



September 2020

FEDERAL TACTICAL TEAMS

Characteristics, Training, Deployments, and Inventory

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-710](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Many federal agencies employ law enforcement officers to carry out the agency's law enforcement mission and maintain the security of federal property, employees, and the public. Some of these agencies have specialized law enforcement teams—referred to as federal tactical teams in this report—whose members are selected, trained, equipped, and assigned to prevent and resolve critical incidents involving a public safety threat that their agency's traditional law enforcement may not otherwise have the capability to resolve.

This report provides information on the (1) federal tactical teams and their characteristics; (2) training team members receive; (3) deployments of such teams from fiscal years 2015 through 2019; and (4) firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in team inventories, as of January 2020.

To identify federal tactical teams, GAO contacted executive branch agencies with at least 50 federal law enforcement officers. GAO administered a standardized questionnaire and data collection instrument to the identified teams to gather information on team missions, staffing, training, deployments, and inventories. GAO reviewed team documents, such as standard operating procedures, and interviewed agency officials. GAO collected descriptive information on reported deployments as of June 2020 in response to COVID-19 and nationwide civil unrest, which were ongoing during the review. GAO incorporated agency technical comments as appropriate.

View [GAO-20-710](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwin@gao.gov.

September 2020

FEDERAL TACTICAL TEAMS

Characteristics, Training, Deployments, and Inventory

What GAO Found

Within the executive branch, GAO identified 25 federal tactical teams, and the characteristics of these teams varied. The 25 tactical teams were across 18 agencies, such as agencies within the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, Energy, and the Interior. The number of reported team members per team ranged from two to 1,099. More than half (16 of 25) of the teams reported that they are composed of team members working for the team on a collateral basis. Most teams (17 of 25) had multiple units across various locations.

Photos of Federal Tactical Teams in Action



Source: Federal tactical teams identified by GAO. | GAO-20-710

Tactical teams generally followed a similar training process, with initial training, specialty training, and ongoing training requirements. Nearly all teams (24 of 25) reported that new team members complete an initial tactical training course, which ranged from 1 week to 10 months. For example, potential new team members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hostage Rescue Team complete a 10-month initial training that includes courses on firearms; helicopter operations; and surveillance, among others. Nearly all teams (24 of 25) reported offering specialized training to some team members, such as in sniper operations and breaching. Nearly all teams (24 of 25) also reported having ongoing training requirements, ranging from 40 hours per year to over 400 hours per year.

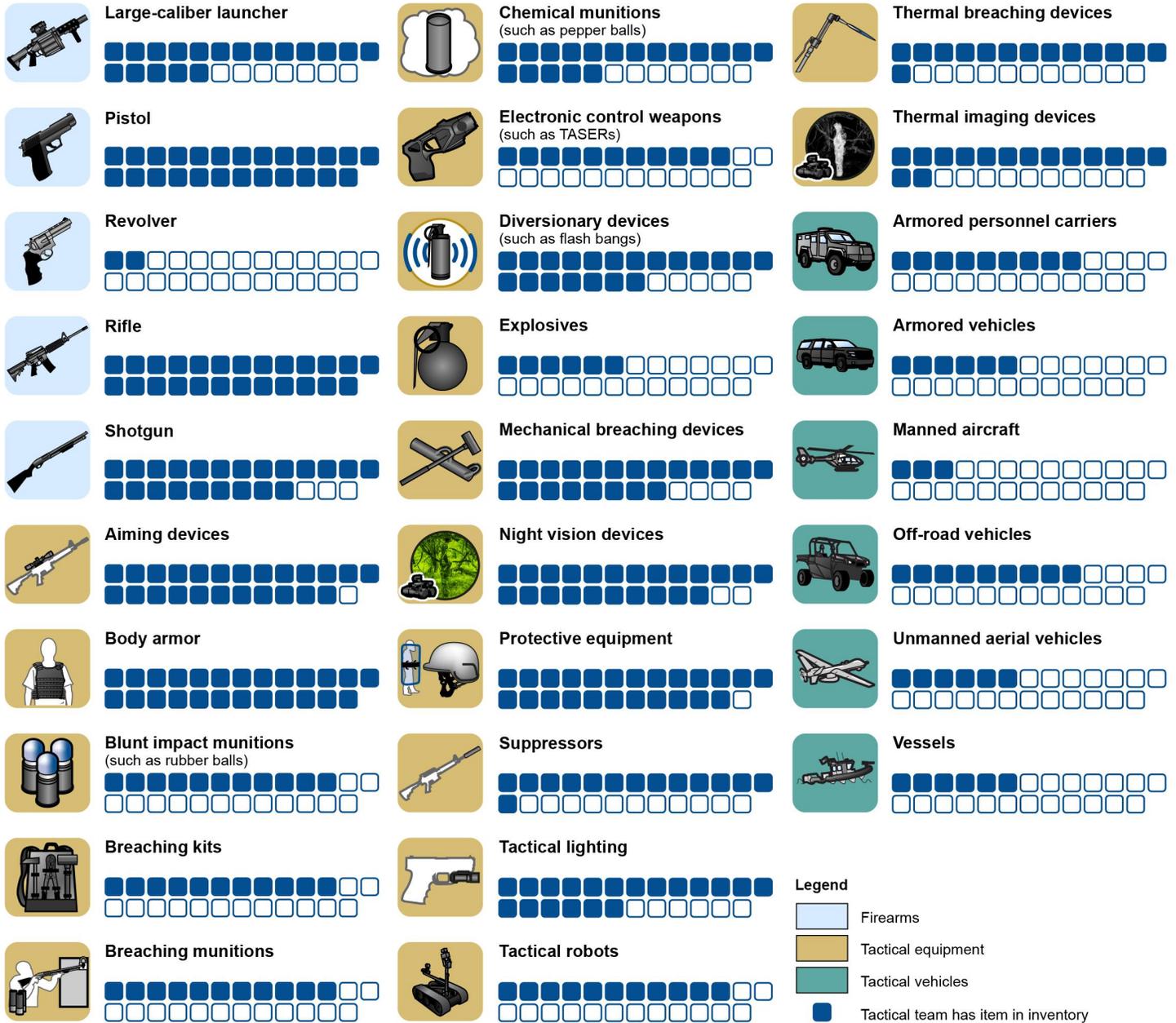
The number and types of deployments varied across the 25 tactical teams for fiscal years 2015 through 2019. The number of reported deployments per tactical team during this time period ranged from 0 to over 5,000. Teams conducted different types of deployments, but some types were common among teams, such as:

- supporting operations of other law enforcement entities, such as other federal, state, and local law enforcement (16 of 25);
- providing protection details for high-profile individuals (15 of 25);
- responding to or providing security at civil disturbances, such as protests (13 of 25); and
- serving high-risk search and arrest warrants (11 of 25).

Four teams reported that they had deployed in response to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and 16 teams reported deployments related to nationwide civil unrest and protests in May and June 2020.

Tactical teams reported having various types of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in their inventories. Team members generally have a standard set of firearms (e.g., a pistol, a backup pistol, and a rifle), but some may also have specialized firearms (e.g., a shotgun designed to breach doors). Tactical teams also have a variety of tactical equipment, such as night vision devices to maintain surveillance of suspects or tactical robots that can go into locations to obtain audio and video information when team members cannot safely enter those locations. Tactical teams may also have tactical vehicles, such as manned aircraft (e.g., helicopters) and armored vehicles to patrol locations. The figure below identifies the number of tactical teams that reported having such items in their inventories.

Number of Federal Tactical Teams That Reported Having Firearms, Tactical Equipment, and Tactical Vehicles in Their Inventories, as of January 2020



Source: GAO analysis of federal tactical team inventories, National Tactical Officers Association standards, and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials; U.S. Customs and Border Protection (adapted photo). | GAO-20-710

Appendix I of the report provides details on each of the 25 tactical teams, such as each team’s mission; staffing; types and frequency of training; and number and types of deployments from fiscal years 2015 through 2019. This is a public version of a sensitive report issued in August 2020. Information deemed to be sensitive by the agencies in this review, such as the quantities of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in team inventories, has been omitted from this report.

