



July 2019

DRUG CONTROL

Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-441](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government has identified illicit drugs, as well as the criminal organizations that traffic them, as significant threats to the United States. In 2017, over 70,000 people died from drug overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DOD and DHS created joint task forces to help facilitate and strengthen interagency efforts in combating the flow of illicit drugs, particularly in the maritime domain.

GAO was asked to review the structure of these task forces and their ability to coordinate and conduct missions effectively. Among other objectives, this report (1) assesses the extent to which the task forces coordinate effectively to minimize duplication, and (2) examines how the task forces measure the effectiveness of their missions and activities. GAO reviewed and assessed documentation on the task forces' missions, coordination efforts, and performance assessments and compared them to best practices from prior work, departmental guidance, and federal internal control standards. GAO also met with task force officials to discuss and observe planning and coordination activities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that JIATF-West establish a vital few, consistent performance measures for its overall performance; and that DHS develop outcome-based performance measures for the JTFs' activities. DOD and DHS concurred with the three recommendations.

View [GAO-19-441](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or AndersonN@gao.gov.

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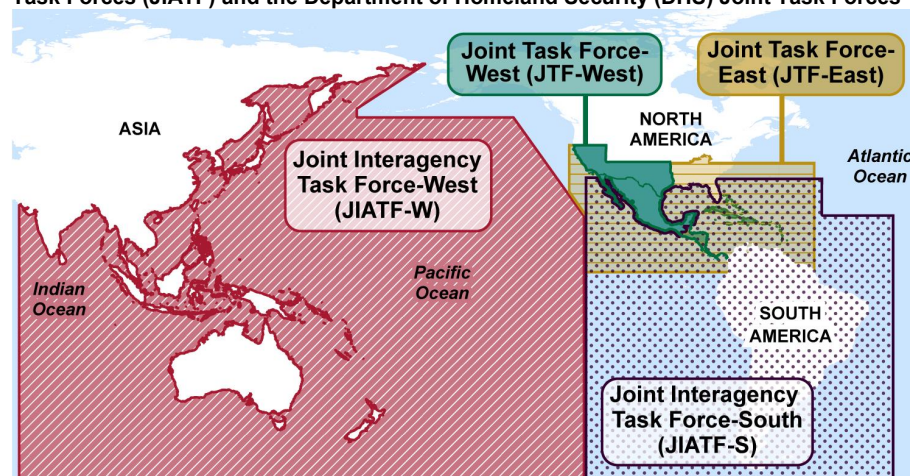
DRUG CONTROL

Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities

What GAO Found

Many federal agencies are involved in efforts to reduce the availability of illicit drugs by countering the flow of such drugs into the United States. Among them are the Department of Defense (DOD), which has lead responsibility for detecting and monitoring illicit drug trafficking into the country, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which is responsible for securing U.S. borders to prevent illegal activity. DOD and DHS lead and operate task forces—Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)—South, JIATF-West, and three DHS Joint Task Forces (JTF)—to coordinate and conduct counterdrug missions and activities. Task force officials reported that the task forces coordinated effectively with each other when they had shared purposes and overlapping or shared geographical boundaries (see map). The task forces also used coordination mechanisms that align with best practices, such as working groups and liaison officers, to minimize duplication of their missions and activities.

Map of the Areas of Responsibility for the Department of Defense (DOD) Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Joint Task Forces



Source: GAO adaptation based on DOD and DHS documentation; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-441

Note: DHS also has JTF-Investigations, which is a functional task force with no geographic area of responsibility.

Each of the five task forces GAO reviewed has performance measures, but only JIATF-South uses output (e.g., number of detected smuggling events) and outcome-based measures to assess the effectiveness of its activities. Specifically, JIATF-South developed an outcome-based measure of its overall effectiveness: the percentage of smuggling events it detected and provided to law enforcement that resulted in disrupted or seized illicit drugs. JIATF-West evaluates its numerous initiatives and activities, for instance, by determining if they were executed as planned, but has not established a vital few performance measures that consistently convey the overall effectiveness of its activities. Lastly, the DHS JTFs' performance measures are not outcome-based and do not fully assess the effectiveness of the task forces' activities. Enhancing their measures would better position JIATF-West and the JTFs to demonstrate contributions and convey trends in the overall effectiveness of their activities.

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Abbreviations

AMO	Air and Marine Operations
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Coast Guard	U.S. Coast Guard
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HOMECONT	Homeland Criminal Organization Target
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
JTF	Joint Task Force
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy

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July 9, 2019

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate

The Honorable John Thune
United States Senate

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate

The U.S. government has identified illicit drugs, as well as the transnational and domestic criminal organizations that traffic and smuggle them, as significant threats to the public, law enforcement, and the national security of the United States. Deaths related to the use of drugs, including illicit drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, and other synthetic opioids, have risen in recent years. For example, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, in 2017, over 70,000 people died from drug overdoses compared to approximately 47,000 such deaths in 2014.

For the past decade, one key priority of U.S. efforts to combat the effects of illicit drugs has been to reduce their availability. Many federal departments and agencies are involved in efforts to reduce the availability of drugs by countering the trafficking and flow of illicit drugs into the United States.¹ Among them are the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Regarding counterdrug efforts, DOD is the lead department responsible for detecting and monitoring (tracking) illicit drug trafficking into the United States and DHS is responsible for securing the U.S. air, land, and sea borders to prevent illegal activity. Both DOD and DHS created and lead interagency task forces to help facilitate and strengthen efforts across federal agencies to

¹For more information on some other agencies' efforts, see GAO, *Counternarcotics: Overview of the U.S. Efforts in the Western Hemisphere*, [GAO-18-10](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 13, 2017); and *Illicit Opioids: While Greater Attention Given to Combating Synthetic Opioids, Agencies Need to Better Assess their Efforts*, [GAO-18-205](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2018).

conduct counterdrug missions and activities to combat the flow of illicit drugs into the United States. Given the number of federal counterdrug task forces that exist, we focused this review on the two DOD and three DHS joint task forces that conduct counterdrug missions and activities and have overlapping areas of responsibility, particularly in the maritime domain.² In particular, for DOD we included Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF)—JIATF-South and JIATF-West. These interagency task forces were formed in 1989 as partnerships between military and federal law enforcement agencies to coordinate and conduct counterdrug operations.³ For DHS, we included three Joint Task Forces (JTFs)—JTF-East, JTF-West, and JTF-Investigations—that were created in 2014 to enhance and unify DHS efforts, and those of its component agencies (components), to secure the U.S. southern border and approaches to the United States via land, sea, or air.

These five task forces have a role in U.S. counterdrug efforts, such as by supporting the removal of cocaine bound for the United States and strengthening interagency and foreign partners' counterdrug capabilities. However, questions have been raised about their effectiveness and the extent of coordination between them, including potential duplication of counterdrug missions and activities. You asked us to review these five task forces' coordination efforts, and their ability to conduct operations effectively. In this report, we (1) describe the missions of JIATF-South, JIATF-West, and the three DHS JTFs; (2) assess the extent to which these task forces coordinate effectively with one another to minimize duplication of missions and activities; and (3) examine how these task forces measure the effectiveness of their missions and activities.

To describe the missions of the task forces, we collected and reviewed documentation related to each task force's missions and activities, such as mission statements, guidance, memoranda, policies, and prior reports. We also interviewed officials from each of the task forces, as well as key components and offices, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. Coast

²While there are other joint task forces within DOD that conduct counterdrug missions and activities, such as Joint Task Force–North, we did not include this task force in our review because it is comprised solely of DOD personnel and it does not generally operate in the maritime domain.

³This includes federal law enforcement agency representation from DHS components, such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Department of Justice (DOJ) components, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Guard (Coast Guard). We obtained from these officials additional details related to the task forces' missions and activities, including information on any task force reorganization efforts that have taken place since fiscal year 2014, such as the JIATF-West reorganization in early 2016.⁴ We analyzed similarities and differences across the task forces, including the departments and agencies that provide staff to support the task forces, as well as the varied agency representation on the task forces' leadership positions.

To assess the effectiveness of the task forces' coordination, we examined documentation related to task force coordination, such as strategic plans, guidance, and memoranda of understanding and agreement. Additionally, we collected and reviewed documentation on the extent to which the task forces coordinated with one another, such as joint operations plans and joint investigation reports; as well as the mechanisms used for coordination, such as joint meetings and the use of liaisons. We also met with officials at each of the five task forces to discuss and observe the task forces' planning and coordination efforts.⁵ Further, we developed a set of 17 structured interview questions—which we derived from our Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation guide and our prior work on collaboration and coordination best practices—to interview a group of knowledgeable officials at each of the five task forces on their coordination efforts.⁶ Specifically, we asked officials in each of the task forces to describe the nature of the task force's coordination efforts, to include: (1) the presence of a collaborative relationship with each of the other task forces; (2) the circumstances under which it coordinates; (3) the various mechanisms used to coordinate; and (4) views on the effectiveness of the coordination with each of the other task forces. To quantify these results, we conducted a network analysis in which we

⁴We selected fiscal years 2014 through 2018 to review because they were the most recent fiscal years for which data were available and also included the time frame during which there was a task force reorganization effort at JIATF-West.

