secretary of Health and Human Services would be in the lead and when the Secretary of Homeland Security would lead. This lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities could lead to confusion or disagreements among implementing agencies that could hinder interagency collaboration, and a federal response could be slowed as agencies resolve their roles and responsibilities following the onset of a significant outbreak.[12]

- In March 2008, we reported that DOD and the intelligence community had not developed, agreed upon, or issued a national security space strategy. The United States depends on space assets to support national security activities, among other activities. Reports have long recognized the need for a strategy to guide the national security space community's efforts in space and better integrate the activities of DOD and the intelligence community. Moreover, Congress found in the past that DOD and the intelligence community may not be well-positioned to coordinate certain intelligence activities and programs to ensure unity of effort and avoid duplication of efforts. We reported that a draft strategy had been developed in 2004, but according to the National Security Space Office Director, the National Security Council requested that the strategy not be issued until the revised National Space Policy directive was released in October 2006. However, once the policy was issued, changes in leadership at the National Reconnaissance Office and Air Force, as well as differences in opinion and organizational differences between the defense and intelligence communities further delayed issuance of the strategy. Until a national security space strategy is issued, the defense and

[12]GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Continued Focus on the Nation's Planning and Preparedness Efforts Remains Essential*, GAO-09-760T (Washington, D.C.: June 3, 2009); *Influenza Pandemic: Sustaining Focus on the Nation's Planning and Preparedness Efforts*, GAO-09-334 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 26, 2009); and *Influenza Pandemic: Further Efforts Are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy*, GAO-07-781 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 14, 2007).

intelligence communities may continue to make independent decisions and use resources that are not necessarily based on national priorities, which could lead to gaps in some areas of space operations and redundancies in others.[13]

- We testified in March 2009 that as the current administration clarifies its new strategy for Iraq and develops a new comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan, these strategies should incorporate the desirable characteristics we have previously identified.[14] This includes, among other issues, the roles and responsibilities of U.S. government agencies, and mechanisms and approaches for coordinating the efforts of the wide variety of U.S. agencies and international organizations—such as DOD, the Departments of State, the Treasury, and Justice, USAID, the United Nations, and the World Bank—that have significant roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Clearly defining and coordinating the roles, responsibilities, commitments, and activities of all organizations involved would allow the U.S. government to prioritize the spending of limited resources and avoid unnecessary duplication.[15]

Past GAO Recommendations

In recent years we have issued reports recommending that U.S. government agencies, including DOD, the State Department, and others, develop or revise strategies to incorporate desirable characteristics for strategies for a range of programs and activities including humanitarian and development efforts in Somalia, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, foreign assistance strategy, law enforcement agencies' role in assisting foreign nations in combating terrorism, and meeting U.S. national security goals in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In commenting on drafts of those reports, agencies generally concurred with our recommendations. Officials from one organization—the National Counterterrorism Center—noted that at the time of our May 2007 report on law enforcement agencies' role in assisting foreign nations in

[13]GAO, *Defense Space Activities: National Security Space Strategy Needed to Guide Future Space Efforts*, GAO-08-431R (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 27, 2008).

[14]We noted in that testimony that for Afghanistan, the strategy should address risks posed by neighboring countries that can profoundly influence security and stability—particularly Pakistan. We have previously recommended that the United States establish a comprehensive plan for countering terrorist threats in Pakistan that have tended to destabilize Afghanistan.

[15]GAO-09-476T.

combating terrorism, it had already begun to implement our recommendations.[16]

Oversight Questions

- What steps are agencies taking to develop joint or mutually supportive strategies to guide interagency activities?
- What obstacles or impediments exist to developing comprehensive strategies or plans that integrate multiple agencies' efforts?
- What specific national security challenges would be best served by overarching strategies?
- Who should be responsible for determining and overseeing these overarching strategies? Who should be responsible for developing the shared outcomes?
- How will agencies ensure effective implementation of overarching strategies?
- To what extent do strategies developed by federal agencies clearly identify priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results?
- What steps are federal agencies taking to ensure coordination of planning and implementation of strategies with state and local governments when appropriate?

[16]GAO-07-697.

Enclosure II: Creating Collaborative Organizations That Facilitate Integrated National Security Approaches

Issue Statement

U.S. government agencies, such as the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Defense (DOD), among others, spend billions of dollars annually on various diplomatic, development, and defense missions in support of national security. At a time when our nation faces increased fiscal constraints, it is increasingly important that agencies use their resources efficiently and effectively. Achieving meaningful results in many national security–related interagency efforts requires coordinated efforts among various actors across federal agencies; foreign, state, and local governments; nongovernment organizations; and the private sector. Given the number of agencies involved in U.S. government national security efforts, it is particularly important that there be mechanisms to coordinate across agencies. However, differences in agencies' structures, processes, and resources can hinder successful collaboration in national security, and adequate coordination mechanisms to facilitate collaboration during national security planning and execution are not always in place. Congress and the administration will need to consider the extent to which agencies' existing structures, processes, and funding sources facilitate interagency collaboration and whether changes could enhance collaboration.

Key Findings

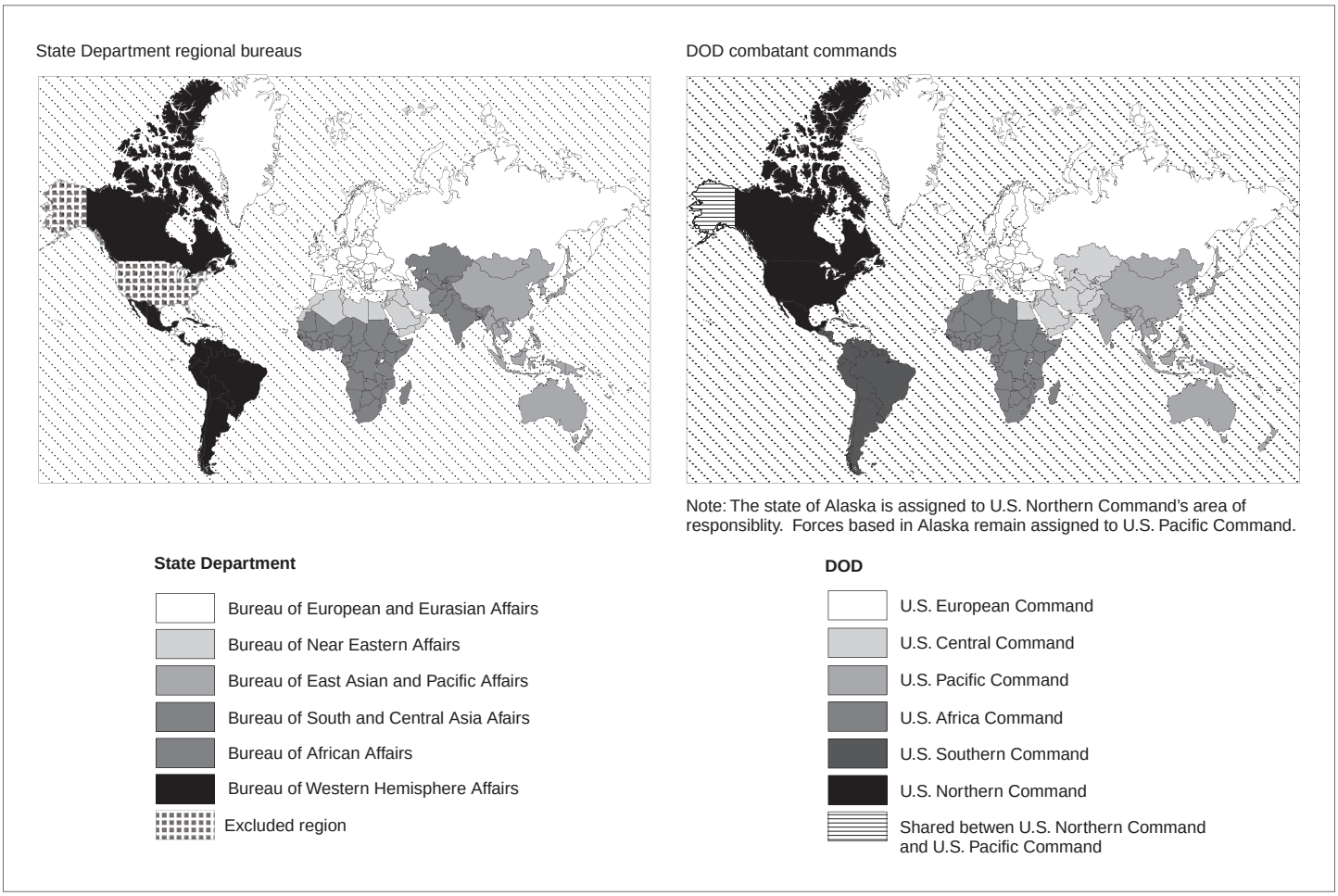
Organizational Differences Can Hinder Collaboration on National Security Activities

Based on our prior work, organizational differences—including differences in organizational structures, planning processes, and funding sources—can hinder interagency collaboration, resulting in a patchwork of activities that can waste scarce funds and limit the overall effectiveness of federal efforts.[1]

Differences in organizational structures can hinder collaboration for national security efforts. Agencies involved in national security activities define and organize their regions differently. For example, DOD's regional combatant commands and the State Department's regional bureaus are aligned differently, as shown in figure 1.