Contents

Letter		1
	Number and Characteristics of Federal Tactical Teams	7
	Training Types and Frequency	10
	Number and Types of Reported Deployments	12
	Inventory of Firearms, Tactical Equipment, and Tactical Vehicles	16
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	22
<hr/>		
Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical Teams		24
Appendix II: Reported Tactical Team Deployments for the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) Pandemic		50
Appendix III: Reported Tactical Team Deployments for Civil Unrest and Protests in May and June 2020		52
Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments		56
Appendix V: Accessible Data		57
	Data Tables	57
<hr/>		
Tables		
	Table 1: Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review and Reported Number of Team Members, as of January 2020	7
	Table 2: Number of Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review That Reported Having Tactical Equipment in Their Inventories, as of January 2020	19
	Table 3: Number of Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review that Reported Having Tactical Vehicles in Their Inventories, as of January 2020	20
	Table 4: Examples of Items Transferred from the Department of Defense's Law Enforcement Support Office to Federal Tactical Teams That Were Reported to Be in Team Inventories, as of January 2020	21

Figures

Figure 1: Number of Reported Federal Tactical Team Deployments, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2019	15
Figure 2: Types of Firearms Included in Our Review	17
Figure 3: Types of Tactical Equipment Included in Our Review	18
Figure 4: Types of Tactical Vehicles Included in Our Review	20
Accessible Data for Number of Federal Tactical Teams That Reported Having Firearms, Tactical Equipment, and Tactical Vehicles in Their Inventories, as of January 2020	57
Accessible Data for Figure 1: Number of Reported Federal Tactical Team Deployments, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2019	59

Abbreviations

ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
BORTAC	Border Patrol Tactical Unit
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOJ	Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
SORT	Special Operations Response Team
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. The published product may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.



September 10, 2020

Congressional Requesters

Many federal agencies employ law enforcement officers to carry out the agency's law enforcement mission and maintain the security of federal property, employees, and the public. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that 82 federal agencies employed law enforcement officers with authority to make arrests and carry firearms as of the end of fiscal year 2016.¹ Some of these agencies have specialized law enforcement teams—referred to as federal tactical teams in this report—whose members are selected, trained, equipped, and assigned to prevent and resolve critical incidents involving a public safety threat that the agency's traditional law enforcement may not otherwise have the capability to resolve.²

According to the National Tactical Officers Association standards, tactical teams are generally trained and equipped for one or more of the following mission capabilities: hostage rescue operations, barricaded subject operations, sniper operations, high-risk warrant service, high-risk apprehensions, high-risk security operations, or terrorism response. Federal tactical teams can include either federal law enforcement officers or contract personnel working for federal agencies in a law enforcement capacity, both of whom are authorized to carry firearms and make

¹See Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 2016 – Statistical Tables* (Washington, D.C.: October 2019). This number does not include military agencies, but does include quasi-governmental entities, such as the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (commonly known as Amtrak), as well as offices of inspectors general. The Amtrak Police Department employs rail police to provide security for rail passengers and Amtrak property. The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the primary statistical agency of the Department of Justice that collects, analyzes, publishes, and disseminates information on crime, criminal offenders, crime victims, and criminal justice operations.

²We developed this definition based on the National Tactical Officers Association standards and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials. See National Tactical Officers Association, *Tactical Response and Operations Standard for Law Enforcement Agencies* (April 2018). The National Tactical Officers Association is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to enhance the performance and professional status of law enforcement personnel by providing credible and proven training resources as well as a forum for the development of tactics and information exchange.

arrests.³ Federal tactical teams are staffed by members serving on the team full-time or as a collateral duty or a mixture of both. Teams may be based out of a single location or composed of multiple units across various locations.

Tactical teams use firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles to support their law enforcement missions, such as counterdrug, counterterrorism, and border security activities. The types of items used for these activities can include specialized rifles and aiming devices for counter-sniper operations; night vision and thermal imaging devices to surveil suspects; and manned aircraft and armored vehicles to patrol the border for illegal activities. Federal tactical teams may obtain some of these items from the Department of Defense's Defense Logistics Agency, which can transfer certain items to federal law enforcement agencies that are determined to be in excess of the department's needs.⁴

Federal agencies deploy their tactical teams for a variety of reasons corresponding with their mission, including deployments that are reactive in nature—such as responding to an active shooter situation—as well as those that are proactive—such as providing security for high-profile events.⁵ For example, members of a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) tactical team responded to an active shooter situation at a high school in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018 and assisted in searching for the suspect, clearing buildings, and rescuing teachers and children. In April 2020, U.S. Coast Guard tactical teams were reportedly deployed to proactively provide security for two U.S. Navy hospital ships that were sent to New York City and Los Angeles to assist with response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

³Tactical team members may be known by various titles in their agencies, such as operators, agents, and officers.

⁴The Defense Logistics Agency's Law Enforcement Support Office program, also known as the 1033 program in reference to the section of the law authorizing it, allows for the transfer of personal property to federal and state agencies determined to be in excess of the needs of the Department of Defense and suitable for use by the agencies in law enforcement activities. See National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Pub. L. No. 104-201, div. A, title X, § 1033(a)(1), 110 Stat. 2422, 2639 (1996) (codified, as amended, at 10 U.S.C. 2576a).

⁵For purposes of this review, we define a deployment as an activation of some or all members of a tactical team for an operation. Deployments do not include routine patrols, drills, responding to false alarms, or training activities but do include missions in which the tactical unit provides training to other entities. We developed this definition based on the National Tactical Officers Association standards and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials.

pandemic. Further, in response to nationwide civil unrest and protests in late May and June 2020, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Bureau of Prisons reportedly deployed tactical teams to Washington, D.C., and various locations across the country.

You asked us to review federal law enforcement agencies with specialized tactical teams that respond to high-risk situations. This report provides information on the:

1. number of federal tactical teams and their characteristics, such as their missions and staffing;
2. types and frequency of training team members receive;
3. number and types of deployments of such teams from fiscal years 2015 through 2019; and
4. types of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in team inventories as of January 2020.

This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued in August 2020.⁶ The Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Justice, and State as well as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration deemed some of the information in our August report to be sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure. Therefore, this report omits sensitive information related to the quantities of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in team inventories, as well as other details about some of the tactical teams. Although this report omits this information, it addresses the same overall objectives as the sensitive report and uses the same methodology.

To identify federal tactical teams in our scope, in August 2019 we contacted executive branch agencies with at least 50 federal law enforcement officers per the 2016 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey and requested that these agencies identify whether they had specialized law

⁶GAO, *Federal Tactical Teams: Characteristics, Training, Deployments, and Inventory*, GAO-20-585SU (Washington, D.C: Aug. 11, 2020).

enforcement teams.⁷ For agencies that reported to us that they had such a team, we then interviewed agency officials and obtained information and documentation to determine if the specialized law enforcement team met our definition of a federal tactical team.⁸ Based on information provided by agencies and our analysis, we identified 24 tactical teams that were in place as of August 2019. We identified a 25th team in July 2020, when Department of Justice (DOJ) officials informed us that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)—a DOJ component—created a new tactical team in October 2019.

For all of our objectives, we administered a standardized questionnaire and data collection instrument to tactical team officials to gather information on team missions; staffing; training; deployments; and inventories of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles.⁹ We also contacted agency officials for all 25 teams to discuss the scope and nature of our information requests prior to the completion of the questionnaire and data collection instrument.¹⁰

⁷We did not contact agencies with less than 50 federal law enforcement officers because we determined through interviews with law enforcement officer associations that they were not likely to have a tactical team. We contacted 53 agencies, including offices of inspectors general. We excluded legislative, judicial, intelligence, and military agencies. We included the U.S. Coast Guard in our review, which was not included in the Bureau of Justice Statistics survey, because it is within the Department of Homeland Security and performs law enforcement functions.

⁸We excluded teams that primarily provide operational support, such as medical providers and hazardous material technicians. For example, we excluded U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue team and the U.S. Secret Service's Hazardous Agent Mitigation Medical Emergency Response team. Although members of these teams may receive some tactical training, such teams are generally used to support other teams or to provide a specific function in a crisis response situation, such as emergency medical treatment.

⁹We conducted pretests with four agencies prior to administering the questionnaire and data collection instrument to check that (1) the questions were clear and unambiguous, (2) terminology was used correctly, (3) the questionnaire and data request did not place an undue burden on agency officials, (4) the information could feasibly be obtained, and (5) the questionnaire was comprehensive and unbiased.

¹⁰Because DOJ did not inform us of the existence of DEA's tactical team until July 2020—after we administered the questionnaire and data collection instrument—we obtained comparable information on DEA's team by administering a modified questionnaire and conducting an interview with DEA tactical team officials in August 2020. Because we issued the sensitive version of this report in August 2020, it did not include detailed information on the DEA tactical team's mission, staffing, training, deployments, and inventory, which we gathered for purposes of including in this public version of the report.