⁵We met with officials from DOD, DHS, and DOJ and their component agencies, who were representatives of these task forces.

⁶GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015); *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014); *Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*, [GAO-14-220](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2014); and *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012).

aggregated the responses to our structured interview questions about the nature and mechanisms used by the task forces to communicate and coordinate with one another and developed a representation of the patterns of collaboration among the task forces.⁷ We then analyzed these networks to determine the extent to which the task forces were using mechanisms our prior work had identified as best practices for effective coordination. We then used task force documentation, such as joint operations after action reports, to validate the responses regarding the coordination mechanisms used. We also assessed the interview responses we received from the task forces regarding their interactions with the other joint task forces as a means to corroborate each task force's responses.

To examine how the task forces measure the effectiveness of their missions and activities, we identified performance measures the task forces used for assessing the effectiveness of their missions and activities from fiscal years 2014 through 2018.⁸ Specifically, we reviewed each of the task forces' annual performance measures and reports and any available results for this time period. We assessed the task forces' performance measures against criteria, such as departmental performance assessment standard operating procedures, best practices to enhance performance management and measurement processes we have identified in our prior work, and federal internal control standards related to monitoring performance.⁹ Additionally, we examined measures against relevant requirements in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.¹⁰ To assess the reliability of the performance measures and any underlying data used to inform the performance assessments from fiscal

⁷Network analysis is a set of quantitative and graphical methods to identify the underlying patterns and structures in a complex set of relationships among entities such as countries, organizations, or individuals.

⁸We selected the most recent 5 fiscal years to assess the task forces' performance.

⁹[GAO-14-704G](#); Office of Management and Budget, *Performance Management Challenges and Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: June 18, 2003); GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, [GAO-12-208G](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 2012); GAO, *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, [GAO-11-646SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2011); GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO/GGD-96-118](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1, 1996); and Department of Defense Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, *Counternarcotics and Global Threats Performance Metrics System Standard Operating Procedures* (January 2012).

¹⁰Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1901, 130 Stat. 2000, 2665-70 (2016). See 6 U.S.C. § 348(b)(9).

years 2014 through 2018, we reviewed documentation, such as data dictionaries, system manuals, and user guides. We also interviewed task force officials to better understand the processes for inputting and monitoring the quality of the data and inputs, and how they identify and address any deficiencies. Additionally, we interviewed task force officials about how the data and other inputs were used, and the methodologies for assessing the task forces' missions and activities. We found the data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting how task forces measure the effectiveness of their missions and activities.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2018 to July 2019 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.

Background

Roles and Responsibilities in Federal Counterdrug Missions and Activities

As previously mentioned, multiple federal departments and components have responsibilities for combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States. Figure 1 summarizes the missions and responsibilities of the federal departments and components primarily responsible for combating the trafficking of illicit drugs.

Figure 1: Primary Federal Departments and Components Involved in Counterdrug Missions and Activities and Their Respective Responsibilities



Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)

Is to develop the National Drug Control Strategy; oversee and coordinate the efforts of National Drug Control Program agencies; and assess and certify the adequacy of the budget submissions of national drug control program agencies, among other things. ONDCP is a component of the Executive Office of the President.



Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Is to prevent terrorism and enhance security, secure and manage U.S. borders, and administer immigration laws, among other things.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

Is to stop the unlawful movement of people, illicit drugs, and other contraband across U.S. borders. CBP's Air and Marine Operations (AMO) is to use air and maritime assets to help detect these threats, and also provide such assets to task forces to support drug interdiction activities.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Is to enforce federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration. ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is to investigate the illicit movement of goods into and out of the United States, including illicit drugs.

U.S. Coast Guard

Is to lead maritime drug interdiction, and has broad legal authorities to conduct counterdrug missions. The Coast Guard is also the only military branch within DHS.



Department of Defense (DOD)

Is to lead the detection and monitoring of illicit drug trafficking into the United States. Within DOD, there are geographic combatant commands, which oversee counterdrug missions and activities in their respective areas of responsibility.

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats

Is to develop, fund, and oversee DOD policies, activities, and programs related to counterdrug and counter-transnational organized crime efforts; to include those of the DOD combatant commands.

U.S. Southern Command

Is to execute contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation on behalf of DOD in Central America, South America, and parts of the Caribbean. Joint Interagency Task Force – South (JIATF-South) is a direct reporting unit of the U.S. Southern Command.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command

Is to execute counterdrug activities on behalf of DOD to defend the U.S. and stabilize the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Joint Interagency Task Force – West (JIATF-West) is the executive agent responsible for counterdrug activities in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's area of responsibility.



Department of Justice (DOJ)

Is to enforce federal laws, including those related to drug trafficking and production offenses.

Drug Enforcement Administration

Is to conduct drug-related investigations in coordination with international, federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies. It is also responsible for enforcing laws and regulations related to the growth, manufacture, or distribution of controlled substances.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Is to conduct intelligence and law enforcement investigations, including investigating terrorism, cyber-attacks, and other major criminal threats, such as drug trafficking.

Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces

Is to identify major drug trafficking organizations, money laundering organizations, and related criminal enterprises to target, disrupt, and dismantle. It also coordinates prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven multi-agency and multijurisdictional task forces, including DOJ and DHS components.

Source: GAO summary of information provided by DOD, DHS, DOJ, and ONDCP. | GAO-19-441

DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Involved in Counterdrug Missions and Activities

DOD Joint Interagency Task Forces

In 1989, DOD created several joint task forces, which aimed to bridge the military's counterdrug efforts with those of civilian, federal law enforcement agencies. These task forces have evolved since then and eventually developed into the present-day iterations of JIATF-South under the U.S. Southern Command and JIATF-West under the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

JIATF-South and JIATF-West both consist of representatives from DOD, DHS, and DOJ components, among others. Coast Guard admirals currently serve as the Directors of both of the JIATFs. Previously, DOD service components have led JIATF-South; however, while DOD is responsible for detection and monitoring of drug flow, it is precluded from taking law enforcement actions in counterdrug efforts.¹¹ Task force officials stated that Coast Guard leadership encourages participation from both DOD and DHS because the Coast Guard is both a military and a law enforcement agency.¹² The deputy and vice leadership positions at the JIATFs are held by officers and civilians from DOD, DHS, and DOJ components, which allow the task forces to leverage various experiences and authorities across these components, according to task force officials.

DHS Joint Task Forces

In 2014, DHS established three new joint task forces — (1) JTF-East, (2) JTF-West, and (3) JTF-Investigations—as pilot programs to, among other things, address the smuggling of illicit drugs over the southern border and approaches to the United States. Additionally, according to the *DHS Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan*, the JTFs were created to strengthen the unity of effort within DHS toward common goals. The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act subsequently

¹¹See 18 U.S.C. § 1385.

¹²According to JIATF officials, the JIATF Directors operate under military authorities.

codified these task forces and established new JTF requirements, such as establishing outcome-based and other appropriate performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF.¹³ In 2017, DHS also created a JTF Coordination Cell to develop JTF performance measures and enhance awareness among DHS components about the role of the JTFs, among other things.

The DHS JTFs primarily consist of representatives from CBP, ICE, and the Coast Guard, and a representative from each of these components serves as the Director for each of the three JTFs. The deputy leadership positions of each JTF are held by officers from the other two components. For example, DHS JTF-West's director is an officer from CBP, and the deputy directors are officers from the Coast Guard and ICE. According to a DHS memorandum, in establishing the JTFs, DHS wanted each JTF to be led and supported by the different DHS components in order to integrate their varied capabilities. For more information on the task forces' leadership and compositions, see table 1.

¹³The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act also details DHS JTF responsibilities, such as planning and executing joint task force activities and exercising operational direction with personnel allocated to the JTFs, as well as personnel and resource requirements and limitations. Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1901, 130 Stat. 2000, 2665-70 (2016). See 6 U.S.C. § 348(b).

Table 1: Information on the Department of Defense Joint Interagency Task Forces' and Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Forces' Locations, Leadership, and Number of Staff

Task force	Location	Task force leadership	Number of assigned staff ^a
Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S)	Key West, FL	- Director: U.S. Coast Guard - Deputy Director: U.S. Navy - Vice Directors: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)	408
Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-W)	Honolulu, HI	- Director: U.S. Coast Guard - Deputy Director: U.S. Navy (civilian) - Chief of Staff: U.S. Marine Corps	126
Joint Task Force-East (JTF-E)	Portsmouth, VA	- Director: U.S. Coast Guard - Deputy Directors: CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)	44
Joint Task Force-Investigations (JTF-I)	Washington, DC	- Director: ICE HSI - Deputy Directors: U.S. Coast Guard and CBP	67
Joint Task Force-West (JTF-W)	San Antonio, TX	- Director: CBP - Deputy Directors: U.S. Coast Guard and ICE HSI	56

Source: GAO summary of information provided by each joint task force. | GAO-19-441

^aAccording to task force officials, the number of assigned staff represent the number of permanent staff for the JIATFs and the number of permanent and temporary duty staff for the DHS JTFs in fiscal year 2018.