[1]GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005), and *Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination*, GAO/GGD-00-106 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2000).

Figure 1: Comparison of the State Department's Regional Bureaus and DOD's Combatant Command Areas of Responsibility



Source: DOD and State Department.

In addition to regional bureaus, the State Department is organized to interact bilaterally through U.S. embassies located within other countries. As a result of these differing structures, our prior work and that of national security experts has found that agencies must coordinate with a large number of organizations in their regional planning efforts, potentially creating gaps and overlaps in policy implementation and leading to

challenges in coordinating efforts among agencies.[2] For example, as the recent report by the Project on National Security Reform noted, U.S. government engagement with the African Union requires two of the State Department's regional bureaus, one combatant command (however, before October 2008, such efforts would have required coordination with three combatant commands), two USAID bureaus, and the U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia.[3] Similarly, in reporting on the State Department's efforts to develop a framework for planning and coordinating U.S. reconstruction and stabilization operations, the State Department noted that differences between the organizational structure of civilian agencies and that of the military could make coordination more difficult, as we reported in November 2007.[4]

Agencies also have different planning processes that can hinder interagency collaboration efforts. Specifically, in a May 2007 report on interagency planning for stability operations, we noted that some civilian agencies, like the State Department, focus their planning efforts on current operations. In contrast, DOD is required to plan for a wide range of current and potential future operations. Such differences are reflected in their planning processes: we reported that the State Department does not allocate its planning resources in the same way as DOD and, as such, does not have a large pool of planners to engage in DOD's planning process. We found almost universal agreement among all organizations included in that review—including DOD, the State Department, and USAID—that there needed to be more interagency coordination in planning.[5] However, we have previously reported that civilian agencies generally did not receive military plans for comment as they were developed, which restricted agencies' ability to harmonize plans. Interagency collaboration during plan development is important to achieving a unified government approach in

[2]See, for example, GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning*, GAO-07-549 (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2007); Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, Va.: Nov. 26, 2008); and Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Era*, *Phase 2 Report* (Washington, D.C.: July 2005).

[3]Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield*.

[4]GAO, *Stabilization and Reconstruction: Actions Are Needed to Develop a Planning and Coordination Framework and Establish the Civilian Reserve Corps*, GAO-08-39 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 6, 2007).

[5]GAO-08-39 and GAO-07-549.

plans; however, State Department officials told us during our May 2007 review that DOD's hierarchical approach, which required Secretary of Defense approval to present aspects of plans to the National Security Council for interagency coordination, limited interagency participation in the combatant commands' plan development and had been a significant obstacle to achieving a unified governmentwide approach in those plans.[6] DOD has taken some steps to involve other agencies in its strategic planning process through U.S. Africa Command. As we reported in February 2009, in developing its theater campaign plan, U.S. Africa Command was one of the first combatant commands to employ DOD's new planning approach, which called for collaboration among federal agencies to ensure activities are integrated and synchronized in pursuit of common goals. U.S. Africa Command officials met with representatives from 16 agencies at the beginning of the planning process to gain interagency input on its plan. While a nascent process, involving other U.S. government agencies at the beginning of the planning process may result in a better informed plan for DOD's activities in Africa.[7]

Moreover, agencies have different funding sources for national security activities. Funding is budgeted for and appropriated by agency, rather than by functional area (such as national security or foreign aid). The Congressional Research Service reported in December 2008 that because of this agency focus in budgeting and appropriations, there is no forum to debate which resources or combination of resources to apply to efforts, like national security, that involve multiple agencies and, therefore, the President's budget request and congressional appropriations tend to reflect individual agency concerns.[8] As we have previously testified, the agency-by-agency focus of the budget does not provide for the needed integrated perspective of government performance envisioned by the Government Performance and Results Act.[9] Moreover, we reported in March 2008 that different funding arrangements for defense and national

[6]GAO-07-549.

[7]GAO, *Defense Management: Actions Needed to Address Stakeholder Concerns, Improve Interagency Collaboration, and Determine Full Costs Associated with the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-09-181 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 20, 2009).

[8]Catherine Dale, Nina M. Serafino, and Pat Towell, Congressional Research Service, *Organizing the U.S. Government for National Security: Overview of the Interagency Reform Debates*, RL34455 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 16, 2008).

[9]GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: GPRA Has Established a Solid Foundation for Achieving Greater Results*, GAO-04-594T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 31, 2004).

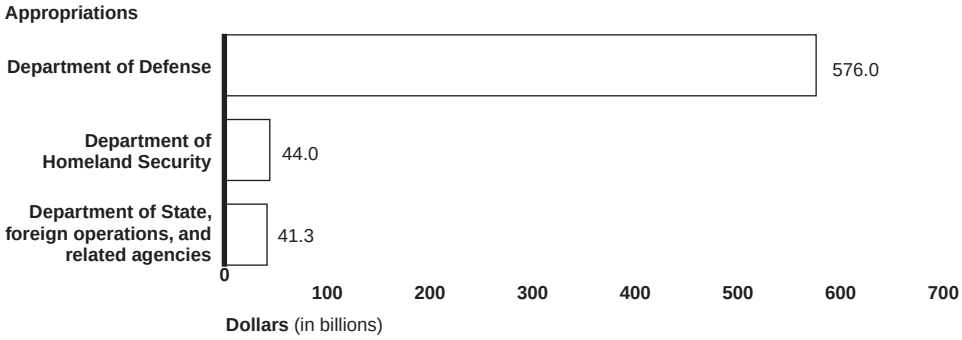
intelligence activities may complicate DOD's efforts to incorporate intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities. While DOD develops the defense intelligence budget, some DOD organizations also receive funding through the national intelligence budget, which is developed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, to provide support for national intelligence efforts. According to a DOD official, disagreement about equitable funding from each budget led to the initial operating capability date being pushed back 1 year for a new space radar system.[10] In an April 2008 Comptroller General forum on enhancing partnerships for countering transnational terrorism, some participants suggested that funding overall objectives—such as counterterrorism—rather than funding each agency would provide flexibility to allocate funding where it was needed and would have the most effect.[11] Similarly, as part of the national security reform debate, some have recommended instituting budgeting and appropriations processes—with corresponding changes to oversight processes—based on functional areas to better ensure that the U.S. national security strategy aligns with resources available to implement it.

Agencies receive different levels of appropriations that are used to fund all aspects of an agency's operations, to include national security activities. As shown in figure 2, DOD receives significantly more funding than other key agencies involved in national security activities, such as the Departments of State and Homeland Security.

[10]GAO, *Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: DOD Can Better Assess and Integrate ISR Capabilities and Oversee Development of Future ISR Requirements*, GAO-08-374 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 24, 2008).

[11]GAO, *Highlights of a GAO Forum: Enhancing U.S. Partnerships in Countering Transnational Terrorism*, GAO-08-887SP (Washington, D.C.: July 2008).

Figure 2: Fiscal Year 2009 Funding for Key Agencies Involved in National Security



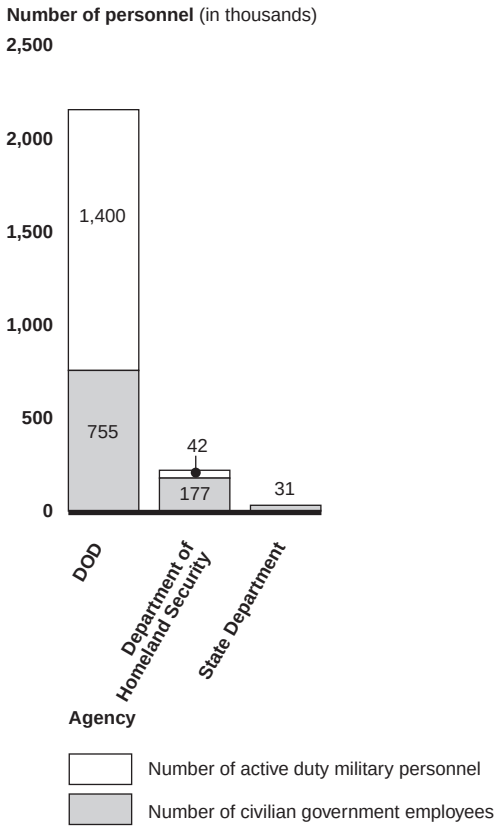
Source: Congressional Research Service.

