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Border and Maritime Security,
Committee on Homeland Security,
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SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY

Additional Actions Needed to Assess Resource Deployment and Progress

Statement of Rebecca Gambler, Director, Homeland
Security and Justice

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-465T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

The southwest border continues to be vulnerable to cross-border illegal activity, with DHS apprehending over 331,000 illegal entrants, and making over 14,000 seizures of drugs in fiscal year 2015. DHS has employed a variety of resources to help secure the border, including personnel, technology—such as cameras and sensors, tactical infrastructure—such as fencing and roads, and air and marine assets.

This statement discusses (1) DHS efforts to deploy resources on the southwest border and measure the effectiveness of these resources in securing the border, and (2) DHS efforts to develop performance goals and measures for achieving situational awareness and border security. This statement is based on GAO reports and testimonies issued from September 2009 through May 2015, with selected updates through February 2016 on DHS enforcement efforts and actions to address prior GAO recommendations. To conduct the updates, GAO interviewed agency officials and reviewed related documentation.

What GAO Recommends

GAO previously made recommendations for DHS to, among other things, (1) strengthen its management of technology plans and programs and (2) establish milestones and time frames for the development of border security goals and measures. DHS generally agreed and has actions underway to address the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-465T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

March 1, 2016

SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY

Additional Actions Needed to Assess Resource Deployment and Progress

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), has taken action to deploy various resources—including agents and technology—along the southwest border and assess those resources' contributions to border security. For example, in December 2012, GAO reported that CBP's Border Patrol scheduled agents for deployment differently across southwest border locations, and although in most locations less than half of Border Patrol apprehensions were made within five miles of the border in fiscal year 2011, Border Patrol had moved overall enforcement efforts closer to the border since the prior fiscal year. GAO also reported in December 2012, that Border Patrol tracked changes in the effectiveness rate for response to illegal activity across border locations to determine if the appropriate mix and placement of personnel and assets were deployed and used effectively, and took steps to improve the data quality issues that had precluded comparing performance results across locations at the time of GAO's review. For example, Border Patrol issued guidance in September 2012 for collecting and reporting data with a more standardized and consistent approach. DHS has reported the effectiveness rate as a performance measure in its Fiscal Year 2015-2017 Annual Performance Report.

Further, in March 2014, GAO reported that CBP had made progress in deploying programs under the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan, but that CBP could strengthen its management and assessment of the plan's programs. GAO reported that while CBP had identified mission benefits of technologies to be deployed under the plan, the agency had not developed key attributes for performance metrics to identify the technologies' individual and collective contribution, as GAO had recommended in 2011. GAO also reported in 2014 that CBP officials stated that baselines for each performance measure would be developed and that by the end of fiscal year 2016, CBP would establish a tool to explain the impact of technology and infrastructure on situational awareness in the border environment. CBP should complete these actions in order to fully assess its progress in implementing the plan and determine when mission benefits have been fully realized.

In December 2012, GAO reported on Border Patrol's efforts to develop performance goals and measures for assessing the progress of efforts to secure the border between ports of entry and informing the identification and allocation of border security resources. GAO reported that DHS had transitioned from a goal and measure related to the capability to detect, respond to, and address cross-border illegal activity to an interim performance goal and measure of apprehensions between the land border ports of entry beginning fiscal year 2011. GAO reported that this interim goal and measure did not inform program results or resource identification and allocation decisions, limiting DHS and congressional oversight and accountability. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendation that CBP develop milestones and time frames for the development of border security goals and measures and Border Patrol works to define a new overarching performance goal for achieving a low-risk border and develop associated performance measures. CBP should complete these actions in order to fully assess its capabilities and progress to secure the border.

March 1, 2016

Chairman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our past work reviewing actions taken by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to deploy resources at the southwest border, and the extent that DHS measures the effectiveness of these deployed resources to improve situational awareness and achieve a more secure border. The southwest border continues to be vulnerable to cross-border illegal activity, and DHS reported apprehending over 331,000 illegal entrants and making over 14,000 seizures of drugs in fiscal year 2015.