Organizational Structure

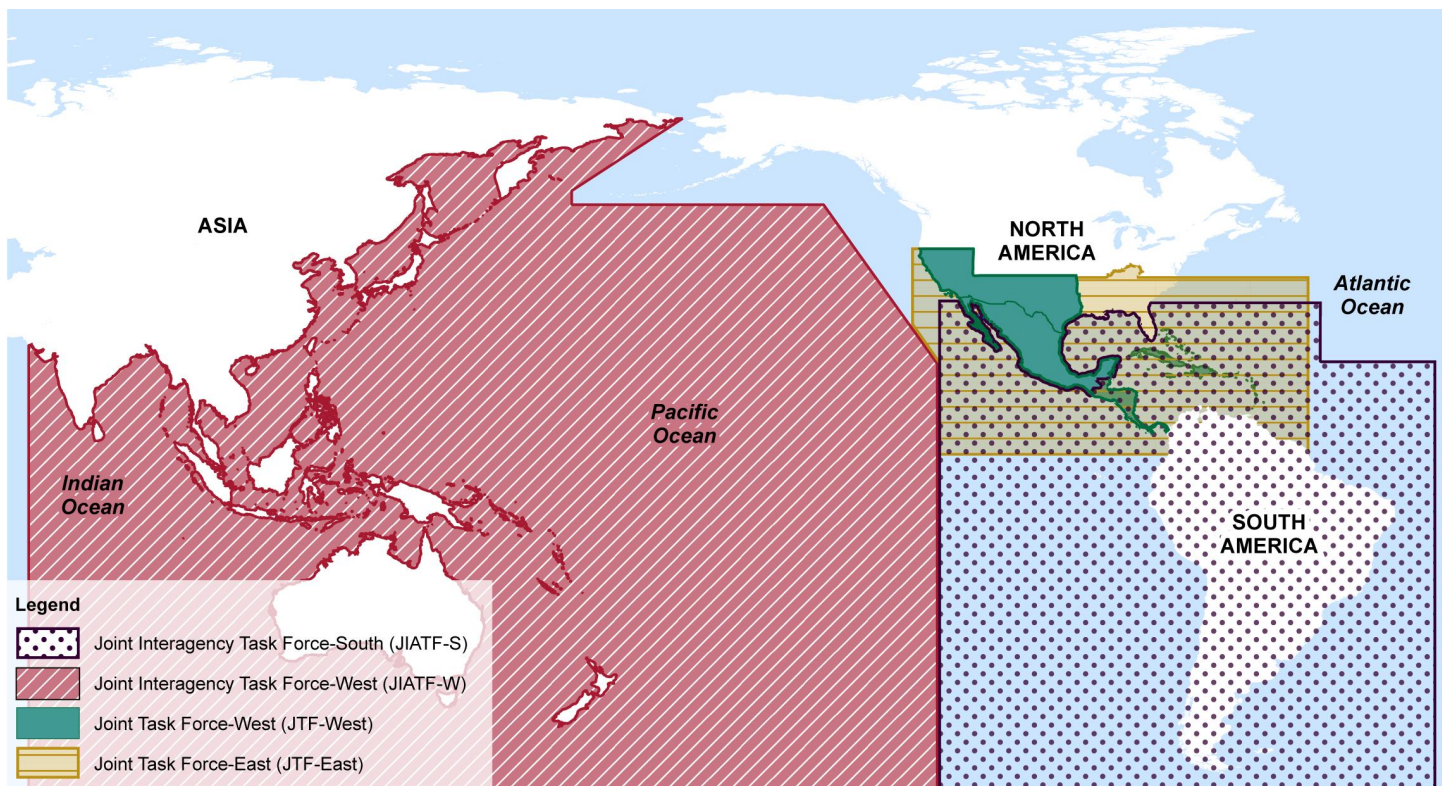
Each of the five task forces are similarly organized by functional areas and all include areas such as administration and personnel, intelligence, and operations. For example, JIATF-South, JIATF-West, and each of the DHS JTFs have Planning sections, which help guide the task forces' overarching strategic plans and operations, with input from other sections. One task force—JIATF-West—further tailored its organizational structure to its missions and activities. Specifically, JIATF-West reorganized in January 2016, at the direction of the former U.S. Indo-Pacific Combatant Commander, to operationalize and combine its Intelligence and Operations functional areas into a Counternarcotics Operations Center. According to JIATF-West leadership, the Counternarcotics Operations Center better reflects the nature of its intelligence gathering and sharing activities with other federal law enforcement agencies and foreign countries. JIATF-West officials also stated the task force merged its section that provided support and training of foreign law enforcement

agencies into its Planning and Engagement section since that section directs activities related to JIATF-West's engagement with partner nations.

Areas of Responsibility

As shown in figure 2, the two DOD task forces (JIATF-South and JIATF-West) and two of the three DHS task forces (JTF-East and JTF-West) have geographical areas of responsibility. In contrast, the third DHS task force (JTF-Investigations) is focused on coordinating investigations and information sharing to support DHS and the other two DHS JTFs. As a result, it does not have a geographical area of responsibility.

Figure 2: Map of the Joint Interagency Task Forces' and Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Forces' Geographical Areas of Responsibility



Source: GAO adaptation based on DOD and DHS documentation; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-441

Each of the Five Task Forces in Our Review Has a Counterdrug Mission, and Its Activities Vary Based on Threats in Its Area of Responsibility and Available Resources

JIATF-South, JIATF-West, and the DHS JTFs all support or conduct missions and activities related to countering the flow of illicit drugs. The counterdrug missions and activities each task force engages in vary based on the type of threats present in its area of responsibility, as well as the physical assets available to it, according to task force documents and officials. For the JIATFs, counterdrug activities in the maritime and air domains are their primary focus, as their missions are focused on the detection and monitoring of illicit drug trafficking to support U.S. and foreign partner law enforcement interdiction activities. In contrast, the JTFs primarily coordinate counterdrug and other activities among the DHS components. For example:

Example of Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-South) Activity to Combat Illicit Drug Trafficking

When JIATF-South receives information about a potential illicit drug smuggling event, it will use available air and maritime assets allocated to it to detect and monitor the suspect smuggling vessel. Once JIATF-South locates the suspect vessel and has assets in place, JIATF-South turns over control of the assets to the relevant law enforcement agencies (e.g., the Coast Guard, CBP, etc.) to interdict the smuggling vessel and any illicit drugs that may be on board.

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by JIATF-South. | GAO-19-441

- **JIATF-South:** Focuses its activities on detecting, monitoring, and supporting the interdiction of bulk cocaine movements being smuggled on noncommercial maritime vessels. According to JIATF-South officials, this focus is partly because the key coca-producing countries are within its area of responsibility, and partly because cocaine is a key source of profit for transnational criminal organizations. JIATF-South is also allocated assets, such as ships and surveillance aircraft, from DOD and DHS components (such as the Coast Guard and CBP Air and Marine Operations), as well as from foreign partners. JIATF-South uses these maritime and air assets, in conjunction with available intelligence, to detect and monitor the trafficking of illicit drugs, such as cocaine, being smuggled north across its area of responsibility. Once JIATF-South detects a smuggling event occurring, it passes this information and control of the assets to law enforcement authorities to interdict the smuggling event. For an example of how this occurs, see the sidebar.

Example of Joint Interagency Task Force–West’s (JIATF-West) Capacity Building Efforts to Combat Illicit Drug Trafficking

JIATF-West has helped countries in its area of responsibility—such as Vanuatu—build their financial investigative capacity by providing law enforcement training on topics such as bank records analysis, money laundering theory, and accounting. This training is intended to help foreign law enforcement agencies better detect transnational criminal organizations’ transactions, thus making it more difficult for such organizations to operate in their area of responsibility.

Source: GAO summary of JIATF-West information. | GAO-19-441

- **JIATF-West:** Focuses its missions and activities on four priorities: (1) detecting precursor chemicals that can be used to manufacture illicit drugs, such as synthetic opioids; (2) supporting allies and foreign partners in combating illicit drug trafficking in its area of responsibility; (3) monitoring drug flows moving to, from, and through Asia and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region; and (4) detecting the flow of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids, according to JIATF-West documents.¹⁴ According to JIATF-West officials, JIATF-West’s activities primarily consist of intelligence gathering and collaboration with law enforcement partners within foreign countries where precursor chemicals are manufactured or combined to manufacture illicit drugs. JIATF-West also engages in capacity building with law enforcement authorities in foreign countries in the Pacific region, such as the Philippines and Thailand. For an example of JIATF-West’s capacity building efforts, see the sidebar.