Note: Funding data include annual appropriations, supplemental appropriations, and funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5 (2009).

As shown in figure 3, DOD also has a significantly larger workforce than other key agencies involved in national security activities. As of the end of fiscal year 2008, DOD reported having 1.4 million active duty military personnel and about 755,000 government employees,[12] while the State Department and Department of Homeland Security reported having almost 31,000 government employees and almost 219,000 government employees and military personnel, respectively.

[12]DOD also reported having almost 840,000 personnel in its National Guard and Reserve forces.

Figure 3: Number of Civilian Government Employees and Military Personnel Employed by Key Agencies Involved in National Security



Source: DOD, State Department, and Department of Homeland Security.

Notes: Data do not include contractor personnel. Numbers are rounded.

Because of its relatively large size—in terms of appropriations and personnel—DOD has begun to perform more national security–related activities than in the past. For example, as the Congressional Research Service reported in January 2009, the proportion of DOD foreign assistance funded through the State Department has increased from 7 percent of bilateral official development assistance in calendar year 2001

to an estimated 20 percent in 2006, largely in response to stabilization and reconstruction activities in Iraq and Afghanistan.[13]

The Secretaries of Defense and State have testified and stated that successful collaboration among civilian and military agencies requires confronting the disparity in resources, including providing greater capacity in the State Department and USAID to allow for effective civilian response and civilian-military partnership.[14] In testimonies in April 2008 and May 2009, the former and current Secretaries of State, respectively, explained that the State Department was taking steps to become more capable and ready to handle reconstruction and development tasks in coordination with DOD. Specifically, former Secretary of State Rice explained that the State Department had redeployed diplomats from European and Washington posts to countries of greater need; sought to increase the size of the diplomatic corps in the State Department and USAID; and was training diplomats for nontraditional roles, especially stabilization and reconstruction activities.[15] Additionally, the current Secretary of State noted in testimonies before two congressional committees that the State Department is working with DOD and will be taking back the resources to do the work that the agency should be leading, but did not elaborate on which activities this included.[16] Enclosure III of this report further

[13]We did not validate these data. According to the Congressional Research Service, official development assistance consists of aid activities of a development nature. This includes some DOD programs providing humanitarian assistance, civic action activities, training and equipping of foreign militaries, counternarcotics programs, and even some health-related assistance, such as DOD's HIV/AIDS assistance to some foreign militaries. See Susan B. Epstein and Connie Veillette, Congressional Research Service, *Foreign Aid Reform: Issues for Congress and Policy Options*, RL34243 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2009).

[14]See, for example, Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Foreign Policy Priorities in the President's FY2010 International Affairs Budget* (May 20, 2009); Hillary Rodham Clinton, *FY 2010 Budget for the Department of State* (May 20, 2009); Robert M. Gates, *A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New* Age, Foreign Affairs (January/February 2009); Robert M. Gates, *Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee* (Apr. 15, 2008); and Condoleezza Rice, *Testimony of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Before the House Armed Services Committee With Secretary of Defense Robert Gates* (Apr. 15, 2008).

[15]Condoleezza Rice, *Testimony of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Before the House Armed Services Committee With Secretary of Defense Robert Gates*.

[16]Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Foreign Policy Priorities in the President's FY2010 International Affairs Budget*, *FY 2010 Budget for the Department of State*, and *Testimony Before the Senate Appropriations Committee* (April 30, 2009).

discusses the human capital issues related to interagency collaboration for national security.

Some Agencies Have Established Mechanisms to Integrate Efforts, but Challenges Remain

Some agencies have established mechanisms to facilitate interagency collaboration—a critical step in achieving integrated approaches to national security—but challenges remain in collaboration efforts. We have found in our prior work on enhancing interagency collaboration that agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries, among other practices.[17]

Some agencies have established and formalized coordination mechanisms to facilitate interagency collaboration. For example:

- At the time of our review, DOD's U.S. Africa Command had undertaken efforts to integrate personnel from other U.S. government agencies into its command structure because the command is primarily focused on strengthening security cooperation with African nations and creating opportunities to bolster the capabilities of African partners, which are activities that traditionally require coordination with other agencies.[18] DOD's other combatant commands have also established similar coordination mechanisms. National security experts have noted that U.S. Southern Command has been relatively more successful than some other commands in its collaboration efforts and attributed this success, in part, to the command's long history of interagency operations related to domestic disaster response and counterdrug missions.[19]

- As we reported in March 2009, an intelligence component of the Drug Enforcement Administration rejoined the intelligence community in 2006 to provide a link to coordinate terrorism and narcotics intelligence with all intelligence community partners. According to a Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General report, intelligence community partners

[17]GAO-06-15.

[18]At the time of our review, U.S. Africa Command had taken initial steps to integrate personnel from other U.S. government agencies into the command but had not finalized the extent of interagency representation. See GAO-09-181.

[19]Nora Bensahel, Olga Oliker, and Heather Peterson, *Improving Capacity for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations* (Arlington, Va.: RAND Corp., 2009); Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield*; National Defense University, *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations* (Washington, D.C.: December 2008).

found the Drug Enforcement Administration's intelligence valuable in their efforts to examine ongoing threats.[20]

- DOD, State Department, and USAID officials have established processes to coordinate projects related to humanitarian relief and reconstruction funded through the Commander's Emergency Response Program[21] and Section 1206 program.[22] We reported in June 2008 that Multinational Corps–Iraq guidance required DOD commanders to coordinate Commander's Emergency Response Program projects with various elements, including local government agencies, civil affairs elements, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams. DOD, State Department, and USAID officials we interviewed for that review said that the presence of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, as well as embedded teams, had improved coordination among programs funded by these agencies and the officials were generally satisfied with the coordination that was taking place.[23] Similarly, Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act

[20]GAO, *Drug Control: Better Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and an Updated Accountability Framework Can Further Enhance DEA's Efforts to Meet Post-9/11 Responsibilities*, GAO-09-63 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 20, 2009).

[21]The Commander's Emergency Response Program was designed to enable local commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their areas of responsibility. Guidance issued by the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) establishes authorized uses for these funds, including transportation, electricity, and condolence payments. See GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight and Interagency Coordination for the Commander's Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan*, GAO-09-615 (Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2009), and *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Better Guide Project Selection for Commander's Emergency Response Program and Improve Oversight in Iraq*, GAO-08-736R (Washington, D.C.: June 23, 2008).

[22]Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006 (Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1206 (2006), as amended) authorizes DOD to provide equipment, supplies, or training to a foreign country to build its capacity to (1) conduct counterterrorism operations or (2) participate in or support stability operations in which the U.S. military also participates. Funds may be obligated only with the concurrence of the Secretary of State. See GAO, *Section 1206 Security Assistance Program—Findings on Criteria, Coordination, and Implementation*, GAO-07-416R (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2007). A related program—Section 1207—authorizes DOD to transfer to the State Department up to $100 million per fiscal year in defense articles, services, training, or other support for reconstruction, stabilization, and security activities in foreign countries. The Secretary of State must coordinate with the Secretary of Defense in the formulation and implementation of a program of reconstruction, security, or stabilization assistance to a foreign country that involves the provision of these services or transfer of these defense articles or funds. Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1207 (2006), as amended by Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 1210 (2008) and Pub. L. No. 110-417, § 1207 (2008).

[23]GAO-08-736R.

of 2006 gave DOD the authority to spend a portion of its own appropriations to train and equip foreign militaries to undertake counterterrorism and stability operations. The State Department and DOD must jointly formulate all projects and coordinate their implementation and, at the time of our review, the agencies had developed a coordinated process for jointly reviewing and selecting project proposals. We found that coordination in formulating proposals did not occur consistently between DOD's combatant commands and the State Department's embassy teams for those projects formulated in fiscal year 2006; however, officials reported better coordination in the formulation of fiscal year 2007 proposals.[24]

While some agencies have established mechanisms to enhance collaboration, challenges remain in facilitating interagency collaboration. We have found that some mechanisms are not formalized, may not be fully utilized, or have difficulty gaining stakeholder support, thus limiting their effectiveness in enhancing interagency collaboration.

- *Some mechanisms may be informal.* In the absence of formal coordination mechanisms, some agencies have established informal coordination mechanisms; however, by using informal coordination mechanisms, agencies could end up relying on the personalities of officials involved to ensure effective collaboration. At DOD's U.S. Northern Command, for example, we found that successful collaboration on the command's homeland defense plan between the command and an interagency planning team was largely based on the dedicated personalities involved and the informal meetings and teleconferences they instituted.[25] In that report we concluded that without institutionalizing the interagency planning structure, efforts to coordinate with agency partners may not continue when personnel move to their next assignments.[26]

[24]GAO-07-416R.

[25]The Incident Management Planning Team is an interagency team created by the Department of Homeland Security to provide contingency and crisis action incident management planning based on 15 national planning scenarios. Participating organizations include DOD; the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, Energy, Transportation, and Health and Human Services; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the American Red Cross.

