



Highlights of [GAO-10-856](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Somali pirates operating off the Horn of Africa have attacked more than 450 ships and taken nearly 2,400 hostages since 2007. A small number of U.S.-flagged vessels and ships have been among those affected. As Somalia lacks a functioning government and is unable to repress piracy in its waters, the National Security Council (NSC) developed the interagency *Countering Piracy off the Horn of Africa: Partnership and Action Plan (Action Plan)* in December 2008 to prevent, disrupt, and prosecute piracy off the Horn of Africa in collaboration with international and industry partners. GAO was asked to evaluate the extent to which U.S. agencies (1) have implemented the plan, and any challenges they face in doing so, and (2) have collaborated with partners in counterpiracy efforts. GAO examined counterpiracy plans, activities, collaborative practices, and data, and interviewed industry and international partners and officials at U.S. agencies and the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the NSC reassess and update its *Action Plan*; identify metrics; assess the costs, benefits, and effectiveness of U.S. counterpiracy activities; and clarify agency roles and responsibilities. The NSC did not comment. The Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, State, Transportation, and the Treasury provided comments to clarify facts in the report.

[View GAO-10-856](#) or [key components](#).

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MARITIME SECURITY

Actions Needed to Assess and Update Plan and Enhance Collaboration among Partners Involved in Countering Piracy off the Horn of Africa

What GAO Found

The U.S. government has made progress in implementing its *Action Plan*, in collaboration with international and industry partners, but pirates have adapted their tactics and expanded their area of operations, almost doubling the number of reported attacks from 2008 to 2009, and the U.S. government has yet to evaluate the costs, benefits, or effectiveness of its efforts or update its plan accordingly. The United States has advised industry partners on self-protection measures, contributed leadership and assets to an international coalition patrolling pirate-infested waters, and concluded prosecution arrangements with Kenya and the Seychelles. Officials credit collaborative efforts with reducing the pirates' rate of success in boarding ships and hijacking vessels in 2009. However, from 2007 to 2009, the most recent year for which complete data were available, the total number of hijackings reported to the International Maritime Bureau increased, ransoms paid by the shipping industry increased sharply, and attacks spread from the heavily patrolled Gulf of Aden—the focus of the *Action Plan*—to the vast Indian Ocean. The *Action Plan*'s objective is to repress piracy as effectively as possible, but the effectiveness of U.S. resources applied to counterpiracy is unclear because the interagency group responsible for monitoring the *Action Plan*'s implementation has not tracked the cost of U.S. activities—such as operating ships and aircraft and prosecuting suspected pirates—nor systematically evaluated the relative benefits or effectiveness of the *Action Plan*'s tasks. GAO's prior work has shown that federal agencies engaged in collaborative efforts need to evaluate their activities to identify areas for improvement. Moreover, as pirates have adapted their tactics, the *Action Plan* has not been revised. Without a plan that reflects new developments and assesses the costs, benefits, and effectiveness of U.S. efforts, decision makers will lack information that could be used to target limited resources to provide the greatest benefit, commensurate with U.S. interests in the region.

The U.S. government has collaborated with international and industry partners to counter piracy, but it has not implemented some key practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration among U.S. agencies. According to U.S. and international stakeholders, the U.S. government has shared information with partners for military coordination. However, agencies have made less progress on several key efforts that involve multiple agencies—such as those to address piracy through strategic communications, disrupt pirate finances, and hold pirates accountable—in part because the *Action Plan* does not designate which agencies should lead or carry out 13 of the 14 tasks. For instance, the Departments of Defense, Justice, State, and the Treasury all collect information on pirate finances, but none has lead responsibility for analyzing that information to build a case against pirate leaders or financiers. The NSC, the President's principal arm for coordinating national security policy among government agencies, could bolster interagency collaboration and the U.S. contribution to counterpiracy efforts by clarifying agency roles and responsibilities and encouraging the agencies to develop joint guidance to implement their efforts.