Unlike JIATF-South, JIATF-West does not have assets, such as ships or aircraft. However, JIATF-West officials stated that even if JIATF-West had assets, it would not alter the focus of its missions and activities because of the threat transnational criminal organizations pose and the nature of the flow of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in its expansive area of responsibility. For example, JIATF-West officials told us that precursor chemicals are typically shipped in commercial cargo containers. Notably, all precursor chemicals are legal to manufacture and sell for legitimate uses, such as the production of pharmaceutical drugs and pesticides, and it is difficult to determine when such chemicals have been diverted for illicit use. Officials stated that JIATF-West would face legal and logistical challenges if they were to directly disrupt precursor chemicals being diverted, such as if the vessel was state-owned or was in a foreign country’s territorial waters. Thus, even if JIATF-West had assets, JIATF-West officials noted that the legal and logistical challenges would not change how the task force approaches its missions and activities.

- **DHS JTFs:** Focus on coordinating with DHS components (e.g., CBP, ICE HSI, Coast Guard) to facilitate awareness about cross-component, cross-geographic homeland security issues. The JTFs have broader missions than countering the flow of illicit drugs. For example, the JTFs also have responsibilities for coordinating migrant

¹⁴Illicit synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, are manmade and chemically produced in a laboratory to mimic the effects of opiates derived from the poppy plant, such as heroin and morphine.

interdiction and counter-terrorism activities.¹⁵ Further, given their areas of responsibility, JTF-East primarily focuses on threats along the southern maritime border of the United States and JTF-West primarily focuses on threats along the southwest land border. In contrast, JTF-Investigations focuses on supporting DHS-wide investigations and sharing information to support the other two task forces. Similar to JIATF-West, the JTFs do not have physical assets to support these activities. According to JTF officials, this is partly because the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act requires the JTFs to be cost neutral.¹⁶ Additionally, JTF officials stated the JTFs were not meant to serve a similar function as the DOD combatant commands and, instead, are meant to help with planning and coordinating missions and activities across joint operating areas.

The Five Task Forces in Our Review Generally Coordinated Effectively to Help Minimize Duplication of Counterdrug Missions and Activities, Using Various Mechanisms

Task force officials reported that the task forces effectively coordinated counterdrug missions and activities to minimize duplication of efforts. The extent to which the task forces coordinate varied based on whether they have (1) shared purposes and (2) areas of responsibility with overlapping

¹⁵According to the *DHS Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan*, the DHS JTFs' key objectives are to: (a) minimize the risk of terrorism; (b) increase the perceived risk of engaging in or facilitating illegal transnational or cross-border activity; (c) interdict people and goods attempting to enter illegally at and between U.S. ports of entry; (d) increase situational awareness in the air, land, and sea border and approaches; (e) decrease or disrupt the profitability and finances of transnational criminal activities at the optimal points; (f) dismantle criminal and terrorist organizations and networks; (g) prevent the illegal exploitation of legal flows; (h) maximize the resiliency of key nodes, conveyances, pathways, and transportation infrastructure; (i) minimize the cost to travelers and delays to shippers in being screened and vetted at ports of entry; and (j) maximize the number of travelers and value of imported goods that undergo screening before arriving at ports of entry. Further, the *DHS Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan* is to be executed along six lines of effort that link to these objectives, such as reduce the terrorism risk to the nation and combat transnational criminal organizations.

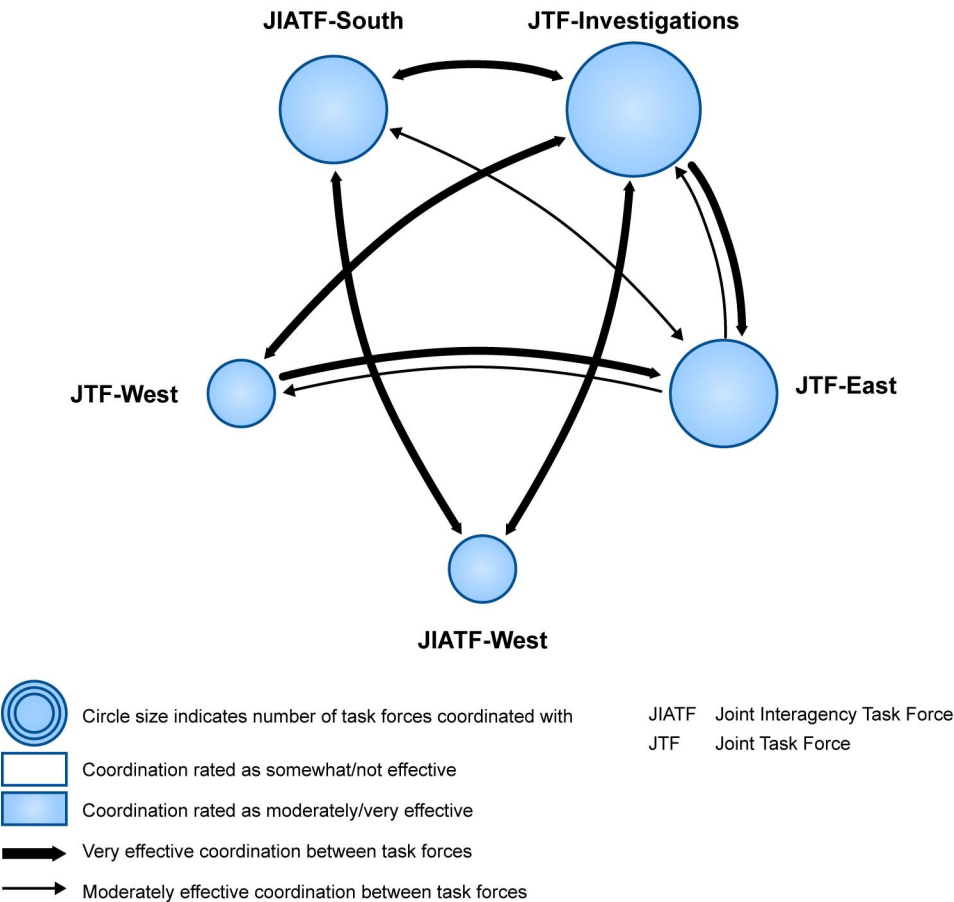
¹⁶Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1901, 130 Stat. 2000, 2665-70 (2016). See 6 U.S.C. § 348(b)(6)(B).

or shared geographical boundaries. In particular, those task forces that have shared purposes and those task forces that have overlapping areas of responsibility or shared boundaries tended to coordinate with one another more than with the other task forces. We also found that the task forces use a variety of mechanisms to coordinate counterdrug missions and activities, such as the use of working groups and liaison officers, that our prior work has identified as best practices.

Task Force Officials Reported Effective Coordination with the Other Task Forces

Officials we met with from each of the task forces stated that they are satisfied with the level of coordination that takes place with other task forces and that the coordination efforts have been effective. Our analysis of their responses found that of the five task forces, JTF-Investigations' coordination activities were rated as the most effective by the other four task forces. JIATF-South was rated the second highest task force in terms of both the effectiveness of its coordination activities and the number of other task forces with which it coordinated. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the task force officials' views on the extent to which the task forces coordinate with one another and the effectiveness of the coordination efforts.

Figure 3: Joint Task Force Officials’ Views on the Extent and Effectiveness of Coordination Efforts



Source: GAO analysis of task force coordination. | GAO-19-441

Note: Some task forces may not have as many adjoining lines denoting the extent of coordination based on their activities or geographical boundaries. For example, JTF-West and JIATF-West do not share a geographic boundary and representatives from those task forces stated that because of this, there is generally not a need to coordinate with each other. Consequently, they did not rate the effectiveness of the coordination. The effectiveness of the coordination depicted above was derived from the structured interview question that asked each task force to rate the effectiveness of its coordination with the other task forces using a five-point scale to include “not effective,” “neither effective nor ineffective,” “somewhat effective,” “moderately effective,” or “very effective.” The results shown above represent the average score each task force received from the other task forces it coordinates with.

The extent of the coordination between the task forces varies based on their purposes and geographical proximity to one another.

(HOMECORT) Process

When the JTFs were first established, JTF-I developed a process to help ensure that the task forces were working strategically on the highest priority homeland security issues.

In particular, JTF-I officials developed and implemented the HOMECORT process to identify and coordinate DHS efforts to dismantle the top transnational criminal organizations impacting homeland security by:

1. Soliciting and receiving cases nominated by the other JTFs and DHS components;
2. Analyzing the case submissions against a variety of criteria to assess the methods criminal organizations use, and sharing this information to enhance investigators' capabilities;
3. Passing the cases to the HOMECORT Board (which includes leaders of the investigative services and deputies of the components, among others) for a final decision on HOMECORT designation; and
4. Bringing together all component officials working on the newly designated HOMECORT cases to develop an Integrated Action Plan to synchronize efforts, including identifying resources, actions to be taken, and desired outcomes to be achieved.