[26]GAO, *Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues*, GAO-08-251 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2008).

- *Some mechanisms may not be fully utilized.* While some agencies have put in place mechanisms to facilitate coordination on national security activities, some mechanisms are not always fully utilized. We reported in October 2007 that the industry-specific coordinating councils that the Department of Homeland Security established to be the primary mechanism for coordinating government and private-sector efforts could be better utilized for collaboration on pandemic influenza preparedness. Specifically, we noted that these coordinating councils were primarily used to coordinate in a single area, sharing information across sectors and government, rather than to address a range of other challenges, such as unclear roles and responsibilities between federal and state governments in areas such as state border closures and vaccine distribution. In February 2009, Department of Homeland Security officials informed us that the department was working on initiatives to address potential coordination challenges in response to our recommendation.[27]

- *Some mechanisms have limited support from key stakeholders.* While some agencies have implemented mechanisms to facilitate coordination, limited support from stakeholders can hinder collaboration efforts. Our prior work has shown that agencies' concerns about maintaining jurisdiction over their missions and associated resources can be a significant barrier to interagency collaboration.[28] For example, DOD initially faced resistance from key stakeholders in the creation of the U.S. Africa Command, in part due to concerns expressed by State Department officials that U.S. Africa Command would become the lead for all U.S. government activities in Africa, even though embassies lead decision making on U.S. government noncombat activities conducted in a country.[29]

Past GAO Recommendations

In recent years we have issued reports recommending that the Secretaries of Defense, State, and Homeland Security and the Attorney General take a variety of actions to address creating collaborative organizations, including taking actions to

[27]GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Sustaining Focus on the Nation's Planning and Preparedness Efforts*, GAO-09-334 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 26, 2009), and *Influenza Pandemic: Opportunities Exist to Address Critical Infrastructure Protection Challenges That Require Federal and Private Sector Coordination*, GAO-08-36 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 31, 2007).

[28]GAO/GGD-00-106.

[29]GAO-09-181 and GAO, *Force Structure: Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges Associated with Establishing the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-08-947T (Washington, D.C.: July 15, 2008).

- provide implementation guidance to facilitate interagency participation and develop clear guidance and procedures for interagency efforts,
- develop an approach to overcome differences in planning processes,
- create coordinating mechanisms, and
- clarify roles and responsibilities.

In commenting on drafts of those reports, agencies generally concurred with our recommendations. In some cases, agencies identified planned actions to address the recommendations. For example, in our April 2008 report on U.S. Northern Command's plans, we recommended that clear guidance be developed for interagency planning efforts and DOD stated that it had begun to incorporate such direction in its major planning documents and would continue to expand on this guidance in the future.[30]

Oversight Questions

- What processes, including internal agency processes, are hindering further interagency collaboration and what changes are needed to address these challenges?
- What are the benefits of and barriers to instituting a function-based budgeting and appropriations process?
- What resources or authorities are needed to further support integrated or mutually supportive activities across agencies?
- What steps are being taken to create or utilize structures or mechanisms to develop integrated or mutually supportive plans and activities?
- What is the appropriate role for key agencies in various national security–related activities?
- What strategies might Congress and agencies use to address challenges presented by the various funding sources?

[30] GAO-08-251.

Enclosure III: Developing a Workforce to Enhance Collaboration in U.S. National Security

Issue Statement

As the threats to national security have evolved over the past decades, so have the skills needed to prepare for and respond to those threats. To effectively and efficiently address today's national security challenges, federal agencies need a qualified, well-trained workforce with the skills and experience that can enable them to integrate the diverse capabilities and resources of the U.S. government. However, federal agencies do not always have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs at the right time to meet the challenges they face, to include having a workforce that is able to deploy quickly to address crises. Moreover, personnel often lack knowledge of the processes and cultures of the agencies with which they must collaborate. To help federal agencies develop a workforce that can enhance collaboration in national security, Congress and the administration may need to consider legislative and administrative changes needed to build personnel capacities, enhance personnel systems to promote interagency efforts, expand training opportunities, and improve strategic workforce planning, thereby enabling a greater ability to address national security in a more integrated manner.

Key Findings

Some Agencies Lack Personnel Capacity to Fully Participate in Interagency Activities

Collaborative approaches to national security require a well-trained workforce with the skills and experience to integrate the government's diverse capabilities and resources, but some federal government agencies may lack the personnel capacity to fully participate in interagency activities. When we added strategic human capital management to our governmentwide high-risk list in 2001, we explained that "human capital shortfalls are eroding the ability of many agencies—and threatening the ability of others—to effectively, efficiently, and economically perform their missions."[1] We also have reported that personnel shortages can threaten an organization's ability to perform missions efficiently and effectively.[2] Moreover, some agencies also lack the capacity to deploy personnel rapidly when the nation's leaders direct a U.S. response to crises. As a result, the initial response to a crisis could rely heavily on the

[1]GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-01-263 (Washington, D.C.: January 2001). Strategic human capital management remains on our high-risk list in 2009. See GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-09-271 (Washington, D.C.: January 2009).

[2]GAO, *Defense Management: Actions Needed to Address Stakeholder Concerns, Improve Interagency Collaboration, and Determine Full Costs Associated with the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-09-181 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 20, 2009).

deployment of military forces and require military forces to conduct missions beyond their core areas of expertise.[3]

Some federal government agencies have taken steps to improve their capacity to participate in interagency activities. For example, in response to a presidential directive and a State Department recommendation to provide a centralized, permanent civilian capacity for planning and coordinating the civilian response to stabilization and reconstruction operations, the State Department has begun establishing three civilian response entities to act as first responders to international crises.[4] Despite these efforts, we reported in November 2007 that the State Department has experienced difficulties in establishing permanent positions and recruiting for one of these entities, the Active Response Corps. Similarly, we also reported that other agencies that have begun to develop a stabilization and reconstruction response capacity, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of the Treasury, have limited numbers of staff available for rapid responses to overseas crises.[5]

Moreover, some federal government agencies are experiencing personnel shortages that have impeded their ability to participate in interagency activities. For example, in February 2009 we reported that the Department of Defense's (DOD) U.S. Africa Command was originally intended to have significant interagency representation, but that of the 52 interagency positions DOD approved for the command, as of October 2008 only 13 of

[3]GAO, *Human Capital: Actions Needed to Better Track and Provide Timely and Accurate Compensation and Medical Benefits to Deployed Federal Civilians*, GAO-09-562 (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2009).

[4]This civilian response capability is comprised of an Active Response Corps, a Standby Response Corps, and a Civilian Reserve Corps. Active Response Corps staff would deploy during the initial stage of stabilization and reconstruction operations to assess countries' or regions' needs and help plan, coordinate, and monitor a U.S. government response. Standby Response Corps staff would deploy during the second stage of a surge to stabilization and reconstruction operations to support activities of the Active Response Corps when additional staff or specialized skills are required. While the Active and Standby Response Corps are both comprised of government employees, the Civilian Reserve Corps would be made up of U.S. civilians who have skills and experiences useful for stabilization and reconstruction operations, such as civil engineers, police officers, and judges, that are not readily available within the U.S. government. These reservists would work in their normal jobs unless called upon for service, in which case they would deploy within 30 to 60 days.

[5]GAO, *Stabilization and Reconstruction: Actions Are Needed to Develop a Planning and Coordination Framework and Establish the Civilian Reserve Corps*, GAO-08-39 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 6, 2007).

these positions had been filled with experts from the State, Treasury, and Agriculture Departments; USAID; and other federal government agencies. Embedding personnel from other federal agencies was considered essential by DOD because these personnel would bring knowledge of their home agencies into the command, which was expected to improve the planning and execution of the command's programs and activities and stimulate collaboration among U.S. government agencies. However, U.S. Africa Command has had limited interagency participation due in part to personnel shortages in agencies like the State Department, which initially could only staff 2 of the 15 positions requested by DOD because the State Department faced a 25 percent shortfall in mid-level personnel.[6] In addition, in November 2007 we reported that the limited number of personnel that other federal government agencies could offer hindered efforts to include civilian agencies into DOD planning and exercises.[7]

Furthermore, some interagency coordination efforts have been impeded because agencies have been reluctant to detail staff to other organizations or deploy them overseas for interagency efforts due to concerns that the agency may be unable to perform its work without these employees. For example, we reported in October 2007 that in the face of resource constraints, officials in 37 state and local government information fusion centers—collaborative efforts intended to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity—said they encountered challenges with federal, state, and local agencies not being able to detail personnel to their fusion center.[8] Fusion centers rely on such details to staff the centers and enhance information sharing with other state and local agencies. An official at one fusion center said that, because of already limited resources in state and local agencies, it was challenging to convince these agencies to contribute personnel to the center because they viewed doing so as a loss of resources. Moreover, we reported in November 2007 that the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization had difficulty getting the State Department's other units to release Standby Response Corps volunteers to deploy for interagency stabilization and reconstruction operations because the home units of these volunteers did not want to become short-staffed or

[6]GAO-09-181.