To describe team characteristics and training, we used the standardized questionnaire and data collection instrument to obtain information on each team's mission, the year the team was established, the locations of teams and their units, and the number of full-time and collateral duty team members as of January 2020. Through this method, we also obtained information on the types of initial, specialized, and ongoing training in which team members participate, including annual training requirements. Further, we reviewed team standard operating procedures and other team documents, such as team policy guides and handbooks, when available.

To describe tactical team deployments, we requested that each tactical team provide data on team deployments for fiscal years 2015 through 2019 and descriptions of such deployments, using our data collection instrument. Depending on how teams track deployments, teams provided us with descriptive data on each deployment, such as date and purpose of deployment, or summary data broken out by fiscal year and category of deployment. To assess the reliability of these data, we conducted tests for missing data and obvious errors, reviewed relevant documentation, followed up with agency officials as needed, and interviewed agency officials about how the data are maintained to identify any relevant limitations to its use. For 22 of the 25 teams, we found the data to be reliable for the purpose of summarizing team deployments for fiscal years 2015 through 2019. However, for two of the tactical teams, we found that the data were not sufficiently reliable for reporting purposes because deployments are tracked differently within the team. We explain these issues in more detail later in this report. The remaining team—DEA's tactical team—did not have any deployments during this period because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020. When available, we also reviewed information on criteria the teams used to determine when to deploy, after action reports, and operation orders created to plan an upcoming deployment from each team, to better understand the nature of teams' deployments. Further, we also gathered information from tactical teams on any deployments made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide civil unrest and protests in late May and June 2020, both of which were ongoing during the time of our review.

To describe the types of items in each team's inventory as of January 2020, we requested inventory data on firearms, tactical equipment, and

tactical vehicles from each team through our data collection instrument.¹¹ We categorized items as one of five types of firearms, such as pistols and rifles; 17 types of tactical equipment, such as body armor, breaching equipment, and diversionary devices; and six types of tactical vehicles, such as armored personnel carriers, manned aircraft, and vessels.¹² To assess the reliability of these data, we conducted tests for missing data and obvious errors, reviewed relevant documentation, followed up with agency officials as needed, and interviewed agency officials about how the data are maintained to identify any relevant limitations to the data's use. We determined that the data were reliable for the purpose of identifying whether the teams had certain kinds of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in their inventories.

Additionally, we analyzed data from the Defense Logistics Agency's Law Enforcement Support Office on firearms, tactical equipment, and vehicles transferred to the agencies in our review from 2013 through the end of 2019 to determine whether tactical teams had such items in their inventories.¹³ Because the data we obtained from the Defense Logistics Agency did not indicate whether the tactical team or another entity within the agency received the items, we asked each tactical team to confirm whether they had been the recipient of the transfer and if they still had the items in their inventories by searching their inventory records. To assess the reliability of these data, we reviewed written responses from Defense Logistics Agency officials on the reliability of the data; reviewed related documentation; and analyzed the data for missing information, outliers, and obvious errors. We found the data reliable for the purpose of

¹¹Although most teams provided their inventory data as of January 2020, the dates of inventory ranged from August 2019 through May 2020, depending on how often agencies updated their inventory systems and when agency officials exported the data. Because DOJ did not inform us of the existence of DEA's tactical team until July 2020—after we administered the questionnaire and data collection instrument—we obtained comparable information on the types of items in DEA's tactical team inventory through a modified questionnaire and interview in August 2020.

¹²We developed these categories on the basis of the National Tactical Officers Association standards, interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials, and analysis of tactical team inventories. We excluded items that did not fit into our categories, such as medical and hazardous materials equipment, communications and surveillance devices, and items solely for training.

¹³The data system used by the Defense Logistics Agency at the time of our review began collecting data on such transfers in 2013. We requested data on such transfers through the end of fiscal year 2019 because that is when we began collecting inventory data from the tactical teams in our review. We did not obtain data on items transferred to DEA's tactical team because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020.

identifying transferred items that were still in team inventories at the time of our review.

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from August 2019 to August 2020 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. We subsequently worked with the relevant agencies from August 2020 to September 2020 to prepare this version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with these standards.

Number and Characteristics of Federal Tactical Teams

Within the executive branch, we identified 25 teams that met our definition of a federal tactical team, as shown in table 1. Teams varied in the reasons the teams were established, the number of team members, locations, and whether the team had full-time or collateral duty team members. For detailed information on the mission and staffing for each team, see the team summaries in appendix I.

Table 1: Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review and Reported Number of Team Members, as of January 2020

Department	Agency	Team name	Number of team members
Homeland Security	Federal Protective Service	Rapid Protection Force	36
Homeland Security	U.S. Coast Guard ^a	Maritime Security Response Team	307
Homeland Security	U.S. Coast Guard ^a	Maritime Safety and Security Team	341
Homeland Security	U.S. Coast Guard ^a	Tactical Law Enforcement Team	230
Homeland Security	U.S. Customs and Border Protection	Border Patrol Tactical Unit	259
Homeland Security	U.S. Customs and Border Protection	Office of Field Operations Special Response Team	143
Homeland Security	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Enforcement and Removal Operations Special Response Team	251
Homeland Security	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Homeland Security Investigations Special Response Team	303

Letter

Department	Agency	Team name	Number of team members
Homeland Security	U.S. Secret Service ^b	Counter Assault Team	105
Homeland Security	U.S. Secret Service ^b	Emergency Response Team	94
Homeland Security	U.S. Secret Service ^b	Counter Sniper Team	62
Justice	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives	Special Response Team	114
Justice	Bureau of Prisons	Special Operations Response Team	634
Justice	Drug Enforcement Administration ^c	Special Response Team	325
Justice	Federal Bureau of Investigation	Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team	1,099
Justice	Federal Bureau of Investigation	Hostage Rescue Team	146
Justice	U.S. Marshals Service	Special Operations Group	Sensitive ^d
Energy	National Nuclear Security Administration	Special Response Force	118
Energy	Multiple components ^e	Special Response Team	376
Amtrak	Police Department ^f	Special Operations Unit	25
Defense	Pentagon Force Protection Agency	Emergency Response Team	14
Health and Human Services	National Institutes of Health	Special Response Team	2
Interior	U.S. Park Police	SWAT team	18
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Office of Protective Services	Special Response Team	33
State	Bureau of Diplomatic Security	Mobile Security Deployments	69

Source: GAO analysis of agency information. | GAO-20-710

^aThe number of team members for the U.S. Coast Guard's tactical teams reflects the number of law enforcement personnel on the team and does not include other personnel on the team, such as those in a support role.

^bThe number of team members for U.S. Secret Service tactical teams reflects the maximum number of team members allocated per team.

^cThe number of team members for the Drug Enforcement Administration's Special Response Team is as of August 2020, and represents the number of personnel that are certified for the team, some of whom may have retired or left the program since they were certified.

^dThe number of team members for the U.S. Marshals Service Special Operations Group has been omitted because the U.S. Marshals Service deemed this information sensitive.

^eDepartment of Energy Special Response Team units are composed of contractor personnel managed by three components: National Nuclear Security Administration, Office of Environmental Management, and Office of Nuclear Energy. Special Response Team units are located at sites with special nuclear material, such as certain kinds of nuclear weapons or components, enriched uranium, or plutonium. According to Department of Energy officials, Special Response Team members have limited arrest authority while on duty and on site, and have no arrest authority off site unless engaged in recovery operations.

^fAmtrak may directly employ or contract with rail police to provide security for rail passengers and property of Amtrak. 49 U.S.C. § 24305(e).