Source: GAO summary of information from Joint Task Force--Investigations. | GAO-19-441

- **Shared purposes.** Task force officials we spoke with told us the level of coordination with the other task forces varies based on the extent to which the task forces have shared purposes. Of the five task forces, JTF-Investigations was the one task force that coordinated with all the other task forces, which is consistent with its purpose to enhance DHS investigations, coordinate priorities, and share information with the other joint task forces. As a part of its process in designating cases as a Homeland Criminal Organization Target (HOMECORT), JTF-Investigations conducts a Comprehensive Criminal Network Analysis that identifies links between multiple cases and criminal organizations that can cross geographical and task force boundaries (see sidebar for more information on the HOMECORT process). According to JTF-Investigations officials, this analysis helps identify cases that may be related and helps to coordinate cases across task force jurisdictions to prevent duplication of missions and activities.
- **Geographical proximity.** Officials we spoke with from the five task forces told us that they coordinated more with those task forces with which they had a shared border or joint operating area. For example, JIATF-South shares a joint operating area or a geographical boundary with both JTF-East and JIATF-West and, as a result, officials from these three task forces provided more robust examples of coordination.

The Task Forces Use a Variety of Mechanisms to Coordinate Missions and Activities

According to task force documentation, such as operational guidance, and our discussions with task force officials, JIATF-South, JIATF-West, and the DHS JTFs coordinated with each other on missions and activities where they have a shared interest, such as a common illicit drug threat. These coordination activities include information sharing and joint operations, as well as mechanisms, such as the use of working groups and liaison officers, which our prior work has identified as best practices for coordination.¹⁷ According to task force officials, this coordination is intended to enhance counterdrug efforts and avoid duplication of missions and activities. As described earlier, the task forces have different mission focuses that depend on their geographically defined areas of responsibility, which also help the task forces avoid duplication of

¹⁷ [GAO-12-1022](#).

missions and activities. However, as shown earlier in figure 2, there are some areas of land, sea, and air in which more than one task force may conduct missions and activities (e.g., between JIATF-South and JTF-East). These areas of overlap are called joint operating areas. According to our review of task force documents and discussions with task force officials, within these joint operating areas, the task forces share intelligence information, coordinate missions and activities with one another, and sometimes conduct joint operations. For example, in 2018, JTF-East led and coordinated with JIATF-South on an operation to increase intelligence and targeting capabilities to disrupt illicit drug trafficking organizations operating within their joint operating area in the Caribbean. JTF-East personnel deployed to JIATF-South's headquarters to facilitate coordination and information sharing. As a result of this joint operation, the law enforcement agencies involved seized over 3,700 pounds of cocaine and apprehended 69 migrants, one smuggler, and the smuggling vessel, according to JTF-East documentation.

Officials from the task forces we spoke with reported coordinating most frequently through meetings and working groups, and through liaison officers, as detailed in examples below.

Meetings and Working Groups

- **JIATFs:** In 2018, JIATF-South and JIATF-West officials developed a collaborative process to track and target shipments with potential illicit drugs and precursor chemicals moving between their respective areas of responsibility. For example, JIATF-West analysts traveled to JIATF-South to initiate the process, and officials stated they continue to work with JIATF-South analysts remotely on an ongoing basis on such collaborative efforts.
- **JTFs:** The JTF Coordination Cell hosts quarterly "synchronization meetings" with the three DHS JTFs to discuss emerging drug and smuggling trends, ongoing coordination efforts, and investigations.

Liaison Officers

All five task forces utilize liaison officers to enhance coordination with the other task forces and components. For example, in 2018, JIATF-West sent an analyst to JTF-Investigations to coordinate on a HOMECORT case related to drug threats in the Indo-Pacific region. Further, the five task forces coordinate with each other and their participating components through liaison officers that reside at the task forces. For example, JIATF-

South officials told us that they coordinate with JTF-East through a Coast Guard liaison at JIATF-South. Liaison officers also provide direct access to their components' information systems, which task force officials said further aids them in sharing information and coordinating missions and activities.

Other Coordination Mechanisms

In addition to meetings, working groups, and liaison officers, the task forces utilize other coordination mechanisms, such as memoranda of understanding and agreement, shared databases, and conferences, as detailed below.

- **Memoranda of understanding or agreement:** The two JIATFs have nine separate formal memoranda of understanding or agreement with various DHS and DOJ components, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration and ICE, that detail how the task forces and agencies will coordinate with one another and share resources.
- **Shared databases:** Each of the five task forces, along with other federal agencies, can submit information, sometimes known as a "critical movement alert" to shared databases, to alert JIATF-South about a potential drug event in its area of responsibility.¹⁸ According to JIATF-South officials we spoke with and our observations, JIATF-South uses these critical movement alerts, along with other intelligence that may exist, to determine whether it will dedicate assets to target a smuggling event, in conjunction with other, relevant law enforcement agencies.
- **Conferences:** Each of the five task forces participates in periodic in-person, telephone, or video conferences to coordinate with one another and share information on key issues. For example, JIATF-South officials stated they have ongoing discussions once a quarter via video conference with JIATF-West officials and other federal agencies and task forces to coordinate on illicit drug threats.

¹⁸The five task forces, along with other federal agencies, can submit illicit drug events to the U.S. National Consolidated Counterdrug Database, which tracks seizures of different drugs worldwide to give a baseline of drug trafficking activity. JIATF-South manages the module of the database related to cocaine. JIATF-West maintains the module on amphetamine-type stimulants. Additionally, critical movement alerts reside within a JIATF-South database, known as HELIOS, which all four of the other task forces have access to.

Four of the Five Task Forces' Performance Measures Do Not Allow Them to Determine the Effectiveness of Their Counterdrug Activities

JIATF-South Uses Various Output and Outcome-Based Measures to Assess the Effectiveness of Its Counterdrug Activities

JIATF-South uses both output-based and outcome-based performance measures to gauge the effectiveness of its counterdrug missions and activities, and it reports the results to the DOD Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats in JIATF-South's annual Performance Summary Reports.¹⁹ JIATF-South consistently assesses four key performance measures, called interdiction continuum measures, using data from the Consolidated Counterdrug Database to determine the effectiveness of its missions and activities. Specifically, JIATF-South measures (1) total maritime smuggling events, (2) targeted smuggling events, (3) detected smuggling events, and (4) seized or disrupted smuggling events. According to JIATF-South officials, data on these events allow JIATF-South to develop its primary measure to determine the effectiveness of its counterdrug missions and activities: the percentage of smuggling events JIATF-South detected that it handed off to law enforcement agencies that resulted in disrupted or seized illicit drugs. These measures and the results for fiscal years 2014 through 2018 are shown in table 2.

¹⁹We have previously reported outputs are the direct products and services delivered by a program. An example of an output-based performance measure is the number of times a task force passes along information on potential illicit drug shipments to law enforcement authorities. In contrast, outcomes are the results of those products and services. An example of an outcome-based performance measure is the percentage of information leads on illicit drug shipments sent to law enforcement authorities that resulted in interdictions and seizures. For more information, see GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, [GAO-12-208G](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 2012).

Table 2: Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-South) Interdiction Continuum Measures

Fiscal year	Total maritime smuggling events ^a	Targeted smuggling events ^b	Detected smuggling events ^c	Seized or disrupted smuggling events ^d	Percentage of detected events handed-off to interdiction and apprehension resources (%) ^e	Department of Defense target (%)
2014	1,397	383	171	135	79	None
2015	2,218	526	246	192	78	90
2016	4,575	1,186	451	322	71	80
2017	4,251	1,071	410	309	75	80
2018	3,854	793	357	245	69	80

Source: GAO analysis of JIATF-South data. | GAO-19-441

^aTotal maritime smuggling events includes all known smuggling events reported in the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB)

^bTargeted smuggling events includes the number of known smuggling events JIATF-South was able to target with its available physical assets, such as sending ships, aircraft, etc. to attempt to locate the smuggling event.

^cDetected smuggling events includes the number of targeted smuggling events that JIATF-South was able to actually detect with its available physical assets.

^dSeized or disrupted smuggling events includes the number of detected smuggling events where law enforcement partners were able to seize or disrupt illicit drugs.

^eJIATF-South determines this percentage by dividing the total number of “seized or disrupted” events by the total number of “detected” events.

From fiscal years 2014 through 2018, the rate at which JIATF-South successfully detected and handed off smuggling events for interdiction was generally 70 percent or higher. While JIATF-South officials acknowledged they have not met the target set by DOD, they noted there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of JIATF-South’s counterdrug missions and activities in any given year that are outside of its span of control. For example, drug trafficking organizations may adapt their tactics in response to JIATF-South’s activities to make it more difficult for the task force to target and detect their movements. This could include changing their trafficking routes or altering the size or type of smuggling conveyances the drug trafficking organizations use to transport the illicit drugs.