[7]GAO-08-39.

[8]GAO, *Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers*, GAO-08-35 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 30, 2007).

lose high-performing staff to other operations.[9] In the same report, we also found that other agencies reported a reluctance to deploy staff overseas or establish on-call units to support interagency stabilization and reconstruction operations because doing so would leave fewer workers available to complete the home offices' normal work requirements.

In addition to the lack of personnel, many national security experts argue that federal government agencies do not have the necessary capabilities to support their national security roles and responsibilities.[10] For example, in September 2009, we reported that 31 percent of the State Department's Foreign Service generalists and specialists in language-designated positions worldwide did not meet both the language speaking and reading proficiency requirements for their positions as of October 2008, up from 29 percent in 2005.[11] To meet these language requirements, we reported that the State Department efforts include a combination of language training, special recruitment incentives for personnel with foreign language skills, and bonus pay to personnel with proficiency in certain languages, but the department faces several challenges to these efforts, particularly staffing shortages that limit the "personnel float" needed to allow staff to take language training. Similarly, we reported in September 2008 that USAID officials at some overseas missions told us that they did not receive adequate and timely acquisition and assistance support at times,[12] in part because the numbers of USAID staff were insufficient or because the USAID staff lacked necessary competencies.[13] National security experts

[9]GAO-08-39. Standby Response Corps volunteers serve normal duty rotations at overseas posts or within State's various bureaus and offices within the United States.

[10]Catherine Dale, Nina M. Serafino, and Pat Towell, Congressional Research Service, *Organizing the U.S. Government for National Security: Overview of the Interagency Reform Debates*, RL34455 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 16, 2008).

[11]GAO, *Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*, GAO-09-955 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2009). We explained that although it can be difficult to link foreign language shortfalls to a specific negative outcome or event, these shortfalls could be negatively affecting several aspects of U.S. diplomacy, including consular operations, security, public diplomacy, economic and political affairs, the development of relationships with foreign counterparts and audiences, and staff morale.

[12]Over the last few decades, as the U.S. government has increasingly come to rely on the private sector to perform various functions, USAID has shifted from conducting its own activities to managing acquisition and assistance instruments, which are awarded to and implemented by mainly nongovernmental organizations.

[13]GAO, *USAID Acquisition and Assistance: Actions Needed to Develop and Implement a Strategic Workforce Plan*, GAO-08-1059 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 26, 2008).

have expressed concerns that unless the full range of civilian and military expertise and capabilities are effective and available in sufficient capacity, decision makers will be unable to manage and resolve national security issues.[14]

In the absence of sufficient personnel, some agencies have relied on contractors to fill roles that traditionally had been performed by government employees. As we explained in October 2008, DOD, the State Department, and USAID have relied extensively on contractors to support troops and civilian personnel and to oversee and carry out reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[15] While the use of contractors to support U.S. military operations is not new, the number of contractors and the work they were performing in Iraq and Afghanistan represent an increased reliance on contractors to carry out agency missions. Moreover, as agencies have relied more heavily on contractors to provide professional, administrative, and management support services, we previously reported that some agencies had hired contractors for sensitive positions in reaction to a shortfall in the government workforce rather than as a planned strategy to help achieve an agency mission.[16] For example, our prior work has shown that DOD relied heavily on contractor personnel to augment its in-house workforce.[17] In our March 2008 report on defense contracting issues, we reported that in 15 of the 21 DOD offices we reviewed, contractor personnel outnumbered DOD personnel and

[14]Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, Va.: Nov. 26, 2008).

[15]GAO, *Contingency Contracting: DOD, State, and USAID Contracts and Contractor Personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan*, GAO-09-19 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 1, 2008).

[16]GAO, *Defense Contracting: Army Case Study Delineates Concerns with Use of Contractors as Contract Specialists*, GAO-08-360 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2008). For example, in April 2009 we testified that of the 30 DOD program offices we reviewed who reported information about the reasons why they use contractor personnel, 22 said they hired contractors because of a shortage of civilian personnel with a particular expertise. GAO, *Acquisition Workforce: DOD Can Improve Its Management and Oversight by Tracking Data on Contractor Personnel and Taking Additional Actions*, GAO-09-616T (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 28, 2009).

[17]GAO-09-616T.

constituted as much as 88 percent of the workforce.[18] While use of contractors provides the government certain benefits, such as increased flexibility in fulfilling immediate needs, we and others have raised concerns about the federal government's services contracting.[19] These concerns include the risk of paying more than necessary for work, the risk of loss of government control over and accountability for policy and program decisions, the potential for improper use of personal services contracts,[20] and the increased potential for conflicts of interest.

Given the limited civilian capacity, DOD has tended to become the default responder to international and domestic events, although DOD does not always have all of the needed expertise and capabilities possessed by other federal government agencies. For example, we reported in May 2007 that DOD was playing an increased role in stability operations activities, an area that DOD directed be given priority on par with combat operations in November 2005. These activities required the department to employ an increasing number of personnel with specific skills and capabilities, such as those in civil affairs and psychological operations units.[21] However, we found that DOD had encountered challenges in identifying stability operations capabilities and had not yet systematically identified and prioritized the full range of needed capabilities. While the services were each pursuing efforts to improve current capabilities, such as those associated with civil affairs and language skills, we stated that these initiatives may not reflect the comprehensive set of capabilities that would be needed to effectively accomplish stability operations in the future. Since then, DOD has taken steps to improve its capacity to develop and maintain capabilities and skills to perform tasks such as stabilization and reconstruction operations. For example, in June 2009, we noted the

[18]GAO, *Defense Contracting: Additional Personal Conflicts of Interest Safeguards Needed for Certain DOD Contractor Employees*, GAO-08-169 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 7, 2008). We judgmentally selected 21 DOD offices for review that were identified by DOD officials as having a large contractor workforce and representing a cross-section of DOD organizations. In the remaining 6 of the 21 offices included in that review, contractor personnel constituted from 19 to 46 percent of the workforce.

[19]GAO-08-360.

[20]The Federal Acquisition Regulation generally prohibits the use of personal services contracts because of the employer-employee relationship they create between the government and contractor personnel.

[21]GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning*, GAO-07-549 (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2007).

increased emphasis that DOD has placed on improving the foreign language and regional proficiency of U.S. forces.[22]

In February 2009, the Secretary of Defense acknowledged that the military and civilian elements of the United States' national security apparatus have grown increasingly out of balance, and he attributed this problem to a lack of civilian capacity.[23] The 2008 National Defense Strategy notes that greater civilian participation is necessary both to make military operations successful and to relieve stress on the military. However, national security experts have noted that while rhetoric about the importance of nonmilitary capabilities has grown, funding and capabilities have remained small compared to the challenge.[24] As a result, some national security experts have expressed concern that if DOD continues in this default responder role, it could lead to the militarization of foreign policy and may exacerbate the lack of civilian capacity.[25] Similarly, we reported in February 2009 that State Department and USAID officials, as well as many nongovernmental organizations, believed that the creation of the U.S. Africa Command could blur the traditional boundaries among diplomacy, development, and defense, regardless of DOD's intention that this command support rather than lead U.S. efforts in Africa, thereby giving the perception of militarizing foreign policy and aid.[26]

Agencies' Personnel Systems Do Not Always Facilitate Interagency Collaboration

Agencies' personnel systems do not always facilitate interagency collaboration, with interagency assignments often not being considered career-enhancing or recognized in agency performance management systems, which could diminish agency employees' interest in serving in interagency efforts. For example, in May 2007 we reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had difficulty filling permanent overseas positions because the FBI did not provide career rewards and incentives

[22]GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568 (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009).

[23]Robert M. Gates, *A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age*, Foreign Affairs (January/February 2009).

[24]Nora Bensahel, Olga Oliker, and Heather Peterson, *Improving Capacity for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations* (Arlington, Va.: RAND Corp., 2009).

[25]Bensahel et al., *Improving Capacity*.

[26]GAO-09-181.

to agents or develop a culture that promoted the importance and value of overseas duty.[27] As a result, permanent FBI positions were either unfilled or staffed with nonpermanent staff on temporary, short-term rotations, which limited the FBI's ability to collaborate with foreign nations to identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists.[28] At the time of that review, the FBI had just begun to implement career incentives to encourage staff to volunteer for overseas duty, but we were unable to assess the effect of these incentives on staffing problems because the incentives had just been implemented. Moreover, in June 2009 we reviewed compensation policies for six agencies that deployed civilian personnel to Iraq and Afghanistan, and reported that variations in policies for such areas as overtime rate, premium pay eligibility, and deployment status could result in monetary differences of tens of thousands of dollars per year.[29] OPM acknowledged that laws and agency policy could result in federal government agencies paying different amounts of compensation to deployed civilians at equivalent pay grades who are working under the same conditions and facing the same risks.