The U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol), within DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), is the federal agency with primary responsibility for securing the border between the U.S. ports of entry.¹ CBP has divided geographic responsibility for the southwest border among nine Border Patrol sectors.² Border Patrol's 2004 National Border Patrol Strategy (2004 Strategy), developed following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was designed to facilitate the buildup and deployment of border resources to ensure the agency had the right mix of personnel, technology—such as cameras and sensors, and tactical infrastructure—such as fencing, roads, and lighting and to deploy those resources in a layered approach at the immediate border and in other areas distant from the border. Since fiscal year 2004, the first full fiscal year DHS was in operation, the number of agents assigned to patrol U.S. southwest land borders increased from about 9,500 to about 17,500 agents near the end of fiscal year 2015.³ In addition to personnel, DHS has employed a variety of technology, tactical infrastructure, and air and marine assets to assist

¹Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where DHS officers or employees are assigned to clear passengers and merchandise, collect duties, and enforce customs laws, and where a person may apply for admission into the United States pursuant to U.S. immigration law

²Each of the nine Border Patrol sectors has a headquarters with management personnel and these sectors are further divided geographically into varying numbers of stations, with agents assigned to patrol defined geographic areas.

³Border Patrol reported agent staffing statistics for on-board personnel as of September 19, 2015.

with its efforts to secure the border. For example, in November 2005, DHS announced the launch of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI) program, which was responsible for developing a comprehensive border protection system using technology, known as the Secure Border Initiative Network (SBI-net), and tactical infrastructure along the southwest border to deter smugglers and aliens attempting to illegally cross the border. In January 2011, in response to internal and external assessments that identified concerns regarding the performance, cost, and schedule for implementing the systems, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced the cancellation of further procurements of SBI-net systems. After the cancellation of SBI-net, under which CBP deployed surveillance systems along 53 of the 387 miles of the Arizona border with Mexico, CBP developed the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan (the Plan) in January 2011, which includes a mix of radars, sensors, and cameras to help provide security for the remainder of the Arizona border. Moreover, we reported in 2011 that DHS continued to deploy other tactical infrastructure along the southwest border, and CBP's Air and Marine Operations (AMO)—formerly known as the Office of Air and Marine—operates a fleet of air and marine assets in support of federal border security efforts.

Through fiscal year 2010, these resources were used to support DHS's goal to achieve "operational control" of the nation's borders by reducing cross-border illegal activity. The extent of operational control—also referred to as effective control—was defined as the number of border miles where Border Patrol had the capability to detect, respond to, and interdict cross-border illegal activity. In May 2012, Border Patrol issued the 2012-2016 Border Patrol Strategic Plan (2012-2016 Strategic Plan), stating that the buildup of its resource base and the operations conducted over the past two decades would enable the Border Patrol to focus on mitigating risk rather than further increasing resources to secure the border. This new strategic plan, with a goal to achieve a low risk border, emphasized using intelligence information to inform risk relative to threats of cross-border terrorism, drug smuggling, and illegal migration across locations; integrating border security operations with those of other law enforcement partners; and developing rapid response capabilities to deploy the resources appropriate to changes in threat.

Over the years, we have reported on the progress and challenges DHS faces in implementing its border security efforts. My statement discusses our key findings in the areas of (1) DHS efforts to deploy agents, technology, tactical infrastructure, and air and marine assets on the southwest border and measure the effectiveness of these resources in

securing the border, and (2) DHS performance measures for achieving situational awareness and border security.

My statement today is based on reports and testimonies we issued from September 2009 through May 2015 that examined DHS efforts to enhance border security and assess the effectiveness of its border security operations on the southwest border (see Related GAO Products at the end of this statement). It also includes selected updates we conducted through February 2016 on DHS enforcement efforts and actions to address our previous recommendations. Our reports and testimonies, as well as the selected updates, incorporated information we obtained by examining CBP's management of resources; analyzing Border Patrol planning and operational assessment documents; reviewing DHS's processes for measuring security at the southwest border; and interviewing relevant DHS officials. More detailed information about our scope and methodology can be found in our reports and testimonies. We conducted all of this work 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.