Establishment of teams. Federal tactical teams were established for a variety of reasons, according to agency officials, such as to meet mission needs or to address a vulnerability identified after a crisis. For example:

- The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations Special Response Team was established in fiscal year 2004 to address situations that require the use of resources beyond those of the typical enforcement officer to ensure a safe and successful resolution, such as executing high-risk warrants to suspects where the likelihood of armed resistance is high.
- The Bureau of Prisons established the Special Operations Response Team (SORT) following the prison riots in Atlanta, Georgia, and Oakdale, Louisiana, in November 1987, for which the bureau needed to use tactical teams from other law enforcement agencies.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) officials noted that Special Response Teams were established at two of its space centers—Kennedy Space Center in Merritt Island, Florida and Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas— in 1979 and 2001, respectively, in part because of the large number of visitors, geographic isolation, and size of the facilities, which would make it difficult to rely on local law enforcement in the event of an emergency.
- The U.S. Coast Guard developed two of its tactical teams—the Maritime Security Response Team and the Maritime Safety and Security Team—in response to a requirement in the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 to establish specialized forces with capabilities to deter, protect against, and respond to the threat of a terrorist attack in the maritime environment, among other things.¹⁴

Number of team members. The number of team members varies depending on the team’s mission, capabilities, and budget, among other factors. Six teams reported that they had less than 50 team members, eight teams had between 51 and 200 team members, eight teams had between 201 and 500 team members, and two teams had more than 500 team members. The total number of team members for the remaining team—the U.S. Marshals Service Special Operations Group—has been omitted because the U.S. Marshals Service deemed this information sensitive. The team with the lowest number of team members was the National Institutes of Health’s Special Response Team (two team

¹⁴See Pub. L. No. 107–295, title I, § 102(a), 116 Stat. 2064, 2068, 2074-2075 (2002) (codified, as amended, at 46 U.S.C. § 70106). For more information on these teams, see GAO, *Coast Guard: Assessing Deployable Specialized Forces’ Workforce Needs Could Improve Efficiency and Reduce Potential Overlap or Gaps in Capabilities*, [GAO-20-33](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 21, 2019).

members), while the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team was the largest (1,099 team members).¹⁵

Team locations. Depending on a team's mission and responsibilities, agencies may create multiple units of the team at various locations to expand its geographic coverage. Some teams (eight of 25) reported that they are composed of a single unit in one location, but most (17 of 25) are composed of multiple units across various locations. For example, the FBI SWAT team has units in each of its 56 field offices across the United States and Puerto Rico, and the Bureau of Prisons' SORT has units in 38 of its 122 institutions. In contrast, the Pentagon Force Protection Agency's Emergency Response Team is composed of a single unit based primarily at the Pentagon.

Full-time and collateral duty. More than half (16 of 25) of the federal tactical teams reported that they are composed of team members working for the team on a collateral basis. Collateral duty team members split their time between the tactical team to which they are assigned and their regular agency law enforcement duties, and the amount of time spent on tactical team duties can vary. Some collateral duty team members may only work for the tactical team for a few deployments per year, whereas team members for other teams may deploy more regularly. For example, FBI SWAT team members must dedicate at least 20 percent of their time to tactical team duties such as training and deployments, but FBI officials stated that the amount of time spent on tactical team duties can be significantly higher depending on mission needs. When not deployed, full-time duty team members engage in other activities, such as training and mission planning.

Training Types and Frequency

The 25 tactical teams in our review generally followed a similar training process of providing initial tactical training for new members, additional specialty training for some members, and ongoing training requirements. For detailed information on the training for each team, see the team summaries in appendix I.

Initial training. Nearly all teams (24 of 25) reported that they required new team members to complete an initial basic training course in

¹⁵The National Institutes of Health's Special Response Team had two team members as of January 2020, but officials stated that the team is authorized for up to 16 members.

specialized weapons and tactics. The length of such courses ranged widely among the teams, from 1 week to 10 months. For example, potential new team members of the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team complete a 10-month new operator training school, which includes courses on close-quarter battle, firearms, breaching, helicopter operations, and surveillance, among others. In contrast, the Bureau of Prisons' SORT does not require that new members take a course in special weapons and tactics prior to joining the team, but new team members must meet other requirements prior to joining the team, such as proficiency in firearms and physical fitness requirements.

In addition, some teams (10 of 25) also require prospective team members to complete a selection training course to qualify for the tactical team. For example, prospective members of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) first undergo a 3-week selection training to evaluate their skills, after which selected prospective members then attend a 6-week course of initial tactical training. CBP officials stated that, generally, less than half of the prospective members successfully complete both the selection and initial training needed to become a BORTAC team member each year.¹⁶

Specialty training. Nearly all teams (24 of 25) reported offering additional training to some team members to become specialists in certain skillsets, such as sniper operations, tactical medicine, canine handling, and breaching. The length of such training varied widely by team and specialty. For example, snipers and team members who will specialize in breaching techniques for ICE's Homeland Security Investigations' Special Response Team take 3-week courses focused on those topics. Further, canine handlers for the ATF Special Response Team attend approximately 13 weeks of training initially, and must complete 872 hours (approximately 22 weeks) of training per year. DEA officials stated that DEA's Special Response Team does not offer additional training for specialty skills because the team's primary mission—serving high-risk search and arrest warrants related to violations of the Federal Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. § 801 et. seq.—does not involve the kind of activities that require specialty training, such as sniper operations or explosive breaching.

¹⁶According to CBP officials, BORTAC offers the selection training once per year and invites up to 75 prospective team members.

Ongoing training. Nearly all (24 of 25) reported having ongoing training requirements for team members to maintain their tactical skills. Such training ranged from 40 hours per year to over 400 hours per year. For example, members of Amtrak's Special Operations Unit are required to complete 16 hours of training per month (or 192 hours per year) on topics such as train breaching and firearm skills. As another example, U.S. Park Police's SWAT units, located at the Statue of Liberty in New York City and the Washington, D.C. area, require team members to dedicate 8 hours per week (or 416 hours per year) to training and team readiness in accordance with standards recommended by the National Tactical Officers Association. FBI officials did not identify a specific ongoing training requirement for the Hostage Rescue Team but stated that its team members train continuously when not deployed or planning for an upcoming deployment.

Number and Types of Reported Deployments

The number and types of deployments varied across the tactical teams in our review for fiscal years 2015 through 2019. Teams varied in how they determined when to deploy their teams, as well as the duration of such deployments. Teams conducted many types of deployments, but some types were common among teams, such as providing protection details for high-profile individuals. The number of reported deployments per tactical team from fiscal years 2015 through 2019 ranged considerably, from 0 to over 5,000. For detailed information on deployments for each team, see the team summaries in appendix I.

Determination to deploy tactical team. Agencies generally have discretion on when to deploy their tactical teams, but agency officials identified additional processes in place when making such decisions, such as the use of set criteria or risk analysis. For example:

- Determinations to deploy CBP's Office of Field Operations Special Response Team are made at the discretion of team and agency management, who review operation orders to determine if the deployment can be conducted safely and is consistent with the team's policies and procedures.
- The FBI's SWAT team can be deployed at the discretion of FBI management, though FBI policy requires that units are deployed if the situation meets certain criteria, such as when automatic weapons or weapons of mass destruction are believed to be at the incident location.

- ICE officers requesting an activation of the Homeland Security Investigations Special Response Team must complete a risk analysis template at least 48 hours prior to an operation, except in exigent circumstances, to help management determine if the tactical team is needed.

Duration of deployments. The duration of tactical team deployments varies a great deal, ranging from a few hours to weeks or months. Agency officials told us that the duration of deployments is dictated by the type and circumstances of the deployment. A deployment to provide a protection detail for a high-profile visitor or to serve a high-risk warrant may only be for a few hours, while an overseas deployment can last for weeks. For example, Department of State officials noted that Mobile Security Deployment units may deploy abroad for several weeks to enhance security at U.S. consulates and embassies experiencing heightened threats. As another example, the Federal Protective Service's Rapid Protection Force was deployed to San Diego County, California for 48 days to provide security during the border wall prototype construction project.

Types of reported deployments. During this time period, the types of reported deployments varied across the teams on the basis of each team's mission; however, some kinds of deployments were common across several of the teams. For example, agencies reported that the team had been deployed at least once during fiscal years 2015 through 2019 to:¹⁷

- provide security at National Special Security Events, such as presidential inaugurations and national political conventions (16 of 25 teams);¹⁸
- support operations of other law enforcement entities, such as other federal, state, and local law enforcement (16 of 25 teams);
- provide protection details for high-profile individuals (15 of 25 teams);
- support natural disaster response, such as to the 2017 hurricanes (14 of 25 teams);

¹⁷DEA's Special Response Team did not have any deployments during this period because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020.

¹⁸National Special Security Events are major federal government or public events that are considered to be nationally significant.

- respond to or provide security at civil disturbances, such as protests (13 of 25 teams);
- conduct a deployment abroad (12 of 25 teams);
- serve high-risk search and arrest warrants (11 of 25 teams); and
- respond to an active shooter situation (nine of 25 teams).

As of June 2020, several of the tactical teams in our review reported that they had deployed in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic or nationwide civil unrest and protests. See appendices II and III for more information on these reported deployments.