In addition, we previously identified reinforcing individual accountability for collaborative efforts through agency performance management systems as a key practice that can help enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies.[30] However, our prior work has shown that assignments that involve collaborating with other agencies may not be rewarded. For example, in April 2009 we reported that officials from the Departments of Commerce, Energy, Health and Human Services, and the Treasury stated that providing support for State Department foreign

[27]GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Law Enforcement Agencies Lack Directives to Assist Foreign Nations to Identify, Disrupt, and Prosecute Terrorists*, GAO-07-697 (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2007). The FBI has expanded the role of its legal attachés overseas to be a dynamic operational partnership with foreign counterparts that includes operationally assisting foreign law enforcement agencies to identify and prosecute terrorists involved in terrorist attacks against U.S. interests around the globe, as well as to proactively assist foreign nations to identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists.

[28]Both FBI headquarters staff and agents in the field at all four countries we visited for that review said that it was essential to have long-term rotations in a country in order to establish the types of working relationships with foreign law enforcement agencies that are needed to effectively assist them to identify, disrupt, and prosecute terrorists.

[29]GAO, *Human Capital: Actions Needed to Better Track and Provide Timely and Accurate Compensation and Medical Benefits to Deployed Federal Civilians*, GAO-09-562 (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2009).

[30]GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

assistance program processes creates an additional workload that is neither recognized by their agencies nor included as a factor in their performance ratings.[31] Furthermore, agency personnel systems may not readily facilitate assigning personnel from one agency to another, which could hinder interagency collaboration. For example, we testified in July 2008 that, according to DOD officials, personnel systems among federal agencies were incompatible, which did not readily facilitate the assignment of non-DOD personnel into the new U.S. Africa Command.[32]

Training Opportunities and Strategic Workforce Planning Could Facilitate Collaboration

Increased training opportunities and focusing on strategic workforce planning efforts are two tools that could facilitate federal agencies' ability to fully participate in interagency collaboration activities. We have previously testified that agencies need to have effective training and development programs to address gaps in the skills and competencies that they identified in their workforces.[33] Training and developing personnel to fill new and different roles will play a crucial part in the federal government's endeavors to meet its transformation challenges. Some agencies have ongoing efforts to educate senior leaders about the importance of interagency collaboration. For example, we reported in February 2009 that DOD's 2008 update to its civilian human capital strategic plan identifies the need for senior leaders to understand interagency roles and responsibilities as a necessary leadership capability.[34] We explained that DOD's new Defense Senior Leader Development Program focuses on developing senior leaders to excel in the 21st century's joint, interagency, and multinational environment and supports the governmentwide effort to foster interagency cooperation and information sharing.

[31]GAO, *Foreign Aid Reform: Comprehensive Strategy, Interagency Coordination, and Operational Improvements Would Bolster Current Efforts*, GAO-09-192 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 17, 2009).

[32]GAO, *Force Structure: Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges Associated with Establishing the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-08-947T (Washington, D.C.: July 15, 2008).

[33]GAO, *Human Capital: Federal Workforce Challenges in the 21st Century*, GAO-07-556T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2007).

[34]GAO, *Human Capital: Opportunities Exist to Build on Recent Progress to Strengthen DOD's Civilian Human Capital Strategic Plan*, GAO-09-235 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 10, 2009).

Training can help personnel develop the skills and understanding of other agencies' capabilities needed to facilitate interagency collaboration. A lack of understanding of other agencies' cultures, processes, and core capabilities can hamper U.S. national security partners' ability to work together effectively. However, civilian professionals have had limited opportunities to participate in interagency training or education opportunities. For example, we reported in November 2007 that the State Department did not have the capacity at that time to ensure that its Standby Response Corps volunteers were properly trained for participating in stabilization and reconstruction operations because the Foreign Service Institute did not have the capacity to train the 1,500 new volunteers the State Department planned to recruit in 2009.[35]

Efforts such as the National Security Professional Development Program, an initiative launched in May 2007, are designed to provide the training necessary to improve the ability of U.S. government personnel to address a range of interagency issues.[36] When it is fully established and implemented, this program is intended to use intergovernmental training and professional education to provide national security professionals with a breadth and depth of knowledge and skills in areas common to international and homeland security. It is intended to educate national security professionals in capabilities such as collaborating with other agencies, and planning and managing interagency operations. A July 2008 Congressional Research Service report stated that many officials and observers have contended that legislation would be necessary to ensure the success of any interagency career development program because, without the assurance that a program would continue into the future, individuals might be less likely to risk the investment of their time, and agencies might be less likely to risk the investment of their resources.[37] Some national security experts say that implementation of the program has lagged, but that the program could be reenergized with high-level attention.[38] The Executive Director of the National Security Professional

[35]GAO-08-39.

[36]The National Security Professional Development Program is being developed under the management of a steering committee and an integration office. The integration office was established to provide support to the steering committee and coordinate the implementation and monitoring the progress of the program.

[37]Catherine Dale, Congressional Research Service, *Building an Interagency Cadre of National Security Professionals: Proposals, Recent Experience, and Issues for Congress*, RL 34565 (Washington, D.C.: July 8, 2008).

[38]Bensahel et al., *Improving Capacity*.

Development Integration Office testified in April 2009 that the current administration is in strong agreement with the overall intent for the program and was developing a way ahead to build on past successes while charting new directions where necessary.

Agencies also can use strategic workforce planning as a tool to support their efforts to secure the personnel resources needed to collaborate in interagency missions. In our prior work, we have found that tools like strategic workforce planning and human capital strategies are integral to managing resources as they enable an agency to define staffing levels, identify critical skills needed to achieve its mission, and eliminate or mitigate gaps between current and future skills and competencies.[39] In designating strategic human capital management as a governmentwide high-risk area in 2001, we explained that it is critically important that federal agencies put greater focus on workforce planning and take the necessary steps to build, sustain, and effectively deploy the skilled, knowledgeable, diverse, and performance-oriented workforce needed to meet the current and emerging needs of government and its citizens.[40]

Strategic human capital planning that is integrated with broader organizational strategic planning is critical to ensuring agencies have the talent they need for future challenges, which may include interagency collaboration. Without integrating strategic human capital planning with broader organizational strategic planning, agencies may lose experienced staff and talent. For example, in July 2009 we reported that the State Department could not determine whether it met its objective of retaining experienced staff while restructuring its Arms Control and Nonproliferation Bureaus because there were no measurable goals for

[39]The five key principles that strategic workforce planning should address are: (1) involve management, employees, and other stakeholders in developing and implementing the strategic workforce plan; (2) determine the critical skills and competencies needed to achieve results; (3) develop strategies to address gaps in human capital approaches for enabling and sustaining the contributions of all critical skills and competencies; (4) build the capability to address requirements important to support workforce planning strategies; and (5) monitor and evaluate the agency's progress toward its human capital goals and the contribution that human capital results have made. GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).

[40]GAO-01-263.

retention of experienced staff. As a result, some offices affected by the restructuring experienced significant losses in staff expertise.[41]

Additionally, in March 2007 we testified that one of the critical needs addressed by strategic workforce planning is developing long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, motivating, and retaining staff to achieve programmatic goals.[42] We also stated that agencies need to strengthen their efforts and use of available flexibilities to acquire, develop, motivate, and retain talent to address gaps in talent due to changes in the knowledge, skills, and competencies in occupations needed to meet their missions. For example, in September 2008 we reported that USAID lacked the capacity to develop and implement a strategic acquisition and assistance workforce plan that could enable the agency to better match staff levels to changing workloads because it had not collected comprehensive information on the competencies—including knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience levels—of its overseas acquisition and assistance specialists.[43] We explained that USAID could use this information to better identify its critical staffing needs and adjust its staffing patterns to meet those needs and address workload imbalances. Furthermore, in December 2005 we reported that the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative,[44] a small trade agency that receives support from other larger agencies (e.g., the Departments of Commerce, State, and Agriculture) in doing its work, did not formally discuss or plan human capital resources at the interagency level, even though it must depend on the availability of these critical resources to achieve its mission. Such interagency planning also would facilitate human capital planning by the other agencies that work with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, which stated that potential budget cuts could result in fewer resources being available to support the trade agency. As a result, since the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative did not provide the other agencies with

[41]GAO, *State Department: Key Transformation Practices Could Have Helped in Restructuring Arms Control and Nonproliferation Bureaus*, GAO-09-738 (Washington, D.C.: July 15, 2009).

[42]GAO-07-556T.

[43]GAO-08-1059.