CBP Has Deployed Resources to Secure the Southwest Border, but Additional Actions Are Needed to Measure Their Effectiveness

Border Patrol Scheduled Agents Differently across Sectors and Enforcement Activities, and Took Steps to Improve Data Measuring Overall Effectiveness

In December 2012, we reported on Border Patrol’s evolving approach for deploying agents along the southwest border.⁴ In that report we found that Border Patrol’s 2004 Strategy provided for increasing resources and deploying these resources using an approach that provided for several layers of Border Patrol agents at the immediate border and in other areas 100 miles or more away from the border (referred to as defense in depth). According to the CBP officials we interviewed for our report, as resources increased, Border Patrol sought to move enforcement closer to the border over time to better position the agency to ensure the arrest of those trying to enter the country illegally. Additionally, headquarters and field officials said station supervisors determined (1) whether to deploy agents in border zones or interior zones, and (2) the types of enforcement or nonenforcement activities agents were to perform.⁵ Similarly, Border Patrol officials from the five sectors we visited stated that they used similar factors in making deployment decisions, such as intelligence showing the presence of threat across locations, the nature of the threat, and environmental factors including terrain and weather.

We reported in December 2012 on Border Patrol data from fiscal year 2011 that showed how agent workdays were scheduled and found differences across sectors in the percentage of agent workdays scheduled for border zones and interior zones and across enforcement and nonenforcement activities. Specifically, we found that while Tucson sector scheduled 43 percent of agent workdays to border zones in fiscal year 2011, agent workdays scheduled for border zones by other southwest border sectors ranged from 26 percent in the Yuma sector to 53 percent in the El Centro sector. Our analysis of agents deployed for enforcement compared to nonenforcement activities ranged from 66 percent for Yuma sector to 81 percent in Big Bend sector.

Border Patrol officials we interviewed attributed the variation in scheduling border zone deployment in fiscal year 2011 to differences in geographical factors among the southwest border sectors—such as varying

⁴GAO, *Border Patrol: Key Elements of New Strategic Plan Not Yet in Place to Inform Border Security Status and Resource Needs* [GAO-13-25](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 2012).

⁵Within the Border Patrol station areas, “border zones” are those with land directly on the U.S.-Mexico border, and “interior zones” are without international border miles. Enforcement activities include, for example, patrolling the border and traffic checks, while nonenforcement activities include, for example, remote-video surveillance, facility maintenance, and training.

topography, ingress and egress routes, and land access issues, and structural factors such as technology and infrastructure deployments—and stated that these factors affect how sectors operate and may preclude closer deployment to the border. Additionally, we found that many southwest border sectors have interior stations that are responsible for operations at some distance from the border, such as at interior checkpoints generally located 25 miles or more from the border, which could have affected their percentage of agent workdays scheduled for border zones. We have planned work to assess Border Patrol deployment and management of agents across the southwest border beginning later this year.

We also reported in December 2012 that Border Patrol sector management used changes in various data over time to help inform assessment of its efforts to secure the border against the threats of illegal migration, smuggling of drugs and other contraband, and terrorism. These data showed changes in the (1) percentage of estimated known illegal entrants who are apprehended, (2) number of seizures of drugs and other contraband, and (3) number of apprehensions of persons from countries at an increased risk of sponsoring terrorism.⁶ In addition, apprehension and seizure data could be analyzed in terms of where they occurred relative to distance from the border as an indicator of progress in Border Patrol enforcement efforts. Border Patrol officials at sectors we visited, and our review of fiscal years 2010 and 2012 sector operational assessments, indicated that sectors historically used these types of data to inform tactical deployment of personnel and technology to address cross-border threats. Our analysis showed that in most southwest border sectors less than half of Border Patrol's apprehensions and seizures were made within five miles of the border in fiscal year 2011. In Tucson sector, for example, 47 percent of Border Patrol's apprehensions of illegal entrants, 38 percent of the drugs and contraband seizures, and 8 percent of the apprehensions of aliens from special interest countries were within five miles of the border. However, our analysis also showed that Border Patrol had moved overall enforcement efforts closer to the border since the prior fiscal year.

