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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-798](#), a report to the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, House Committee on Government Reform, and the Senate Committee on Finance

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Strategy for Homeland Security calls for preventing the entry of foreign terrorists into our country and using all legal means to identify; halt; and, where appropriate, prosecute or bring immigration or other civil charges against terrorists in the United States. GAO reported in October 2002 that the Department of State had revoked visas of certain persons after it learned they might be suspected terrorists, raising concerns that some of these individuals may have entered the United States before or after State's action. Congressional requesters asked GAO to (1) identify the policies and procedures of State, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that govern their respective visa revocation actions and (2) determine the effectiveness of the process.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to the Department of Homeland Security, in conjunction with the Departments of State and Justice, to ensure that when State revokes a visa because of terrorism concerns, the appropriate units within State, INS, and the FBI are notified immediately and that proper actions are taken. Homeland Security agreed that the visa revocation process needed to be strengthened. State and Justice did not comment on our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-798.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

New Policies and Procedures Are Needed to Fill Gaps in the Visa Revocation Process

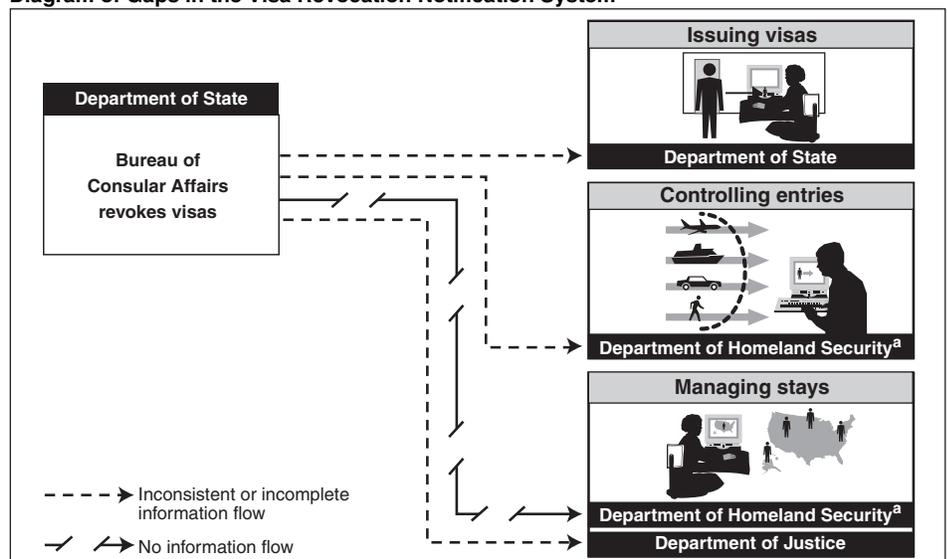
What GAO Found

The U.S. government has no specific written policy on the use of visa revocations as an antiterrorism tool and no written procedures to guide State in notifying the relevant agencies of visa revocations on terrorism grounds. Further, State, INS, and the FBI do not have written internal procedures for notifying their appropriate personnel to take specific actions on visas revoked by the State Department. State and INS officials said they use the revocation process to prevent suspected terrorists from entering the country, but none of the agencies has a policy that covers investigating, locating, and taking action when a visa holder has already entered.

This lack of formal written policies and procedures has contributed to systemic weaknesses in the visa revocation process that increase the possibility of a suspected terrorist entering or remaining in the United States. In our review of 240 visa revocations, we found that

- appropriate units within INS and the FBI did not always receive notifications of all the revocations;
- names were not consistently posted to the agencies' watch lists of suspected terrorists;
- 30 individuals whose visas were revoked on terrorism grounds had entered the United States either before or after revocation and may still remain; and
- INS and the FBI were not routinely taking actions to investigate, locate, or resolve the cases of individuals who remained in the United States after their visas were revoked.

Diagram of Gaps in the Visa Revocation Notification System



Sources: GAO and Art Explosion.

^a On March 1, 2003, INS's various functions transferred to the Department of Homeland Security.