JIATF-West Has a Well-Documented Methodology for Assessing Its Activities, but Its Measures Do Not Allow It to Demonstrate the Overall Effectiveness of Its Counterdrug Activities

In September 2014, JIATF-West set up an Assessments Branch to provide an annual assessment of the task force's counterdrug efforts that was intended to inform leadership about whether the task force was undertaking the best activities to achieve its mission and implementing them effectively. According to JIATF-West officials, the nature of JIATF-West's missions and activities make it inherently more difficult to assess and quantify the effectiveness of its efforts relative to other task forces. For example, unlike JIATF-South, which is annually allocated assets to support its missions and activities and can measure results—such as tons of cocaine seized—JIATF-West's initiatives and activities are primarily focused on information sharing and helping partner nations improve their counterdrug capabilities, activities for which results may be more difficult to quantify.

Example of Joint Interagency Task Force-West's (JIATF-West) Initiative and Activity Assessment

Initiative Assessment

In fiscal year 2017, JIATF-West undertook an initiative to enhance maritime security in the Southern Philippines and assessed its progress in achieving seven objectives, such as:

- Developing and approving tactics, techniques, procedures, and guidance.
- Demonstrating a Philippine law enforcement unit's ability to sustain maintenance and logistics support for facilities and equipment.

Overall, JIATF-West determined that it achieved many desired effects and objectives but that some improvements were required (with a score of 3.7 out of 5).

Activity Assessment

One activity JIATF-West undertook to support this initiative was a training course provided to a Philippine maritime law enforcement unit on maritime security planning. To assess this activity, JIATF-West, among other things, assessed whether the training:

- Provided instruction on assessing the operational environment.
- Provided instruction on operational planning and design, mission analysis, and orders preparation.
- Provided instruction on briefing techniques.

JIATF-West rated its activity performance 4.4 and its effectiveness 2.5 (out of 5), concluding that it successfully executed a mission planning training course with the Philippine maritime law enforcement unit, but could improve the training in the future by addressing challenges related to tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Source: GAO description based on JIATF-West documentation. | GAO-19-441

To develop its annual assessment report, JIATF-West's Assessments Branch evaluates and assigns scores for each of the approximately 20 counterdrug initiatives and more than 100 corresponding activities it conducts each year. (For an example of a JIATF-West initiative and a corresponding activity and a description of how they were assessed, see the sidebar.) In particular, JIATF-West evaluates its initiatives to determine the progress made toward achieving objectives defined in JIATF-West's strategic documents, such as its *Theater Counternarcotics Campaign Plan*. Further, JIATF-West evaluates its activities to determine whether they were executed as planned, including considerations of whether the activities were done with the intended organizations, at the specified locations and times, and whether they met stated objectives.²⁰ Nevertheless, we identified ways JIATF-West measures its performance that inhibit its ability to demonstrate its overall effectiveness of countering the flow of illicit drugs. Specifically, we found that JIATF-West (1) lacks a vital few performance measures that summarize its overall effectiveness that can be consistently assessed over time and (2) that it does not have established targets for assessing the effectiveness of its numerous missions and activities.

²⁰ JIATF-West's assessments of the activities that support its initiatives include both measures of performance and measures of effectiveness where each is rated on a scale. Measures of performance assess whether the activity went forward as scheduled, included the appropriate organizations, and met its objectives. Measures of effectiveness assess whether the activity met the broader intermediate objectives of the initiative that it supports.

JIATF-West Lacks a Vital Few, Comprehensive Performance Measures That Summarize Its Effectiveness and Are Consistent Over Time

JIATF-West has focused its performance measures on assessing its numerous initiatives and activities; however, it has not developed a vital few, comprehensive performance measures that summarize the overall effectiveness of its numerous initiatives and activities in a manner that would convey essential information on its counterdrug activities to decision makers at the DOD command level and above. Such information could help these decision makers better understand the overall effectiveness of JIATF-West's counterdrug missions and activities in relation to broader U.S. counterdrug efforts. For example, JIATF-West could develop a performance measure that calculates the percentage of leads it provides to foreign partners that result in seizures or apprehensions. Such a measure could demonstrate JIATF-West's overall effectiveness in supporting allies and foreign partners in combating illicit drug trafficking in its area of responsibility, in keeping with one of its operational priorities.

Guidance on performance measures from the DOD Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats states that agencies should develop a vital few measures, no more than two or three, which convey essential information on counterdrug activities to decision makers.²¹ JIATF-West used to assess and report such measures as recently as fiscal year 2015. For example, it reported scores on the effectiveness of its mission and broader lines of effort, such as countering illicit drug and precursor chemical flows in its area of responsibility. However, JIATF-West officials told us they stopped reporting on these performance measures in fiscal year 2015 because, from the task force's perspective, the measures did not provide meaningful insights into the effectiveness of the task force's operations. However, such performance measures could provide meaningful information on the effectiveness of JIATF-West's counterdrug activities to decision makers at the DOD command level and above, even if such summary information might not affect the effectiveness of operations at the task force level. We have previously reported on the importance of

²¹Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, *Counternarcotics and Global Threats Performance Metrics System Standard Operating Procedures* (Jan. 26, 2012).

developing performance measures that demonstrate broader effectiveness and have also reported it is worthwhile for agencies to develop them to better determine and understand the overall effectiveness of their missions and activities.²²

Further, JIATF-West is also unable to assess the effectiveness of its initiatives and activities over time because it has annually changed the way it measures the effectiveness of more than 100 counterdrug initiatives and activities. Specifically, JIATF-West has adjusted how it assesses the initiatives and activities each year since 2014—for example, by changing the weight scale for scoring its initiatives and activities to give more emphasis to some over others.²³ These changes to the methodology make it difficult to compare results and assess the effectiveness of its activities over time. DOD guidance states that agencies should have measures that are consistent over time to capture trend results.²⁴ In discussing these issues with JIATF-West officials, they stated that assessing the initiatives and activities provides valuable information on the effectiveness of the task force's efforts for internal, task force management. They acknowledged that JIATF-West's performance measures could be improved to allow for assessments of the effectiveness of the task force's activities over time, but they added that they plan to use the same methodology to calculate the task force's initiatives and activities scores in the future because this information is still needed internally. Given that JIATF-West's individual initiatives and activities change year to year, however, it will be difficult for JIATF-West to assess trends in the effectiveness of its initiatives and activities over time. By also establishing a vital few, comprehensive performance measures that can be assessed consistently over time, as appropriate,

²²[GAO-12-208G](#); [GAO-11-646SP](#); and [GAO-18-205](#).

²³In fiscal year 2014, JIATF-West scored its initiatives and activities on a 0 to 4 scale. From fiscal year 2015 to the present, JIATF-West scores its initiatives on a scale of 1 to 5. In addition, beginning in fiscal year 2015, JIATF-West changed its methodology by giving more weight to some measures than others. For example, in calculating its overall activity score, JIATF-West used to average the scores from its measures of performance and measures of effectiveness, respectively. However, in 2015, JIATF-West calculated the overall activity score using a weighted average to give more emphasis to its scores for measures of effectiveness.

²⁴Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, *Counternarcotics and Global Threats Performance Metrics System Standard Operating Procedures* (Jan. 26, 2012).

JIATF-West will be able to better convey trends in the overall effectiveness of its counterdrug missions and activities over time.

JIATF-West Lacks Specific Performance Targets for Its Initiatives and Activities

JIATF-West has not developed specific performance targets (i.e., established acceptable levels of performance or outcomes) for its initiatives and activities as part of its documented assessment methodology, and no such targets appear in any of the task force's annual assessment reports. When assessing its initiatives and activities, JIATF-West officials told us it aims to achieve the best possible outcome—or the highest possible score—for each of the initiatives and activities it undertakes and assesses.²⁵ DOD guidance states that targets should be set for each performance measure to establish a minimum level of performance to be accomplished within a given time frame.²⁶ Additionally, establishing specific performance measure targets that set a minimum level of performance to achieve could better encourage the task force to meet the targets and identify ways to improve, as needed.

The DHS JTF Performance Measures Changed from Fiscal Year 2017 to 2018 and Do Not Reflect Outcomes

The DHS JTFs were fully operational in fiscal year 2016 and began assessing their performance and producing performance reports in fiscal year 2017. Since they began reporting on their performance, the measures the JTFs reported changed in fiscal year 2018 and, according to JTF officials, will change again in fiscal year 2019. Specifically, in the fiscal year 2017 performance report, the JTFs reported on activities, such as the amounts of drugs seized, arrests made, and currency seized. However, according to task force officials, the 2017 report's performance measures did not accurately reflect the strategic-level coordination the JTFs performed. For example, the measures the JTFs reported in fiscal year 2017 focused on drug seizures and arrests made by the DHS components. While the drug seizures and arrests made by the DHS

²⁵In fiscal year 2014, the best possible score an initiative or activity could achieve was a 4. From fiscal years 2015 to 2017, the best possible score was a 5.