[44]The U.S. Trade Representative leads and coordinates the development and implementation of U.S. trade policy through an interagency trade policy process that is comprised of 19 federal agencies and offices. It is a highly networked organization that performs an interagency leadership and coordination mission, working in concert with other agencies.

specific resource requirements when the agencies were planning, it shifted the risk to the other agencies of having to later ensure the availability of staff in support of the trade agenda, potentially straining their ability to achieve other agency missions.[45]

Past Recommendations

In recent years we have recommended that the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Administrator of USAID, and the U.S. Trade Representative take a variety of actions to address the human capital issues discussed above, such as staffing shortfalls, training, and strategic planning. Specifically, we have made recommendations to

- develop strategic human capital management systems and undertake strategic human capital planning,
- include measurable goals in strategic plans,
- identify the appropriate mix of contractor and government employees needed and develop plans to fill those needs,
- seek formal commitments from contributing agencies to provide personnel to meet interagency personnel requirements,
- develop alternative ways to obtain interagency perspectives in the event that interagency personnel cannot be provided due to resource limitations,
- develop and implement long-term workforce management plans, and
- implement a training program to ensure employees develop and maintain needed skills.

In commenting on drafts of those reports, agencies generally concurred with our recommendations. In some cases, agencies identified planned actions to address the recommendations. For example, in our April 2009 report on foreign aid reform, we recommended that the State Department develop a long-term workforce management plan to periodically assess its workforce capacity to manage foreign assistance. The State Department noted in its comments that it concurs with the idea of further improving employee skill sets and would work to encourage and implement further training.[46]

Oversight Questions

- What incentives are needed to encourage agencies to share personnel with other agencies?

[45]GAO, *International Trade: USTR Would Benefit from Greater Use of Strategic Human Capital Principles*, GAO-06-167 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 6, 2005).

[46]GAO-09-192.

- How can agencies overcome cultural differences to enhance collaboration to achieve greater unity of effort?
- How can agencies expand training opportunities for integrating civilian and military personnel?
- What changes in agency personnel systems are needed to address human capital challenges that impede agencies' ability to properly staff interagency collaboration efforts?
- What incentives are needed to encourage employees in national security agencies to seek interagency experience, training, and work opportunities?
- How can agencies effectively meet their primary missions and support interagency activities in light of the resource constraints they face?
- How can agencies increase staffing of interagency functions across the national security community?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks to enacting legislation to support the National Security Professional Development Program?
- What legislative changes might enable agencies to develop a workforce that can enhance collaboration in national security activities?

Enclosure IV: Sharing and Integrating National Security Information across Agencies

Issue Statement

The government's single greatest failure preceding the September 11, 2001, attacks was the inability of federal agencies to effectively share information about suspected terrorists and their activities, according to the Vice Chair of the 9/11 Commission. As such, sharing and integrating national security information among federal, state, local, and private-sector partners is critical to assessing and responding to current threats to our national security. At the same time, agencies must balance the need to share information with the need to protect it from widespread access. Since January 2005, we have designated information sharing for homeland security as high risk because the government has faced serious challenges in analyzing key information and disseminating it among federal, state, local, and private-sector partners in a timely, accurate, and useful way.[1] Although federal, state, local, and private-sector partners have made progress in sharing information, challenges still remain in sharing, as well as accessing, managing, and integrating information. Congress and the administration will need to ensure that agencies remain committed to sharing relevant national security information, increasing access to necessary information, and effectively managing and integrating information across multiple agencies.

Key Findings

Agencies Do Not Always Share Relevant Information

Our prior work has shown that agencies do not always share relevant information with their national security partners, including other federal government agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector. Information is a crucial tool in addressing national security issues and its timely dissemination is absolutely critical for maintaining national security. Information relevant to national security includes terrorism-related information, drug intelligence, and planning information for interagency operations. As a result of the lack of information sharing, federal, state, and local governments may not have all the information they need to analyze threats and vulnerabilities.

More than 8 years after 9/11, federal, state, and local governments, and private-sector partners are making progress in sharing terrorism-related information. For example, we reported in October 2007 that most states

[1]GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-05-207 (Washington, D.C.: January 2005) and *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-09-271 (Washington, D.C.: January 2009).

and many local governments had established fusion centers—collaborative efforts to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity—to address gaps in information sharing.[2] In addition, in October 2008 we reported that the Department of Homeland Security was replacing its information-sharing system with a follow-on system. In our analysis of the follow-on system, however, we found that the Department of Homeland Security had not fully defined requirements or ways to better manage risks for the next version of its information-sharing system.[3] Additionally, in January 2009 we reported that the Department of Homeland Security was implementing an information-sharing policy and governance structure to improve how it collects, analyzes, and shares homeland security information across the department and with state and local partners.[4]

Based on our prior work, we identified four key reasons that agencies may not always share all relevant information with their national security partners.

- *Concerns about agencies' ability to protect shared information or use that information properly.* Since national security information is sensitive by its nature, agencies and private-sector partners are sometimes hesitant to share information because they are uncertain if that information can be protected by the recipient or will be used properly. For example, in March 2006, we reported that Department of Homeland Security officials expressed concerns about sharing terrorism-related information with state and local partners because such information had occasionally been posted on public Internet sites or otherwise compromised.[5] Similarly, in April 2006, we reported that private-sector partners were reluctant to share

[2]GAO, *Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers*, GAO-08-35 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 30, 2007).

[3]GAO, *Information Technology: Management Improvements Needed on the Department of Homeland Security's Next Generation Information Sharing System*, GAO-09-40 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 8, 2008).

[4]GAO-09-271. See also GAO-09-40; GAO-08-35; and GAO, *Information Technology: Numerous Federal Networks Used to Support Homeland Security Need to Be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Information-Sharing Initiatives*, GAO-07-455 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2007).

[5]GAO, *Information Sharing: The Federal Government Needs to Establish Policies and Processes for Sharing Terrorism-Related and Sensitive but Unclassified Information*, GAO-06-385 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 17, 2006).

critical-infrastructure information—such as information on banking and financial institutions, energy production, and telecommunications networks—due to concerns on how the information would be used and the ability of other agencies to keep that information secure.[6]

- *Cultural factors or political concerns.* Agencies may not share information because doing so may be outside their organizational cultures or because of political concerns, such as exposing potential vulnerabilities within the agency. As we noted in enclosure II of this report, we stated in a May 2007 report on interagency planning for stability operations that State Department officials told us that the Department of Defense's (DOD) hierarchical approach to sharing military plans, which required Secretary of Defense approval to present aspects of plans to the National Security Council for interagency coordination, limited interagency participation in the combatant commands' plan development and had been a significant obstacle to achieving a unified governmentwide approach in those plans.[7] Moreover, in our September 2009 report on DOD's U.S. Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) exercise program, we noted that inconsistencies with how NORTHCOM involved states in planning, conducting, and assessing exercises occurred in part because NORTHCOM officials lacked experience in dealing with the differing emergency management structures, capabilities, and needs of the states.[8] Additionally, in our April 2008 report on NORTHCOM's coordination with state governments, we noted that the legal and historical limits of the nation's constitutional federal-state structure posed a unique challenge for NORTHCOM in mission preparation.[9] That is, NORTHCOM may need to assist states with civil support, which means that NORTHCOM must consider the jurisdictions of 49 state governments and the District of Columbia when planning its missions. NORTHCOM found that some state

[6]GAO, *Information Sharing: DHS Should Take Steps to Encourage More Widespread Use of Its Program to Protect and Share Critical Infrastructure Information*, GAO-06-383 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 17, 2006).

[7]GAO, *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning*, GAO-07-549 (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2007).

[8]GAO, *Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has a Strong Exercise Program, but Involvement of Interagency Partners and States Can Be Improved*, GAO-09-849 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 9, 2009).

[9]GAO, *Homeland Defense: Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S. Northern Command's Coordination with States and the National Guard Bureau, but Gaps Remain*, GAO-08-252 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2008).

and local governments were reluctant to share their emergency response plans with NORTHCOM for fear that DOD would "grade" their plans or publicize potential capability gaps, with an accompanying political cost.

- *Lack of clear guidelines, policies, or agreements for coordinating with other agencies.* Agencies have diverse requirements and practices for protecting their information, and thus may not share information without clearly defined guidelines, policies, or agreements for doing so. We reported in April 2008 that NORTHCOM generally was not familiar with state emergency response plans because there were no guidelines for gaining access to those plans.[10] As a result, NORTHCOM did not know what state capabilities existed, increasing the risk that NORTHCOM may not be prepared with the resources needed to respond to homeland defense and civil support operations. We also reported in March 2009 about the lack of information sharing between the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Since 9/11, DEA has supported U.S. counterterrorism efforts by prioritizing drug-trafficking cases linked to terrorism. DEA partners with federal, state, and local agencies—including ICE—to leverage counternarcotics resources. However, at the time of that review, ICE did not fully participate in two multiagency intelligence centers and did not share all of its drug-related intelligence with DEA. In one center, ICE did not participate because they did not have an agreement on the types of data ICE would provide and how sensitive confidential source information would be safeguarded. Without ICE's drug-related intelligence, DEA could not effectively target major drug-trafficking organizations due to the potential for overlapping investigations and officer safety concerns.[11]

- *Security clearance issues.* Agencies often have different ways of classifying information and different security clearance requirements and procedures that pose challenges to effective information sharing across agencies. In some cases, some national security partners do not have the clearances required to access national security information. Specifically, we reported in May 2007 that non-DOD personnel could not access some DOD planning documents or participate in planning sessions because they may not have had the proper security clearances, hindering interagency

[10]GAO-08-252.

