



Highlights of [GAO-10-340](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The technology component of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Secure Border Initiative (SBI), referred to as *SBI_{net}*, is to put observing systems along our nation's borders and provide Border Patrol command centers with the imagery and related tools and information needed in deciding whether to deploy agents. *SBI_{net}* is being acquired and deployed in incremental blocks of capability, with the first block to cost about \$1.3 billion. Because of the program's importance, size, and challenges, GAO was asked to, among other things, determine the extent to which DHS has (1) defined the scope of its proposed *SBI_{net}* solution, (2) developed a reliable schedule for this solution, (3) demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of this solution, and (4) acquired the solution using key management processes. To do this, GAO compared key program documentation to relevant guidance and industry practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to DHS aimed at (1) limiting near-term investment in the first incremental block of *SBI_{net}*, (2) economically justifying any longer-term investment in *SBI_{net}*, and (3) improving key program management disciplines. DHS agreed with 10 of GAO's 12 recommendations, and partially agreed with the other 2. For all of the recommendations, DHS also described planned and ongoing actions to address them.

View [GAO-10-340](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

DHS Needs to Reconsider Its Proposed Investment in Key Technology Program

What GAO Found

DHS has defined the scope of the first incremental block of *SBI_{net}* capabilities; however, these capabilities have continued to shrink from what the department previously committed to deliver. For example, the geographical "footprint" of the initially deployed capability has been reduced from three border sectors spanning about 655 miles to two sectors spanning about 387 miles. Further, the stringency of the performance capabilities has been relaxed, to the point that, for example, system performance will be deemed acceptable if it identifies less than 50 percent of items of interest that cross the border. The result is a system that is unlikely to live up to expectations.

DHS has not developed a reliable integrated master schedule for delivering the first block of *SBI_{net}*. Specifically, the schedule does not sufficiently comply with seven of nine key practices that relevant guidance states are important to having a reliable schedule. For example, the schedule does not adequately capture all necessary activities, assign resources to them, and reflect schedule risks. As a result, it is unclear when the first block will be completed, and continued delays are likely.

DHS has also not demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of this first system block. In particular, it has not reliably estimated the costs of this block over its entire life cycle. To do so requires DHS to ensure that the estimate meets key practices that relevant guidance states are important to having an estimate that is comprehensive, well-documented, accurate, and credible. However, DHS's cost estimate for the initial block does not sufficiently possess any of these characteristics. Further, DHS has yet to identify expected benefits from the initial block, whether quantitative or qualitative, and analyze them relative to costs. As a result, it does not know whether its planned investment will produce mission value commensurate with costs.

DHS has also not acquired the initial *SBI_{net}* block in accordance with key life cycle management processes. While processes associated with, among other things, requirements development and management and risk management, have been adequately defined, they have not been adequately implemented. For example, key risks have not been captured in the risk management repository and thus have not been proactively mitigated. As a result, DHS is at increased risk of delivering a system that does not perform as intended.

SBI_{net}'s decreasing scope, uncertain timing, unclear value proposition, and limited life cycle management discipline and rigor are due to a range of factors, including limitations in both defined requirements and the capabilities of commercially available system components, as well as the need to address competing program priorities, such as meeting aggressive system deployment milestones. As a result, it remains unclear whether the department's pursuit of *SBI_{net}* is a cost effective course of action, and if it is, that it will produce expected results on time and within budget.