²⁶Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, *Counternarcotics and Global Threats Performance Metrics System Standard Operating Procedures* (Jan. 26, 2012).

components may have been made possible because of coordination activities of the DHS JTFs, using data on drug seizures and arrests as JTF performance measures resulted in double-counting because the components reported on the same seizures and arrests for their respective counterdrug programs.

To address these issues for fiscal year 2018, the JTFs and the DHS Coordination Cell developed a new set of performance measures that were intended to better reflect the JTFs' coordination activities and contributions. For example, a new JTF performance measure developed for fiscal year 2018 included the number of leads that the JTFs provided to a partner law enforcement agency, DHS component, or foreign government partner for interdiction or investigative action. Table 3 shows the evolution of the JTF performance measures from fiscal year 2017 to fiscal year 2018.

Table 3: Evolution of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Joint Task Forces' (JTF) Performance Measures from Fiscal Year 2017 to Fiscal Year 2018

Fiscal year 2017 performance measures	Fiscal year 2018 performance measures
- Percent of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) targeted by the JTFs that are disrupted or dismantled - Number of JTF operations executed against TCOs targeted by the JTFs - Number of criminal arrests linked to TCOs targeted by the JTFs - Pounds of drugs seized linked to TCOs targeted by the JTFs - Total amount of currency and/or monetary instruments seized of TCOs targeted by the JTFs	- Number of disruptions and degradations of TCOs - Number of operations executed against TCOs with assistance or coordination limited to DHS components - Number of operations executed against TCOs with interdepartmental (any non-DHS federal, state, or local entity) assistance or coordination - Number of operations executed against TCOs with international assistance or coordination - Number of joint intelligence products initiated or enhanced in alignment with the JTF operational priorities - Number of supportive efforts provided to or in response to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for awareness only - Number of supportive efforts provided to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for interdiction or investigative action - Number of individuals who satisfactorily completed a joint training event provided by their respective JTF - Number of marketing efforts provided to stakeholders regarding JTF capabilities, capacities, or processes for awareness, collaboration, cooperation, and relationship building

Source: DHS Joint Task Force performance information. | GAO-19-441

The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act requires the Secretary of DHS to establish outcome-based and other appropriate performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of each joint task force.²⁷ Although the DHS JTF Coordination Cell and the JTFs developed performance measures in fiscal year 2018 that better reflect the specific missions and activities of the three task forces, these measures are focused on outputs—such as the number of operations conducted in combating transnational criminal organizations—and not outcomes, such as the number or percentage of leads that resulted in seizures of illicit drugs. According to JTF Coordination Cell officials, the fiscal year 2018 JTF performance measures are not outcome-based because it is difficult to quantify and capture the contributions of the JTFs through their roles as coordinators and facilitators of missions and activities that are conducted by DHS components. Table 4 illustrates each of the DHS JTF performance results for fiscal year 2018 under the revised measures.²⁸

Table 4: Performance Measures for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Joint Task Forces (JTF), Fiscal Year 2018

Performance measure	Joint Task Force–West	Joint Task Force–East	Joint Task Force–Investigations
Number of disruptions and degradations of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) within joint operating areas	217	87	270
Number of operations executed against TCOs with assistance or coordination limited to DHS components	179	107	178
Number of operations executed against TCOs with interdepartmental (any non-DHS federal, state, or local entity) assistance or coordination	137	106	174
Number of operations executed against TCOs with international assistance or coordination	18	68	160

²⁷Pub. L. No. 114-328, § 1901, 130 Stat. 2000, 2665-70 (2016). See 6 U.S.C. § 348(b)(9).

²⁸The JTFs and the DHS JTF Coordination Cell also established performance targets for each JTF and each of its measures. In fiscal year 2018, each of the JTFs met or exceeded the individual targets set for these measures. For example, DHS set a performance goal (or target) for JTF-Investigations to provide 15 personnel with joint duty training to promote workforce professional development and enhance coordination within DHS, and 17 JTF-Investigations personnel completed the training in fiscal year 2018. For JTF-West, it set a target of executing two operations against transnational criminal organizations with international assistance or coordination, and in fiscal year 2018 JTF-West executed 18 such operations. For the performance targets and results for each of the measures for each of the task forces in fiscal year 2018, see appendix I.

Performance measure	Joint Task Force–West	Joint Task Force–East	Joint Task Force–Investigations
Number of joint intelligence products initiated or enhanced in alignment with the JTF operational priorities	120	133	87
Number of supportive efforts provided to or in response to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for awareness only	310	166	46,931
Number of supportive efforts provided to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for interdiction or investigative action	279	246	1,338
Number of individuals who satisfactorily completed a joint training event provided by their respective JTF	891	119	17
Number of marketing efforts provided to stakeholders regarding JTF capabilities, capacities, or processes for awareness, collaboration, cooperation, and relationship building	136	60	124

Source: GAO analysis based on information provided by the Department of Homeland Security. | GAO-19-441

Note: The JTFs report operations in each appropriate category and do not limit an operation to a single description. For example, depending on the specific circumstances, a single JTF-led or coordinated operation may be counted in both the measure for interdepartmental efforts, as well as the measure for operations with international assistance or coordination. However, if an operation's engagement was limited to solely DHS components, it would only count toward the measure for operations limited to DHS components.

In addition to the changes to the performance measures made from fiscal years 2017 to 2018, JTF Coordination Cell officials told us in October 2018 they plan to further revise their performance measures for fiscal year 2019, as they believe their measures could continue to improve to better reflect the value added by the JTFs and their coordination and information-sharing activities. JTF Coordination Cell officials further stated that they had considered linking the fiscal year 2018 performance measures to relevant strategic-level outcomes in DHS plans. However, they noted that such outcomes—including the number of drug seizures and apprehensions—are already reported by the individual DHS components and they are trying to avoid the double-counting that occurred in the fiscal year 2017 performance report.

We acknowledge that the types of coordination activities that the JTFs perform are inherently more difficult to measure, but developing and implementing outcome-based performance measures that reflect the value the JTFs add would better position the JTFs to demonstrate the effectiveness of their coordination efforts. For example, a performance measure that calculates the percentage of leads provided to components, partner law enforcement agencies, or foreign government partners that result in a successful seizure or arrest could help demonstrate the JTFs' contributions to DHS counterdrug efforts. Further, in designing its

outcome-based performance measures that are reflective of their coordination and information sharing activities, establishing a consistent set of performance measures across years, as appropriate, will allow the JTFs to better assess and convey their progress over time.

Conclusions

In 2017, 70,237 Americans died from an overdose involving synthetic opioids, heroin, cocaine, and other drugs. The number of annual overdose deaths has nearly doubled over the past decade. Combating the trafficking and availability of illicit drugs in the United States is a government-wide priority that requires a coordinated effort by federal departments and agencies with counterdrug responsibilities. JIATF-South, JIATF-West, and the three DHS JTFs are five task forces that are focused on strengthening interagency counterdrug efforts. While these task forces have worked together to coordinate and avoid duplicative activities, improvements to the performance measures used by four of the five task forces could enable them to better determine the effectiveness of their counterdrug missions and activities. In particular, by developing a vital few, comprehensive measures that are consistent from one year to the next, and establishing specific targets against which it can measure its missions and activities, JIATF-West will be better able to determine the effectiveness of its missions and activities and assess performance trends across years. In addition, by developing outcome-based performance measures that are consistent, the JTFs would be better positioned to demonstrate the effectiveness of their counterdrug efforts over time.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making a total of three recommendations: two for JIATF-West and one for DHS.

The Director of JIATF-West should establish a vital few performance measures that are consistently measured over time. (Recommendation 1)

The Director of JIATF-West should establish specific targets that set a minimal level of performance. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should develop outcome-based performance measures for the DHS JTFs that are consistent.
(Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

In May 2019, we provided a copy of this report to DOD, DHS, DOJ, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) for review and comment. In written comments, which are included in appendix II, DOD stated that it concurred with the two recommendations directed to JIATF-West and noted that JIATF-West plans to conduct an internal evaluation to establish a vital few performance measures to allow it to measure performance over time. Additionally, JIATF-West has identified several areas where it can establish specific targets that set a minimal level of performance to support DOD priorities. In its written comments, which are included in appendix III, DHS stated that it concurred with its recommendation and plans to implement new performance measures in a phased approach. DHS also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated into the report, as appropriate. Additionally, ONDCP provided technical comments, which we have incorporated into the report, as appropriate. DOJ did not have any comments on the draft report.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, the Acting Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at www.gao.gov.

If you or your staffs have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3841 or AndersonN@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nathan" and last name "Anderson" clearly distinguishable.

