

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-371](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Homeland security threats continue to evolve and include challenges ranging from terrorist attacks to natural disasters, emphasizing the need for DHS to periodically examine and strengthen the nation's homeland security strategy. Further, the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 requires DHS to conduct such a review every 4 years. GAO reported in 2011 on DHS's first QHSR and recommended DHS provide sufficient time for stakeholder consultations and examine how risk information could be used to prioritize mission efforts. DHS issued its second QHSR in 2014.

GAO was asked to assess the QHSR. This report addresses the extent to which DHS (1) examined and used risk information to inform the QHSR and its implementation, (2) aligned its budget and performance measures to QHSR mission goals, and (3) collaborated with stakeholders to develop the QHSR. GAO analyzed relevant statutes and QHSR documentation; conducted a nongeneralizable survey of DHS-identified federal and nonfederal QHSR stakeholders, receiving responses from 93 of the 182 QHSR stakeholders it contacted; and interviewed officials from DHS, federal, and nonfederal entities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that for future QHSRs DHS improve its risk assessment documentation, prioritize risks, and ensure stakeholder meetings are interactive. DHS concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-16-371](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (213) 830-1011 or vonaha@gao.gov

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QUADRENNIAL HOMELAND SECURITY REVIEW

Improved Risk Analysis and Stakeholder Consultations Could Enhance Future Reviews

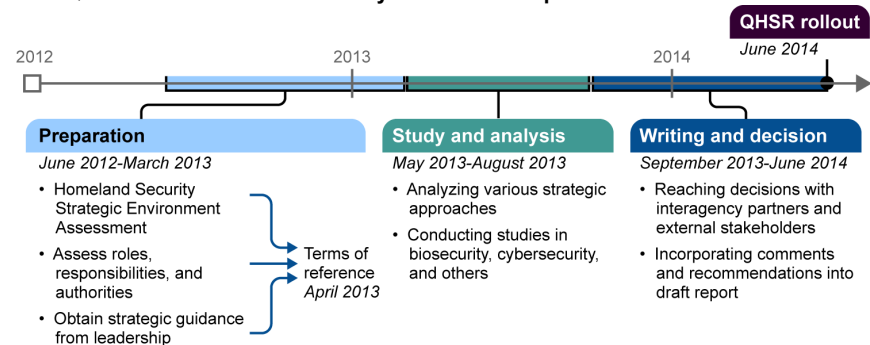
What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) assessed risk for the second Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR) and considered threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences; however, DHS did not document how its various analyses were synthesized to generate results, thus limiting the reproducibility and defensibility of the results. Without sufficient documentation, the QHSR risk results cannot easily be validated or the assumptions tested, hindering DHS's ability to improve future assessments. In addition, the QHSR describes homeland security hazards, but does not rank those hazards or provide prioritized strategies to address them. Comparing and prioritizing risks helps identify where risk mitigation is most needed and helps justify cost-effective risk management options. Without determining prioritized risk outcomes, DHS is missing an opportunity to more efficiently mitigate risk or identify the resources required for addressing different levels and types of risks.

The President's fiscal years 2015 and 2016 budget requests for DHS were generally presented in alignment with the QHSR. However, DHS has faced challenges accounting for its spending by mission, which it is taking actions to address, such as developing a new common appropriation structure to better link the department's funding request to the execution of its missions. DHS also developed performance measures for all of the QHSR mission areas.

DHS expanded its stakeholder outreach efforts, but 43 of 61 stakeholders who provided narrative responses to one question in GAO's survey stated that collaboration with stakeholders could be improved. For example, one respondent reported that stakeholders were asked to react to information provided by DHS rather than assist in formulating the QHSR approach and execution. DHS officials reported being limited by staff, time, and other constraints, and thus directed stakeholders to provide feedback via various web-based forums. Although the online forums allowed DHS to reach 2,000 representatives during its 2014 QHSR development process, DHS's QHSR After Action Report noted that the tools were used to validate study findings instead of informing them. Without fostering interactive communication, DHS may miss opportunities to incorporate stakeholder perspectives from the entire homeland security enterprise and thereby may not have fully informed the QHSR effort.

2014 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Development Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of DHS information. | GAO-16-371