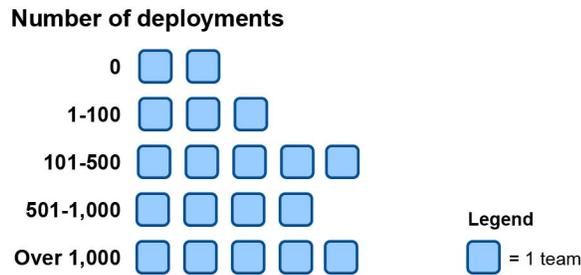
Number of reported deployments. Although all 25 teams reported that they tracked their team deployments, we are not able to report deployment data for two of the teams:

- Bureau of Prisons officials stated that although institutions track the deployment of their SORT units, the bureau could not provide data on deployments across all institutions because activation of the units varies across the 38 institutions. Use of SORT is at the warden's discretion at these institutions, and wardens may decide to use the tactical team for different tasks. For example, one institution may use SORT for high-risk escorts for sick prisoners, whereas another institution may use other institution assets for this purpose. As such, we do not provide deployment data in our team summary for SORT in appendix I but instead provide descriptive information on the kinds of deployments the team conducts.
- The two units of NASA's Special Response Teams at the Johnson and Kennedy Space Centers each track deployment information in different ways that could not be aggregated for our purposes. As such, we do not provide deployment data in our team summary for NASA's Special Response Teams in appendix I, but instead provide descriptive information on the kinds of deployments the team conducts.

The number of reported deployments per tactical team from fiscal years 2015 through 2019 ranged from 0 to over 5,000. FBI SWAT, which has the largest number of team members (1,099) and units (56), also had the most deployments, with 5,175 deployments from fiscal years 2015 through 2019. Two teams—the Department of Energy's Special Response Team and the National Nuclear Security Administration's Special Response Force—did not have any tactical team deployments during this time period. Both teams specialize in the protection and

recovery of attempted stolen nuclear materials, either in transit or from one of the Department of Energy’s sites with category I special nuclear materials.¹⁹ According to officials for both teams, there have been no security incidents that required the deployment of either team.²⁰ Further, DEA’s tactical team did not have any deployments during this period because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020. Figure 1 does not include the U.S. Secret Service, which provided combined deployment data for each of its three tactical teams—Counter Assault Team, Counter Sniper Team, and Emergency Response Team—because officials stated that disaggregated data would reveal the means and methods of its protective methodologies. We present U.S. Secret Service data on the combined number of trips in which the three teams participated, such as foreign and domestic trips with the President, in the team summaries in appendix I.

Figure 1: Number of Reported Federal Tactical Team Deployments, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2019



Source: GAO analysis of agency deployment data and information. | GAO-20-710

Note: The Federal Protective Service’s Rapid Protection Force only reported data for fiscal years 2017 through 2019 because the team was established in fiscal year 2017. This figure does not include the U.S. Secret Service’s three tactical teams—Counter Assault Team, Counter Sniper Team, and Emergency Response Team—because deployment data for all three teams were combined. U.S. Secret Service data on the combined deployments for its three teams appears in the team summaries

¹⁹Category I special nuclear materials include certain kinds of nuclear weapons or components, enriched uranium, and plutonium.

²⁰According to Department of Energy officials, although tactical teams have not deployed in response to any incidents, team members participate in other activities when on duty. For example, Department of Energy Special Response Team members, who are contractor personnel on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at some sites may provide security for the movement of nuclear materials within a site. The National Nuclear Security Administration’s Special Response Force members, who are federal employees, assist with vehicle stops based on reasonable suspicion, interacting with the public and first responders, and backfilling security positions within the larger convoy transporting nuclear materials, when needed. For more information on the activities of these teams, see the team summaries in app. I.

in appendix I. This figure does not include the Drug Enforcement Administration's Special Response Team period because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020.

Inventory of Firearms, Tactical Equipment, and Tactical Vehicles

The 25 tactical teams in our review reported that they have various kinds of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in their inventories. Some of these tactical teams also reported that their inventories included items such as tactical equipment and vehicles that were obtained via transfers of excess defense articles from the Defense Logistics Agency's Law Enforcement Support Office.

Firearms. For the purposes of our review, a firearm is any weapon that is designed to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive or that may be readily converted to do so, as shown in figure 2.²¹ Some firearms are single-shot, while others may be semiautomatic (requires a separate pull of the trigger to fire each cartridge) or fully automatic (can shoot automatically more than one shot, without manual reloading, by a single function of the trigger).²² Tactical team members generally have a standard set of firearms (e.g., a pistol, a backup pistol, and a rifle), but inventories may include additional specialized firearms (e.g., a shotgun designed to breach doors).

²¹The Gun Control Act of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-618, 82 Stat. 1213, 1214 (codified as amended at 18 U.S.C. § 921(a)(3)) defines a "firearm" as: (A) any weapon (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive; (B) the frame or receiver of any such weapon; (C) any firearm muffler or firearm silencer; or (D) any destructive device. The term does not include antique firearms. We did not use the statutory definition of firearm for this review to allow for more detailed analysis of team inventories. We also categorized firearms of greater than .50 caliber (meaning the inside diameter of the barrel or exterior diameter of the round is 0.50 inches) as large-caliber launchers, excluding shotguns that shoot ammunition greater than 0.50 inches. We did not include devices that propel electronic control weapons, tranquilizer guns, or firearms that are solely used for training purposes, such as simulation firearms that cannot shoot live ammunition. However, agencies may also have firearms that can be used for training as well as for tactical team deployments.

²²The term "fully automatic" encompasses a range of firearms classified as machine guns, including submachine guns, three round burst guns, and guns with a selector switch that can enable continuous fire. Generally, the National Firearms Act, Pub. L. No. 73-474, 48 Stat. 1236, 1236 (codified as amended at 26 U.S.C. § 5845(b)), classifies any weapon as a "machine gun" which shoots, is designed to shoot, or can be readily restored to shoot, automatically more than one shot without manual reloading, by a single function of the trigger. For the purposes of this report, such firearms are considered rifles.

Figure 2: Types of Firearms Included in Our Review



Large-caliber launcher
Any weapon (excluding shotguns) larger than 0.50 caliber (12.7 mm) typically used to launch grenades and less-lethal munitions.



Pistol
A firearm that fires a bullet from one or more barrels with a short stock designed to be gripped in one hand.



Revolver
A pistol-type firearm with a breech loading chambered cylinder arranged so that the cocking of the hammer or movement of the trigger rotates it and brings the next cartridge in line with the barrel for firing.



Rifle
A firearm intended to be fired from the shoulder that uses the energy of an explosive to fire a single projectile through a rifled bore.



Shotgun
A firearm intended to be fired from the shoulder that uses the energy of an explosive to fire a number of ball shot or a single projectile through a smooth bore.

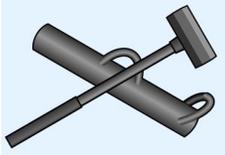
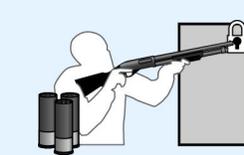
Source: GAO. | GAO-20-710

All 25 teams in our review reported that they had pistols and rifles in their inventories, and most also had shotguns (22 teams) and large-caliber launchers (18 teams). Two teams reported having revolvers.

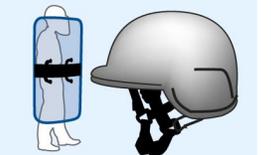
Tactical Equipment. In addition to firearms, federal tactical teams also have a variety of tactical equipment available to their team members to support their law enforcement roles, as shown in figure 3. For example, team members may use night vision devices to maintain surveillance of suspects or use tactical robots that can go into locations to obtain audio and video information when team members cannot safely enter those locations. Tactical teams may also use resources from other law enforcement. Nine of 25 teams indicated that they utilize equipment and vehicles from other entities, such as other entities within the same agency; other federal agencies; law enforcement at the state, local, or tribal level; and military allies (e.g., Canada). Team officials noted that shared resources typically are not tracked in a team's inventory systems unless that resource is owned by that particular team or agency.