[11]GAO, *Drug Control: Better Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and an Updated Accountability Framework Can Further Enhance DEA's Efforts to Meet Post-9/11 Responsibilities*, GAO-09-63 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 20, 2009).

participation in the development of military plans.[12] Additionally, in October 2007 we reported that some state and local fusion center officials cited that the length of time needed to obtain clearances and the lack of reciprocity, whereby an agency did not accept a clearance granted by another agency, prevented employees from accessing necessary information to perform their duties.[13] In other cases, access to classified information can be limited by one partner, which can hinder integrated national security efforts. For example, we reported that DOD established the National Security Space Office to integrate efforts between DOD and the National Reconnaissance Office, a defense intelligence agency jointly managed by the Secretary of Defense and the Director of National Intelligence. However, in 2005, the National Reconnaissance Office Director withdrew full access to a classified information-sharing network from the National Security Space Office, which inhibited efforts to further integrate defense and national space activities, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities.[14]

Managing and Integrating Information from Multiple Agencies Continues to Present Challenges

When agencies do share information, managing and integrating information from multiple sources presents challenges regarding redundancies in information sharing, unclear roles and responsibilities, and data comparability. As the Congressional Research Service reported in January 2008, one argument for fusing a broader range of data, including nontraditional data sources, is to help create a more comprehensive threat picture.[15] The 9/11 Commission Report stated that because no one agency or organization holds all relevant information, information from all relevant sources needs to be integrated in order to "connect the dots."[16] Without integration, agencies may not receive all relevant information.

Some progress had been made in managing and integrating information from multiple agencies by streamlining usage of the "sensitive but

[12]GAO-07-549.

[13]GAO-08-35.

[14]GAO, *Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: DOD Can Better Assess and Integrate ISR Capabilities and Oversee Development of Future ISR Requirements*, GAO-08-374 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 24, 2008).

[15]John Rollins, Congressional Research Service, *Fusion Centers: Issues and Options for Congress*, RL34070 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 18, 2008).

[16]National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9-11 Commission Report* (Washington, D.C.: July 22, 2004).

unclassified" designation. In March 2006, we reported that the large number of sensitive but unclassified designations used to protect mission-critical information and a lack of consistent policies for their use created difficulties in sharing information by potentially restricting material unnecessarily or disseminating information that should be restricted.[17] We subsequently testified in July 2008 that the President had adopted "controlled unclassified information" to be the single categorical designation for sensitive but unclassified information throughout the executive branch and outlined a framework for identifying, marking, safeguarding, and disseminating this information.[18] As we testified, more streamlined definition and consistent application of policies for designating "controlled but unclassified information" may help reduce difficulties in sharing information; however, monitoring agencies' compliance will help ensure that the policy is employed consistently across the federal government.

Based on our previous work, we identified three challenges posed by managing and integrating information drawn from multiple sources.

- *Redundancies when integrating information.* Identical or similar types of information are collected by or submitted to multiple agencies, so integrating or sharing this information can lead to redundancies. For example, we reported in October 2007 that in intelligence fusion centers, multiple information systems created redundancies of information that made it difficult to discern what was relevant.[19] As a result, end users were overwhelmed with duplicative information from multiple sources. Similarly, we reported in December 2008 that in Louisiana, reconstruction project information had to be repeatedly resubmitted separately to state and Federal Emergency Management Agency officials during post–Hurricane Katrina reconstruction efforts because the system used to track project information did not facilitate the exchange of documents. Information was sometimes lost during this exchange, requiring state officials to resubmit the information, creating redundancies and

[17]GAO-06-385.

[18]GAO, *Information Sharing: Definition of the Results to Be Achieved in Terrorism-Related Information Sharing Is Needed to Guide Implementation and Assess Progress*, GAO-08-637T (Washington, D.C.: July 23, 2008).

[19]GAO-08-35.

duplication of effort. As a result, reconstruction efforts in Louisiana were delayed.[20]

- *Unclear roles and responsibilities.* Agency personnel may be unclear about their roles and responsibilities in the information-sharing process, which may impede information-sharing efforts. For example, we reported in April 2005 that officials in Coast Guard field offices did not clearly understand their role in helping nonfederal employees through the security clearance process. Although Coast Guard headquarters officials requested that Coast Guard field officials submit the names of nonfederal officials needing a security clearance, some Coast Guard field officials did not clearly understand that they were responsible for contacting nonfederal officials about the clearance process and thought that Coast Guard headquarters was processing security clearances for nonfederal officials. As a result of this misunderstanding, nonfederal employees did not receive their security clearances in a timely manner and could not access important security-related information that could have aided them in identifying or deterring illegal activities.[21]

- *Data may not be comparable across agencies.* Agencies' respective missions drive the types of data they collect, and so data may not be comparable across agencies. For example, we reported in October 2008 that biometric data, such as fingerprints and iris images, collected in DOD field activities such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, were not comparable with data collected by other units or with large federal databases that store biometric data, such as the Department of Homeland Security biometric database or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fingerprint database. For example, if a unit collects only iris images, this data cannot be used to match fingerprints collected by another unit or agency, such as in the FBI fingerprint database. A lack of comparable data, especially for use in DOD field activities, prevents agencies from determining whether the individuals they encounter are friend, foe, or neutral, and may put forces at risk.[22]

[20]GAO, *Disaster Recovery: FEMA's Public Assistance Grant Program Experienced Challenges with Gulf Coast Rebuilding*, GAO-09-129 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2008).

[21]GAO, *Maritime Security: New Structures Have Improved Information Sharing, but Security Clearance Processing Requires Further Attention*, GAO-05-394 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 15, 2005).

[22]GAO, *Defense Management: DOD Can Establish More Guidance for Biometrics Collection and Explore Broader Data Sharing*, GAO-09-49 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 15, 2008).

Past Recommendations

Since 2005, we have recommended that the Secretaries of Defense, Homeland Security, and State establish or clarify guidelines, agreements, or procedures for sharing a wide range of national security information, such as planning information, terrorism-related information, and reconstruction project information. We have recommended that such guidelines, agreements, and procedures

- define and communicate how shared information will be protected;
- include provisions to involve and obtain information from nonfederal partners in the planning process;
- ensure that agencies fully participate in interagency information-sharing efforts;
- identify and disseminate practices to facilitate more effective communication among federal, state, and local agencies;
- clarify roles and responsibilities in the information-sharing process; and
- establish baseline standards for data collecting to ensure comparability across agencies.

In commenting on drafts of those reports, agencies generally concurred with our recommendations. In some cases, agencies identified planned actions to address the recommendations. For example, in our December 2008 report on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's public assistance grant program, we recommended that the Federal Emergency Management Agency improve information sharing within the public assistance process by identifying and disseminating practices that facilitate more effective communication among federal, state, and local entities. In comments on a draft of the report, the Federal Emergency Management Agency generally concurred with the recommendation and noted that it was making a concerted effort to improve collaboration and information sharing within the public assistance process.[23] Moreover, agencies have implemented some of our past recommendations. For example, in our April 2006 report on protecting and sharing critical infrastructure information, we recommended that the Department of Homeland Security define and communicate to the private sector what information is needed and how the information would be used.[24] The Department of Homeland Security concurred with our recommendation and, in response, has made available, through its public Web site, answers to frequently asked questions that define the type of information collected

[23]GAO-09-129.

[24]GAO-06-383.

and what it is used for, as well as how the information will be accessed, handled, and used by federal, state, and local government employees and their contractors.

Oversight Questions

- What steps are being taken to promote access to relevant databases?
- What steps are needed to develop and implement interagency protocols for sharing information?
- How do agencies balance the need to keep information secure and the need to share information to maximize interagency efforts?
- How can agencies encourage effective information sharing?
- What are ways in which the security clearance process can be streamlined and security clearance reciprocity among agencies can be ensured?

Appendix I: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Acknowledgments

In addition, the following staff contributed to the report: John H. Pendleton, Director; Marie Mak, Assistant Director; Hilary Benedict; Cathleen Berrick; Renee Brown; Leigh Caraher; Grace Cho; Joe Christoff; Elizabeth Curda; Judy McCloskey; Lorelei St. James; and Bernice Steinhardt.

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