

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-33](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Coast Guard, within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is the principal federal agency charged with ensuring the security and safety of the waters under U.S. jurisdiction. To help carry out its missions, the Coast Guard maintains Specialized Forces units with the capabilities needed to handle drug interdiction, terrorism, and other threats to the U.S. maritime environment. The Coast Guard reorganized the command structure of these units in 2007 and again in 2013.

The Maritime Security Improvement Act of 2018 included a provision for GAO to evaluate Specialized Forces units and provide a report to Congress. This report examines the extent to which the Coast Guard addressed key practices and considerations for assessing reorganization of its Specialized Forces units. GAO assessed the Coast Guard report and associated workforce planning documentation and data used for its 2013 reorganization and analyzed the extent to which the agency applied key practices. GAO also analyzed guidance and data on Specialized Forces capabilities and operations to identify potential overlap or gaps and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes two recommendations to DHS. First, GAO recommends that the Coast Guard conduct an analysis of its Specialized Forces' workforce needs, with which DHS concurred. Second, GAO recommends that the Coast Guard assess the extent to which unnecessary overlap or duplication exists. Although DHS did not concur, GAO continues to believe the findings documented in the report support the recommendation.

View [GAO-20-33](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or andersonn@gao.gov.

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COAST GUARD

Assessing Deployable Specialized Forces' Workforce Needs Could Improve Efficiency and Reduce Potential Overlap or Gaps in Capabilities

What GAO Found

In reorganizing its Deployable Specialized Forces (Specialized Forces) in 2013, the Coast Guard generally applied three of five key practices for agency reorganization, including establishing goals and outcomes, engaging stakeholders, and addressing longstanding management challenges, such as training shortfalls. However, the Coast Guard did not fully apply the other two key practices—using data and evidence and addressing potential overlap and duplication within the Specialized Forces workforce. For example:

- The Coast Guard has not assessed the overall Specialized Forces workforce needs, as this practice recommends. Officials from some units stated that they experienced periods of underutilization, while other units with the same or similar capabilities turned down operations for lack of available personnel.
- GAO identified some overlap among the capabilities of the different Specialized Forces units and the Coast Guard missions they support—in some cases Specialized Forces units were co-located with other Specialized Forces units with many of the same capabilities and similar missions. In August 2019, Coast Guard officials acknowledged that the 2013 reorganization did not conduct an analysis of potential overlap or duplication of capabilities and agreed that overlap or gaps in Specialized Forces capabilities could exist.

Assessing workforce needs and the extent to which unnecessary overlap or duplication may exist among Specialized Forces would help ensure that the agency effectively allocates resources and uses them efficiently.

Coast Guard Personnel Conducting a Drug Interdiction Operation



Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-20-33