Figure 3: Types of Tactical Equipment Included in Our Review

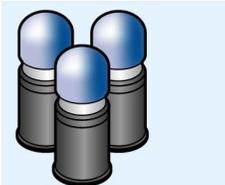
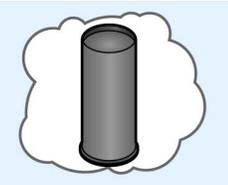
Breaching equipment

			
<p>Mechanical breaching devices Devices for breaching entrances using physical force, such as sledge hammers and rams.</p>	<p>Thermal breaching devices Devices that generate heat for use in breaching entrances, such as torches.</p>	<p>Breaching kits Kits containing multiple items used to breach entrances.</p>	<p>Breaching munitions Specialized shotgun munitions designed to breach entrances.</p>

Protective equipment

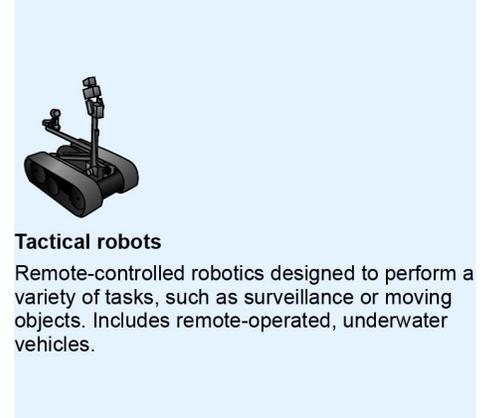
	
<p>Body armor Hard and soft armor plates and panels, armor vests, and plate carriers.</p>	<p>Protective equipment Equipment designed to protect against bullet penetrations and other impacts, such as helmets, shields, and eyewear.</p>

Specialized munitions and pyrotechnics

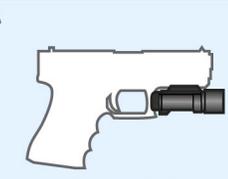
			
<p>Blunt impact munitions Less-lethal projectiles, such as rubber balls, that help subdue individuals or disperse unruly crowds.</p>	<p>Chemical munitions Less-lethal projectiles containing a compound that causes discomfort or incapacitation, such as pepper balls or tear gas.</p>	<p>Diversionsary devices Devices that create a bright flash and loud noise designed to temporarily divert the attention of persons in the vicinity, such as flash bangs.</p>	<p>Explosives Devices designed to create an explosion, such as grenades or blasting caps.</p>

Other equipment

	
<p>Electronic control weapons Less-lethal weapons that use an electrical charge to stun and immobilize subjects to make them easier to subdue, such as TASERS.</p>	<p>Suppressors Devices used for muffling or diminishing the sound of a portable firearm, commonly known as silencers.</p>


<p>Tactical robots Remote-controlled robotics designed to perform a variety of tasks, such as surveillance or moving objects. Includes remote-operated, underwater vehicles.</p>

Vision enhancement devices

			
<p>Aiming devices Electronic or optical weapon positioning or spotting systems, including laser trackers and weapon sights.</p>	<p>Tactical lighting Illumination systems to artificially light an area to search, locate, or track a target, such as weapon-mounted lights and strobe lighting.</p>	<p>Night vision devices Devices designed to produce an image in low-light situations, by amplifying available light.</p>	<p>Thermal imaging devices Devices designed to produce an image in low-light or low-visibility situations using infrared technology.</p>

Source: GAO analysis of federal tactical team inventories, National Tactical Officers Association standards, and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials; U.S. Customs and Border Protection (adapted photo). | GAO-20-710

Note: TASER is a trademark and an acronym for Thomas A. Swift's Electric Rifle, which is a product line of hand-held devices that deliver an electric shock designed to incapacitate an individual.

All 25 teams reported having body armor, as shown in table 2. Most teams also reported having aiming devices (24 teams), protective equipment (24 teams), night vision devices (23 teams), mechanical breaching devices (21 teams), and diversionary devices (20 teams). Some teams reported having electronic control weapons (11 teams), tactical robots (11 teams), and explosives (six teams).

Table 2: Number of Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review That Reported Having Tactical Equipment in Their Inventories, as of January 2020

Type of tactical equipment	Number of teams (out of 25)
Aiming devices	24
Body armor	25
Blunt impact munitions	11
Breaching kits	11
Breaching munitions	11
Chemical munitions	18
Diversionary devices	20
Electronic control weapons	11
Explosives	6
Mechanical breaching devices	21
Night vision devices	23
Protective equipment	24
Suppressors	14
Tactical lighting	19
Tactical robots	11
Thermal breaching devices	14
Thermal imaging devices	15

Source: GAO analysis of federal tactical team inventories and information. | GAO-20-710

Notes: These figures include teams that had inventory data identifying such equipment as well as teams that indicated that they had such equipment but were not required to track the items in their inventories per agency policy. Although most teams provided their inventory data as of January 2020, the dates of inventory ranged from August 2019 through May 2020, depending on how often agencies update their inventory systems and when agency officials exported the data. Because the Department of Justice did not inform us of the existence of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s tactical team until July 2020—after we administered our questionnaire and data collection instrument—we obtained comparable information on this tactical team’s inventory through a modified questionnaire and interview in August 2020.

Tactical vehicles. Tactical teams may also have and utilize tactical vehicles for their missions. Figure 4 shows the various tactical vehicles included in our review. For example, tactical team members that work in counterterrorism and border security may use manned aircraft (e.g., helicopters) and armored vehicles to patrol locations.

Figure 4: Types of Tactical Vehicles Included in Our Review



Armored personnel carriers

Armored vehicles that provide ballistic protection to occupants and equipment. Armor is integral to the structure of the vehicle.



Armored vehicles

Vehicles that provide ballistic protection, such as armored sport utility vehicles. Armor is added on to the vehicle.



Manned aircraft

Powered aircraft with a crew aboard, such as airplanes or helicopters.



Off-road vehicles

Vehicles designed to drive on unpaved surfaces (e.g., gravel), such as all-terrain vehicles and unarmored Humvees.



Unmanned aerial vehicles

Remotely piloted powered aircraft without a crew aboard.



Vessels

Vessels used for waterborne operations, such as personal watercraft (e.g., jet skis) and rescue boats.

Source: GAO analysis of federal tactical team inventories, National Tactical Officers Association standards, and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials. | GAO-20-710

Fourteen of the tactical teams reported that they had at least one of the kinds of tactical vehicles in our review. Of these teams, more than half reported that they had armored personnel carriers (nine teams) or off-road vehicles (nine teams), as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Number of Federal Tactical Teams in Our Review that Reported Having Tactical Vehicles in Their Inventories, as of January 2020

Type of vehicle	Number of teams (out of 25)
Armored personnel carriers	9
Armored vehicles	6
Manned aircraft	3
Off-road vehicles	9
Unmanned aerial vehicles	6
Vessels	6

Source: GAO analysis of federal tactical team inventories and information | GAO-20-710

Note: Although most teams provided their inventory data as of January 2020, the dates of inventory ranged from August 2019 through May 2020, depending on how often agencies update their inventory systems and when agency officials exported the data. Because the Department of Justice did not inform us of the existence of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s tactical team until July 2020—after we administered the questionnaire and data collection instrument—we obtained comparable information on this tactical team’s inventory through a modified questionnaire and interview in August 2020.

Transfers of tactical equipment and vehicles from the Department of Defense. Seven of the tactical teams in our review reported that some of the tactical equipment and vehicles in the team’s inventory were obtained via a transfer of excess defense articles from the Defense Logistics

Agency’s Law Enforcement Support Office.²³ These teams had relatively few items acquired through these transfers compared to the team’s full inventory, and agency officials stated that they can obtain these kinds of items using their own budgets. As shown in table 4, transferred items included aiming devices, mechanical breaching equipment, night vision devices, off-road vehicles, protective equipment, thermal imaging devices, and unmanned aerial vehicles. In some cases, agency officials stated that some of the items were either unusable or were in the process of being excessed (i.e., destroyed) or returned to the Department of Defense.

Table 4: Examples of Items Transferred from the Department of Defense’s Law Enforcement Support Office to Federal Tactical Teams That Were Reported to Be in Team Inventories, as of January 2020

Agency	Tactical team	Examples of transferred items
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives	Special Response Team	Night vision devices and protective equipment
Bureau of Prisons	Special Operations Response Team	Aiming devices, night vision devices, and thermal imaging devices
Federal Bureau of Investigation	Hostage Rescue Team	Aiming devices and off road vehicles,
Federal Bureau of Investigation	Special Weapons and Tactics Team	Aiming devices, night vision devices, mechanical breaching equipment, protective equipment, tactical robots, off-road vehicles, and thermal imaging devices
U.S. Customs and Border Protection	Office of Field Operations Special Response Team	Unmanned aerial vehicles ^a
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Enforcement and Removal Operations Special Response Team	Aiming devices, breaching kits, night vision devices, off-road vehicles, and thermal imaging devices ^b
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Homeland Security Investigations Special Response Team	Aiming devices, armored personnel carrier, breaching kits, night vision devices, protective equipment, tactical robots, and thermal imaging devices ^c

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data and agency information. | GAO-20-710

^aU.S. Customs and Border Protection officials stated that the unmanned aerial vehicles were never used because the technology was obsolete and not suitable for the team’s operations and that they were in the process of excessing the vehicles from their inventory as of March 2020.

