



Highlights of [GAO-12-688T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Border Patrol, within DHS's CBP, is the federal agency with primary responsibility for securing the national borders between the U.S. ports of entry (POE). DHS has completed a new *2012-2016 Border Patrol Strategic Plan* (2012-2016 Strategic Plan) that Border Patrol officials stated will emphasize risk management instead of increased resources to achieve border security and continue to build on the foundation of the 2004 *National Border Patrol Strategy* (2004 Strategy). This statement highlights key issues from prior GAO reports that discuss Border Patrol's progress and challenges in (1) implementing key elements of the 2004 Strategy and (2) achieving the 2004 strategic goal to gain operational control of the border. This statement is based on GAO reports issued since 2007 on border security, with selected updates from April and May 2012 on Border Patrol resource needs, actions taken to address prior GAO recommendations, and efforts to develop performance measures. To conduct these updates, GAO reviewed agency documents such as operational assessments and interviewed DHS officials.

## What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made recommendations to, among other things, strengthen border security technology, infrastructure, and partnerships. DHS concurred with the recommendations and has reported actions planned or underway to address them. CBP reviewed a draft of information contained in this statement and provided comments that GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-12-688T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or [gablerr@gao.gov](mailto:gablerr@gao.gov).

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# BORDER PATROL STRATEGY

## Progress and Challenges in Implementation and Assessment Efforts

## What GAO Found

GAO's prior work has highlighted progress and challenges in various areas related to Border Patrol's implementation of its 2004 National Strategy, which could provide insights as Border Patrol transitions to its 2012 Strategic Plan. Border Patrol officials stated that the 2012 Strategic Plan will rely on Border Patrol and federal, state, local, tribal, and international partners working together to use a risk-based approach to secure the border, and include the key elements of "Information, Integration, and Rapid Response" to achieve objectives. These elements were similar to those in the 2004 Strategy and GAO's past work highlighted the progress and challenges the agency faced obtaining information necessary for border security; integrating security operations with partners; and mobilizing a rapid response to security threats. Border Patrol successfully used interagency forums and joint operations to counter threats, but challenges included assessing the benefits of border technology and infrastructure to, among other things, provide information on situational awareness. For example, in May 2010 GAO reported that the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) had not accounted for the effect of its investment in border fencing and infrastructure on security. GAO recommended that CBP conduct an analysis of the effect of tactical infrastructure on border security, with which CBP concurred. Further, GAO identified challenges in DHS efforts to coordinate with partners that help to secure the border. For example, in December 2010 GAO reported that various northern border security partners cited ongoing challenges sharing information and resources for border security operations and investigations, and that DHS did not have mechanisms for providing oversight. GAO recommended that DHS provide oversight, to which DHS concurred and stated that in January 2012 the department established an intercomponent Advisory Council to provide oversight of compliance with interagency agreements.

GAO's prior work showed that as of September 30, 2010, Border Patrol reported achieving its 2004 goal of operational control—where Border Patrol has the ability to detect and interdict illegal activity—for 1,107 (13 percent) of 8,607 miles across U.S. northern, southwest, and coastal borders. DHS transitioned at the end of fiscal year 2010 from using operational control as its goal and outcome measure for border security to using an interim measure of apprehensions on the southwest border. DHS reported that this interim measure would be used until such time as DHS developed a new goal and measure for border security that will reflect a more quantitative methodology across border locations and the agency's evolving view of border security. As GAO previously testified, this interim measure, while providing useful information on activity levels, is an output measure that does not inform on program results. Therefore, it limits oversight and accountability and has reduced information provided to Congress and the public on program results. DHS stated that it had several efforts underway to establish a new measure used to assess efforts to secure the border but as this measure is under development, it is too early to assess it.