



Highlights of [GAO-10-801](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has been cited as having mature interagency processes and coordinating mechanisms. As evidenced by the earthquakes that shook Haiti in January 2010, the challenges that SOUTHCOM faces require coordinated efforts from U.S. government agencies, international partners, and nongovernmental and private organizations. This report (1) assesses the extent that SOUTHCOM exhibits key attributes that enhance and sustain collaboration with interagency and other stakeholders and (2) evaluates SOUTHCOM's approach for developing an organizational structure that facilitates interagency collaboration and positions the command to conduct a full range of missions. To conduct this review, GAO analyzed SOUTHCOM documents, conducted interviews with the command and a number of its partners, and visited three U.S. embassies in the Caribbean and Central and South America.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SOUTHCOM (1) revise its Organization and Functions Manual to align structure and manpower to meet approved missions; and (2) identify personnel augmentation requirements for a range of contingency operations, develop plans to obtain personnel, and exercise and assess these plans. DOD concurred with our recommendations and stated it is addressing these issues as quickly as possible.

View [GAO-10-801](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or [pendletonj@gao.gov](mailto:pendletonj@gao.gov).

## DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

### U.S. Southern Command Demonstrates Interagency Collaboration, but Its Haiti Disaster Response Revealed Challenges Conducting a Large Military Operation

#### What GAO Found

SOUTHCOM demonstrates a number of key practices that enhance and sustain collaboration with interagency and other stakeholders toward achieving security and stability in the region. SOUTHCOM coordinated with interagency partners to develop mutually reinforcing strategies, including its 2009 Theater Campaign Plan and its 2020 Command Strategy. In addition, SOUTHCOM focuses on leveraging the capabilities of various partners, including interagency and international partners, and nongovernmental and private organizations. For example, at SOUTHCOM's Joint Interagency Task Force South, resources are leveraged from the Department of Defense, U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and partner nations to disrupt illicit trafficking activities. During humanitarian assistance activities, SOUTHCOM has leveraged regional knowledge and activity expertise with nongovernmental and private organizations. Further, SOUTHCOM has established several means to enhance and sustain collaboration between the command and its partners. For example, SOUTHCOM has established a Partnering Directorate that provides full-time outreach, coordination, and support to interagency and other stakeholders. Moreover, information is frequently shared with partners through databases, conferences, and the sharing of lessons learned. Underlying these key practices is sustained leadership, which has been a key enabler for enhancing and sustaining collaboration with partners.

While SOUTHCOM developed an organizational structure designed to facilitate interagency collaboration, the scale of the Haiti earthquake disaster challenged the command's ability to support the relief effort. In 2008, SOUTHCOM developed an organizational structure to facilitate collaboration with interagency and other stakeholders, which included a civilian deputy to the commander, interagency representatives embedded in key leadership positions, and a directorate focused on sustaining partnerships. However, SOUTHCOM's support to the disaster relief efforts in Haiti revealed weaknesses in this structure that initially hindered its efforts to conduct a large scale military operation. Specifically, the structure lacked a division to address planning for operations occurring over 30 days to 1 year in duration. In addition, the command's logistics function was suboptimized and had difficulty providing supply and engineering support to the relief effort. Moreover, SOUTHCOM had not identified the personnel augmentation required for a large contingency nor had it developed a plan to integrate personnel into its existing structure. To address these weaknesses, the commander returned SOUTHCOM to a traditional joint staff structure, while retaining elements from the 2008 reorganization. Combatant commands need to be organized and manned to meet their daily mission requirements and be prepared to respond to a wide range of contingencies, including large scale disaster relief operations. Ensuring better alignment of its organizational structure and manpower to its identified mission requirements, and the development of personnel augmentation plans may enhance SOUTHCOM's ability to conduct the full range of missions that may be required in the region.