^bU.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials stated that they are in the process of returning the off-road vehicles to the Department of Defense as of April 2020.

^cU.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials stated that some of the equipment was inoperable and being excessed from the team’s inventory or was in the process of being returned to the Department of Defense as of March 2020.

²³For more information on transfers of excess defense articles, see GAO, *DOD Excess Property: Enhanced Controls Needed for Access to Excess Controlled Property*, GAO-17-532 (Washington, D.C.: July 18, 2017). We did not obtain data on items transferred to the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Special Response Team because the team was not established until the beginning of fiscal year 2020.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of the sensitive version of this report to the Departments of Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Interior, Justice, and State, as well as Amtrak and NASA, for their review and comment. The Departments of Defense, Energy, Homeland Security, and Justice provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Departments of Health and Human Services, the Interior, and State; Amtrak; and NASA did not provide any technical comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretaries of Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, the Interior, and State; the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security; the Attorney General; the Administrator of NASA; and the Chief Executive Officer of Amtrak. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in Appendix IV.



Gretta L. Goodwin
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

List of Requesters

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

The Honorable Steve Cohen
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate
The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate

Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical Teams

This appendix summarizes agency-provided information on the 25 federal tactical teams in our review.¹ Each summary contains the following information:

- **Team members.** This section identifies the reported number of team members as of January 2020. Federal tactical teams are staffed by members serving on the team as a full-time or collateral duty, or a mixture of both. Collateral duty team members split their time between the tactical team to which they are assigned and their regular agency law enforcement duties, and the amount of time spent on tactical team duties can vary. In some cases, teams may be authorized for more team members than were on the team as of January 2020. The total number of team members for one team—the U.S. Marshals Service Special Operations Group—has been omitted because the U.S. Marshals Service deemed this information sensitive.
- **Team description.** This section describes the team’s mission and responsibilities and the fiscal year the team was established. Further, this section identifies whether the team is based out of a single location or composed of multiple units across various locations.
- **Training.** This section describes tactical training provided to team members, including the initial tactical training given to new members, additional training given to some members to become specialists in certain skillsets, and ongoing training requirements for members to maintain their tactical skills.
- **Deployments.** This section describes the reported number of tactical team deployments from fiscal years 2015 through 2019, as available,

¹For the purposes of this report, federal tactical teams are specialized law enforcement teams in the executive branch whose members are selected, trained, equipped, and assigned to prevent and resolve critical incidents involving a public safety threat that the agency’s traditional law enforcement would not otherwise have the capability to resolve. We developed this definition based on the National Tactical Officers Association standards and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials. See National Tactical Officers Association, *Tactical Response and Operations Standard for Law Enforcement Agencies* (April 2018).

as well as the types of deployments.² This section also includes a figure describing the types of deployments by fiscal year. For teams that did not have any deployments, we provide a narrative description of the team's activities during this time period. For teams for which we are not able to report deployment data because the data were tracked differently within the team, we provide a narrative description of the types of deployments the team conducted during this time period.

To compile this information, we administered a standardized questionnaire and data collection instrument to tactical team officials to gather information on team missions, staffing, training, and deployments.³ To assess the reliability of these data and information, we conducted tests for missing data and obvious errors, reviewed relevant documentation, followed up with agency officials as needed, and interviewed agency officials on how the data are maintained to identify any relevant limitations to its use. We found the data and information reliable for the purposes of presenting summary information provided by the tactical teams, and we describe any relevant limitations to the data and information in the team summaries, as appropriate. This appendix omits information on the types and quantities of firearms, tactical equipment, and tactical vehicles in team inventories, as well as other details about some of the tactical teams, because the agencies in our review deemed this information to be sensitive.

²For purposes of this review, we define a deployment as an activation of some or all members of a tactical team for an operation. Deployments can be reactive—such as responding to an active shooter situation— or proactive—such as providing security for high-profile events. Deployments do not include routine patrols, drills, responding to false alarms, or training activities but do include missions in which the tactical unit provides training to other entities. We developed this definition based on the National Tactical Officers Association standards and interviews with subject matter experts and agency officials.

³Because the Department of Justice did not inform us of the existence of the Drug Enforcement Administration's tactical team until July 2020—after we administered the questionnaire and data collection instrument—we obtained comparable information on this team through a modified questionnaire and interview.

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical Teams

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

**Appendix I: Summaries of Federal Tactical
Teams**

Appendix II: Reported Tactical Team Deployments for the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) Pandemic

Four tactical teams in our review reported that their team had been deployed to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic as of May 2020:

- **U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Team.** U.S. Coast Guard officials reported that two units were deployed in April and May 2020 to assist with the pandemic. One unit was deployed in April 2020 to provide security zone enforcement around the USNS Comfort—a hospital ship maintained by the U.S. Navy that served as a mobile, floating hospital—prior to the ship’s departure from Norfolk, Virginia, to New York City, New York. The unit also provided additional security for the ship during a visit from the President of the United States. Further, another unit conducted security operations in San Diego, California, in April and May 2020 to allow other U.S. Coast Guard entities ability to screen vessels coming into San Diego from Mexico and other nations.
- **U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team.** U.S. Coast Guard officials reported that units were deployed during March through May 2020 to provide security zone enforcement around the USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy while moored in New York City, New York, and Los Angeles, California, respectively. Officials also reported that units had deployed to San Francisco, California to provide security zone enforcement for a cruise ship that had an outbreak of passengers with COVID-19 in March 2020. Units were also deployed to provide a security presence on the northern U.S. border and to conduct sweeps of vessels, port facilities, and vehicles with canine explosive detection teams.
- **Bureau of Prisons Special Operations Response Team.** Bureau of Prisons officials reported that two units were deployed to Travis Air Force Base and the Miramar Naval Consolidated Brig (i.e., military prison), both in California, in March to help provide outer perimeter security. Bureau of Prisons officials stated that the deployment was in

**Appendix II: Reported Tactical Team
Deployments for the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-
19) Pandemic**

response to a request from the Department of Health and Human Services per an interagency agreement.

- **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Enforcement and Removal Operations Special Response Team.** U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials reported that two units were deployed for COVID-19-related reasons. The Buffalo, New York, field office unit was deployed in April 2020 to monitor detention of COVID-19 exposed detainees at the Buffalo Federal Detention facility. The Miami, Florida, field office unit was deployed to the Krome Detention Facility in April 2020 for a disturbance and riot due to COVID-19 concerns, and again in May 2020 to the Broward Transitional Center to provide additional security for a protest about releasing detainees who had COVID-19.

Appendix III: Reported Tactical Team Deployments for Civil Unrest and Protests in May and June 2020

Toward the end of our review, nationwide civil unrest and protests occurred following the death of George Floyd by a Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer on May 25, 2020. News reports indicated that several federal agencies deployed law enforcement officers related to the civil unrest and protests. In June 2020, we requested that each of the 25 federal tactical teams in our review provide information regarding whether they had been deployed related to the civil unrest and protests and if so, to provide information about the purpose and locations of deployments.¹ The information below lists the 16 teams within our review that reported such deployments and summarizes their responses. This summary only includes information reported to us by the federal tactical teams in our review and does not encompass activities by other law enforcement within these federal agencies or at the state and local level. In the future, GAO plans to conduct additional audit work related to these issues.

- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) Special Response Team.** ATF officials stated that Special Response Team units deployed to locations including Washington, D.C.; St. Louis, Missouri; and Los Angeles, California, in response to civil unrest and protests. The reported primary purpose of team members in Washington, D.C., was to support the U.S. Park Police and the U.S. Secret Service at the White House, and to act as a quick reaction force to assist other law enforcement officers if needed in St. Louis and Los Angeles.
- **Bureau of Prisons Special Operations Response Team (SORT).** Bureau of Prisons officials stated that SORT units deployed to Washington, D.C., and Miami, Florida, in response to civil unrest and

¹The Department of Justice did not inform us of the existence of the Drug Enforcement Administration's tactical team until July 2020. Drug Enforcement Administration officials reported that its tactical team did not conduct any deployments related to the civil unrest and protests as of early August 2020.

protests. The reported primary purpose of team members was to provide security and crowd control at these locations.

