

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-668T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* calls for a rapid and coordinated effort that uses U.S. government resources to mitigate threats to homeland security. DHS contributes to the U.S. government's efforts to combat terrorism and works to prevent inadmissible travelers and cargo from entering the United States. DHS's overseas efforts include ensuring visa security, inspecting passengers prior to boarding U.S.-bound flights, and identifying high-risk cargo shipments.

This statement addresses (1) the extent to which DHS has aligned resource use abroad with strategic priorities and (2) selected DHS programs abroad aimed at preventing high-risk travelers and maritime containerized cargo from entering the United States. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from 2008 through January 2015, along with selected updates conducted in May 2015 to obtain information from DHS on actions it has taken to address prior GAO recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO previously made recommendations to DHS to inform its resource deployment abroad and strengthen screening and targeting programs. DHS agreed with GAO's recommendations to inform resource deployment abroad and has actions planned or underway to address them. DHS did not agree with some of GAO's recommendations related to VSP; GAO continues to maintain that all of these recommendations should be addressed.

View [GAO-15-668T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler, (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov.

June 2, 2015

BORDER SECURITY

Progress and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Address High-Risk Travelers and Maritime Cargo

What GAO Found

In September 2013, GAO reported on actions the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had taken to align its programs abroad with its resource use and with other U.S. governmental strategic priorities. GAO found that DHS had taken actions to better align its resource use with its programs abroad consistent with requirements set forth in law. Specifically, from 2011 to early 2012, DHS conducted a onetime review of its international footprint—the complete set of DHS resources and efforts it has deployed abroad—and created a department-wide international engagement plan. However, DHS had not established specific department-wide strategic priorities for resource use abroad. Specifically, DHS (1) had not established department-wide strategic priorities for international engagement, such as specific types of activities or target regions to further combating terrorism goals; (2) did not have a mechanism for monitoring alignment between resource deployment abroad and strategic priorities; and (3) did not have reliable, comparable cost data for its programs and activities abroad and had not established a standardized framework to capture these data. GAO recommended that DHS establish department-wide strategic priorities, a mechanism to routinely monitor alignment between strategic priorities and resource deployment abroad, and reliable cost data to provide DHS with critical information to make informed resource deployment decisions. DHS concurred and, as of May 2015, has taken steps to implement GAO's recommendations, such as drafting an international engagement strategy to identify specific department-wide priorities and establishing a common cost framework. DHS plans to finalize this strategy by early summer 2015 and use it as a mechanism to facilitate additional footprint reviews in future budget years.

DHS deploys multiple screening and targeting programs designed to help interdict high-risk travelers, such as potential terrorists, and otherwise inadmissible passengers and cargo shipments before they board U.S.-bound commercial vessels. For example, in March 2011, GAO reported on the Visa Security Program (VSP) through which DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deploys personnel to certain U.S. embassies and consulates to conduct security reviews of visa applications, among other things. GAO found that ICE had limited guidance for the program and could improve its program expansion planning. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations to issue guidance and strengthen its planning and took steps to address them. GAO also found that DHS did not collect comprehensive data on all VSP performance measures and track the time officials spent on visa security activities; DHS did not concur with GAO's recommendations to address these limitations. Further, since 2008, GAO has reported on CBP's programs intended to secure the maritime global supply chain—the flow of goods from manufacturers to retailer—and cargo destined for the United States. For example, in September 2013, GAO found that CBP had not regularly assessed foreign ports for risks to since 2005. While CBP took steps to rank ports for risks in 2009, CBP did not use this information to modify where CBP staff were posted. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendation to periodically assess the supply chain security risks from foreign ports and has plans to conduct such assessments by the end of 2015.