Nathan Anderson
Acting Director
Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Fiscal Year 2018 Performance Measures and Targets for the Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Forces

This appendix provides further details regarding the performance measures and performance targets for the Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Forces.

Table 5: Performance Measures and Targets for the Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Forces, Fiscal Year 2018

Performance measure	Joint Task Force–West (Target)	Joint Task Force–West (Result)	Joint Task Force–East (Target)	Joint Task Force–East (Result)	Joint Task Force–Investigations (Target)	Joint Task Force–Investigations (Result)
Number of disruptions and degradations of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) within joint operating areas	7	217	33	87	2	270
Number of operations executed against TCOs with assistance or coordination limited to DHS components	21	179	56	107	12	178
Number of operations executed against TCOs with interdepartmental (any non-DHS federal, state, or local entity) assistance or coordination	21	137	74	106	8	174
Number of operations executed against TCOs with international assistance or coordination	2	18	35	68	4	160
Number of joint intelligence products initiated or enhanced in alignment with the Joint Task Force (JTF) operational priorities	7	120	91	133	17	87
Number of supportive efforts provided to or in response to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for awareness only	10	310	70	166	3	46,931

**Appendix I: Fiscal Year 2018 Performance
Measures and Targets for the Department of
Homeland Security Joint Task Forces**

Performance measure	Joint Task Force–West (Target)	Joint Task Force–West (Result)	Joint Task Force–East (Target)	Joint Task Force–East (Result)	Joint Task Force– Investigations (Target)	Joint Task Force– Investigations (Result)
Number of supportive efforts provided to a partner agency, component, or foreign partner that are for interdiction or investigative action	10	279	49	246	3	1,338
Number of individuals who satisfactorily completed a joint training event provided by their respective JTF	210	891	63	119	10	17
Number of marketing efforts provided to stakeholders regarding JTF capabilities, capacities, or processes for awareness, collaboration, cooperation, and relationship building	21	136	42	60	14	124

Source: GAO analysis based on information provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). | GAO-19-441

Note: The JTFs report operations in each appropriate category and do not limit an operation to a single description. For example, depending on the specific circumstances, a single JTF-led or coordinated operation may be counted in both the measure for interdepartmental efforts, as well as the measure for operations with international assistance or coordination. However, if an operation's engagement was limited to solely DHS components, it would only count toward the measure for operations limited to DHS components.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense

**Appendix II: Comments from the Department
of Defense**



UNCLASSIFIED

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

JUN 18 2019

Mr. Nathan Anderson
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Enclosed is the Department of Defense response to your Draft report, GAO-19-441, "Drug Control: Certain DoD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities," dated July, 2019. The Department concurs with the report's recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. Please direct any questions or comments regarding this response to my primary action officer for this matter, Mr. James Furlo, james.a.furlo.civ@mail.mil, 571-256-4384.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "T. Alexander", is located below the word "Sincerely,".

Thomas A. Alexander
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
for Counternarcotics and Global Threats

Enclosure:
As stated

UNCLASSIFIED

**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 17, 2019
GAO-19-441 (GAO CODE 102816)**

**“DRUG CONTROL: CERTAIN DOD AND DHS JOINT TASK FORCES SHOULD
ENHANCE THEIR PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO BETTER ASSESS
COUNTERDRUG ACTIVITIES”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Director of JIATF-West should establish a vital few performance measures that are consistently measured over time. (Recommendation 1)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur, the DoD, and more specifically JIATF-W, continues to evaluate their internal assessments program by leveraging data analytics in order to improve their ability to assess the organization’s ability to conduct its core mission of countering transnational crime in the Indo-Pacific. JIATF-W, in coordination with the office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (DASD(CN>)), plans to conduct an internal evaluation to establish a vital few performance measures that allow for measuring performance over time, and baseline targets for their activities to determine return on investment and modify courses of action to as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Director of JIATF-West should establish specific targets that set a minimal level of performance.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur, the DoD, and more specifically JIATF-W, has already identified several areas in the counter transnational crime space, where they can establish specific targets that set a minimal level of performance to support DASD(CN>) priorities and DoD’s Performance Summary Report. Further, DoD will reinforce with all its drug control sub-components to adhere to the standards found in ONDCP Circular: Accounting of Drug Control Funding and Performance Summary, para 7, dated May 8, 2018.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

June 19, 2019

Nathan Anderson
Acting Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-19-441, "DRUG CONTROL:
Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance
Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities"

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of contributions made by Joint Task Forces (JTFs) – JTF-East, JTF-West, and JTF-Investigations – which DHS began as pilot programs to address the smuggling of illicit drugs over the southern border and approaches to the United States, and Congress subsequently codified in law through the "2017 National Defense Authorization Act." This Act also established several new requirements, such as outcome-based performance measures to evaluate JTF effectiveness. As the draft report highlighted, these measures changed from a solely quantitative measure of Border Enforcement Security Operations (seizures, apprehensions, interdictions, and counter network operations) to a qualitative measure of assessed effects on illicit systems and partnerships resulting from JTF activities. DHS believes this change will result in an enduring and consistent outcome-based measure of JTF effectiveness.

DHS remains committed to combating the effects and availability of illicit drugs in the United States, by countering the trafficking and flow of illicit drugs, in accordance with its responsibility for securing the U.S. air, land, and sea borders to prevent illegal activity. The draft report also recognized the unique focus of DHS JTF's coordinating activities

with DHS Components and provided examples of their broader missions other than countering flow of illicit drugs. In addition to migrant interdiction and counter terrorism cited in the report, additional missions contained in the campaign plan of the DHS JTF's includes counter human smuggling, Department contingency response and recovery, international partnerships, and safeguarding trade and travel.

The DHS JTFs will continue to improve measuring performance using a qualitative approach. DHS recognizes that quantitative measures alone will not sufficiently capture the performance of the JTFs, and as a result, intends for the JTFs to also provide qualitative assessments against the previously identified mission areas. These assessments will provide a means for JTF Directors to consider their professional judgment and experience when determining the true effectiveness of the JTFs to meet the intent of the Secretary of Homeland Security. Performance measures in this area already include assessing:

- Effects (e.g., organizational/structural, resource, operational) on illicit systems as a result of JTF Operations against prioritized transnational criminal organizations/illicit organizations dismantled, and
- Relationships with interagency/international partners within joint operating areas/functional areas, to including the reciprocity of partnerships, degree of impact of partnerships on JTF Operations, and more.

The draft report contained three recommendations, including one for DHS with which the Department concurs. Attached, find our detailed response to that recommendation. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: Management Response to Recommendation
Contained in GAO-19-441**

GAO recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security:

Recommendation 3: Develop outcome-based performance measures that are consistent.

Response: Concur. The DHS Deputy Secretary issued performance measures on March 9, 2018, that contain outcome based direction for assessing counter operations effects. The DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans is overseeing the implementation of these measures, which requires a phased approach that will result in the DHS JTFs finalizing the capacity to link their activities with DHS Component outcomes by early next year. Estimated Completion Date: March 31, 2020.

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact:

Nathan Anderson, (202) 512-3841 or AndersonN@gao.gov

Acknowledgements:

In addition to the contact named above, Christopher Conrad (Assistant Director), Kelsey Hawley (Analyst-in-Charge), and Julia Vieweg made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to the report were Billy Commons, Pamela Davidson, David Dornisch, Eric Hauswirth, and Susan Hsu.

Appendix V: Accessible Data

Agency Comment Letter

Accessible Text for Appendix II Comments from the
Department of Defense

Page 1

JUN 18 2019

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Director, Homeland Security and Justice

U.S. Government Accountability Office

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Page 2

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Related GAO Products

Drug Control: DOD Should Improve Its Oversight of the National Guard Counterdrug Program. [GAO-19-27](#). Washington, D.C.: January 17, 2019.

Colombia: U.S. Counternarcotics Assistance Achieved Some Positive Results, but State Needs to Review the Overall U.S. Approach. [GAO-19-106](#). Washington, D.C.: December 12, 2018.

Illicit Opioids: Office of National Drug Control Policy and Other Agencies Need to Better Assess Strategic Efforts. [GAO-18-569T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2018.

Illicit Opioids: While Greater Attention Given to Combating Synthetic Opioids, Agencies Need to Better Assess their Efforts. [GAO-18-205](#). Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2018.

Counternarcotics: Overview of U.S. Efforts in the Western Hemisphere. [GAO-18-10](#). Washington, D.C.: October 13, 2017.

Border Security: Additional Actions Could Strengthen DHS Efforts to Address Subterranean, Aerial, and Maritime Smuggling. [GAO-17-474](#). Washington, D.C.: May 1, 2017.

Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. [GAO-14-527](#). Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2014.

Combating Illicit Drugs: DEA and ICE Interagency Agreement Has Helped to Ensure Better Coordination of Drug Investigations. [GAO-11-763](#). Washington, D.C.: July 28, 2011.

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