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Hostage Rescue Team.** FBI officials stated that the Hostage Rescue Team was deployed to Washington, D.C., in response to the civil unrest and protests. The reported primary responsibility of team members was to protect federal facilities and potentially respond as a quick reaction force in the event of injured officers.
- **FBI Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team.** FBI officials stated that SWAT team units from all 56 FBI field offices were deployed in response to the civil unrest and protests. SWAT units were deployed within their own areas of responsibility, and units from Connecticut and Virginia were deployed to Washington, D.C., to supplement the Washington field office's SWAT unit. The reported primary responsibility of team members was to protect federal facilities and potentially respond as a quick reaction force in the event of injured officers.
- **U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Team.** U.S. Coast Guard officials stated that one unit deployed to San Diego, California, to bolster internal force protection capabilities in response to concerns of protests near U.S. Coast Guard facilities. Officials reported that the unit also provided additional tactical delivery team crews and boats to execute waterside patrols near San Diego to monitor maritime critical infrastructure during protest periods.
- **U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team.** U.S. Coast Guard officials stated that three units were deployed in response to civil unrest and protests. Officials reported that units from New York City, New York, and San Francisco, California, increased their waterside patrols within their local areas of responsibility to maintain a waterside law enforcement presence. Further, officials said that team members from the Seattle, Washington unit were used to augment internal security patrols at Coast Guard Base Seattle.
- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC).** CBP officials stated that both the National BORTAC team and sector-level teams deployed in response to civil unrest and protests. According to officials, the National team deployed to Washington, D.C. and Pearland, Texas, for the reported primary purposes of supporting U.S. Border Patrol headquarters and other security efforts, and serving as a quick reaction force to support U.S. Border Patrol sector personnel and local law enforcement, respectively. Officials stated that multiple sector-level BORTAC

teams, including teams in El Paso, Texas; Buffalo, New York; and San Diego, California, deployed with the reported purposes of assisting other law enforcement agencies with crowd control and tactical medical support, for example.

- **CBP Office of Field Operations Special Response Team.** CBP officials stated that Special Response Team members deployed to several locations in response to civil unrest and protests. Specifically, officials said members deployed to the ports of entry in Buffalo, New York; ports of entry in Detroit and Port Huron, Michigan; the Federal Building in El Paso, Texas; the Drug Enforcement Administration Office Building in Houston, Texas; the Federal Courthouse in Tacoma, Washington; the region around the seaport in Miami, Florida; and the Federal Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. The reported primary purpose of these deployments was to provide force protection for various law enforcement agencies, including other CBP officers and Federal Protective Service officers.
- **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations' Special Response Team.** ICE officials stated that Enforcement and Removal Operations Special Response Team units deployed to six cities in response to civil unrest and protests. Specifically, officials said Special Response Team units deployed to (1) Washington, D.C., with the reported primary responsibility to protect federal property and provide law enforcement support; (2) Buffalo, New York, to support federal and state law enforcement agencies; (3) Denver, Colorado, to assist the Aurora Police Department, as well as to provide security for ICE detainees, personnel, and sensitive equipment and property, and prevent escape attempts by detainees; (4) San Diego, California, to support other federal agencies in securing the Edward J. Schwartz Federal Building; (5) Dallas, Texas, to provide security for ICE detainees, personnel, and sensitive equipment and property, as well as prevent escape attempts by detainees; and (6) Los Angeles, California, to respond to rioting at the Adelanto Detention Facility.
- **ICE Homeland Security Investigations Special Response Team.** ICE officials stated that Homeland Security Investigations Special Response Team units deployed to locations including Washington, D.C.; Buffalo and New York City, New York; Houston and Dallas, Texas; and San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, California, in response to civil unrest and protests in those cities. The reported primary responsibility of team members was to respond to requests for support from state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies. Additionally, Special Response Team units were available in these

cities to potentially respond as a quick reaction force in the event they received a request for support from law enforcement agencies.

- **Pentagon Force Protection Agency Emergency Response Team.** Pentagon Force Protection Agency officials stated that its Emergency Response Team was put on standby to respond to the civil unrest and protests and was prepared for officer rescues, arrests, and to deploy less-lethal munitions. Officials also said that on June 1, 2020, Emergency Response Team members responded to civil disturbances and vandalism at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces in Washington, D.C. by dispersing the people vandalizing the courthouse.
- **U.S. Marshals Service Special Operations Group.** U.S. Marshals Service officials stated that Special Operations Group units deployed in response to civil unrest and protests. Additional information on these deployments, including the locations and activities of the team, have been omitted because the U.S. Marshals Service deemed this information sensitive.
- **U.S. Park Police SWAT Team.** U.S. Park Police officials stated that its SWAT team deployed to Lafayette Park in Washington, D.C., in response to civil unrest and protests. The reported primary purpose was to support U.S. Park Police's Civil Disturbance Unit and protect officers and resources. Officials said the SWAT team deployed less-lethal munitions, including hand-held canisters that dispersed rubber pellets and pepper ball projectiles, to stop individuals from throwing improvised weapons at law enforcement officers. Officials said the SWAT team and the less-lethal munitions were used to deter individuals in the crowd who were actively resisting or fighting with law enforcement officers.
- **U.S. Secret Service Counter Sniper Team, Counter Assault Team, and Emergency Response Team.** U.S. Secret Service officials stated that, in response to the civil unrest and protests, each of the three tactical teams—which are always deployed full-time (24 hours per day, 7 days per week)—increased the number of members on duty and length of time on duty in the event they were needed to assist with securing the White House Complex and the Vice President's Residence.

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the above contact, Adam Hoffman (Assistant Director), Erin O'Brien (Analyst-in-Charge), Kelsey Burdick, Dominick Dale, Christine Davis, Marissa Esthimer, Suzanne Kaasa, Amanda Miller, Eric D. Hauswirth, and Susan Hsu made key contributions to this report.

Appendix V: Accessible Data

Data Tables

Accessible Data for Number of Federal Tactical Teams That Reported Having Firearms, Tactical Equipment, and Tactical Vehicles in Their Inventories, as of January 2020

Item	Type	Number of teams with item in inventory
Large-caliber launcher	Firearms	18
Pistol	Firearms	25
Revolver	Firearms	2
Rifle	Firearms	25
Shotgun	Firearms	22
Aiming devices	Tactical equipment	24
Body armor	Tactical equipment	25
Blunt impact munitions (such as rubber balls)	Tactical equipment	11
Breaching kits	Tactical equipment	11
Breaching munitions	Tactical equipment	11
Chemical munitions (such as pepper balls)	Tactical equipment	18
Electronic control weapons (such as TASERs)	Tactical equipment	11
Diversionary devices (such as flash bangs)	Tactical equipment	20
Explosives	Tactical equipment	6
Mechanical breaching devices	Tactical equipment	21
Night vision devices	Tactical equipment	23
Protective equipment	Tactical equipment	24
Suppressors	Tactical equipment	14
Tactical lighting	Tactical equipment	19
Tactical robots	Tactical equipment	11
Thermal breaching devices	Tactical equipment	14
Thermal imaging devices	Tactical equipment	15
Armored personnel carriers	Tactical vehicles	9
Armored vehicles	Tactical vehicles	6
Manned aircraft	Tactical vehicles	3

Appendix V: Accessible Data

Item	Type	Number of teams with item in inventory
Off-road vehicles	Tactical vehicles	9
Unmanned aerial vehicles	Tactical vehicles	6
Vessels	Tactical vehicles	6

Appendix V: Accessible Data

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Number of Reported Federal Tactical Team Deployments, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2019

Number of deployments	Number of teams
0	2
1-100	3
101-500	5
501-1000	4
Over 1000	5

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through our website. Each weekday afternoon, GAO posts on its [website](#) newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence. You can also [subscribe](#) to GAO's email updates to receive notification of newly posted products.

Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's website, <https://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm>.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

Connect with GAO

Connect with GAO on [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).
Subscribe to our [RSS Feeds](#) or [Email Updates](#). Listen to our [Podcasts](#).
Visit GAO on the web at <https://www.gao.gov>.

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact FraudNet:

Website: <https://www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm>

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7700

Congressional Relations

Orice Williams Brown, Managing Director, WilliamsO@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400,
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125,
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

James-Christian Blockwood, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814,
Washington, DC 20548



Please Print on Recycled Paper.