Further, we reported that Border Patrol sectors and stations tracked changes in their overall effectiveness as a tool to determine if the

⁶These data also included the percentage of estimated known illegal entrants who are apprehended more than once (repeat offenders).

appropriate mix and placement of personnel and assets were being deployed and used effectively and efficiently, according to officials from Border Patrol headquarters. Border Patrol calculated an overall effectiveness rate using a formula in which it added the number of apprehensions and “turn backs” in a specific sector and divided this total by the total estimated known illegal entries—determined by adding the number of apprehensions, turn backs, and “got aways” for the sector.⁷ Border Patrol views its border security efforts as increasing in effectiveness if the number of turn backs as a percentage of estimated known illegal entries has increased and the number of got aways as a percentage of estimated known illegal entries has decreased. In our December 2012 report, we analyzed apprehension, turn back, and got away data from fiscal years 2006 through 2011 for the Tucson sector and found that while apprehensions remained fairly constant at about 60 percent of estimated known illegal entries, the percentage of reported turn backs increased from about 5 percent to about 23 percent, while the percentage of reported got aways decreased from about 33 percent to about 13 percent. As a result of these changes in the mix of turn backs and got aways, our analysis of Border Patrol data using Border Patrol methodology for our report showed that the enforcement effort, or the overall effectiveness rate for Tucson sector, improved 20 percentage points from fiscal year 2006 to fiscal year 2011, from 67 percent to 87 percent. Border Patrol data showed that the effectiveness rate for eight of the nine sectors on the southwest border also improved from fiscal years 2006 through 2011, using Border Patrol methodology.

At the time of our review in 2012, Border Patrol headquarters officials said that differences in how sectors defined, collected, and reported turn back and got away data used to calculate the overall effectiveness rate precluded comparing performance results across sectors. They stated that each Border Patrol sector decided how it would collect and report turn back and got away data, and as a result, practices for collecting and reporting the data varied across sectors and stations based on differences in agent experience and judgment, resources, and terrain. The ability to obtain accurate or consistent data using these identification

⁷Border Patrol defines estimated illegal entries as the total number of deportable aliens who were apprehended, in addition to the number of entrants who illegally crossed the border but were not apprehended either because they crossed back to Mexico—“turn backs”—or continued traveling to the U.S. interior and Border Patrol was no longer actively pursuing them—“got aways.”

sources depends on various factors, such as terrain and weather, according to Border Patrol officials. As a result of these data limitations, Border Patrol headquarters officials said that while they considered turn back and got away data sufficiently reliable to assess each sector's progress toward border security and to inform sector decisions regarding resource deployment, they did not consider the data sufficiently reliable to compare—or externally report—results across sectors at the time we issued our report in December 2012.

Border Patrol headquarters officials issued guidance in September 2012 to provide a more consistent, standardized approach for the collection and reporting of turn back and got away data by Border Patrol sectors. As we reported in 2012, Border Patrol officials expected that once the guidance was implemented, data reliability would improve. Since that time, DHS has reported the effectiveness rate in its Fiscal Year 2015-2017 Annual Performance Report as a performance measure and method to publicly report results of its border security efforts on the southwest border.

CBP Has Not Yet Fully Applied Performance Metrics or Assessed the Contributions of its Deployed Surveillance Technologies and Fencing

In March 2014 and April 2015, we reported that CBP had made progress in deploying programs under the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan, but that CBP could take additional action to strengthen its management of the Plan and its various programs.⁸ The Plan's acquisition programs include fixed and mobile surveillance systems, agent portable devices, and ground sensors. Specifically, we reported in March 2014 that CBP had identified the mission benefits of its surveillance technologies, as we recommended in November 2011.⁹ CBP had identified mission benefits of surveillance technologies to be deployed under the Plan, such as improved situational awareness and agent safety. However, we also reported that the agency had not developed key attributes for performance metrics for all surveillance

⁸GAO, *Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Management and Assess Effectiveness*, [GAO-14-368](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 4, 2014), and *Homeland Security Acquisitions: Major Program Assessments Reveal Actions Needed to Improve Accountability*, [GAO-15-171SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 22, 2015).

⁹[GAO-14-368](#) and GAO, *Arizona Border Surveillance Technology: More Information on Plans and Costs Is Needed before Proceeding*, [GAO-12-22](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 4, 2011).

technology to be deployed as part of the Plan, as we recommended in November 2011. As of May 2015, CBP had identified a set of potential key attributes for performance metrics for all technologies to be deployed under the Plan; however, CBP officials stated that this set of measures was under review as the agency continued to refine the measures to better inform the nature of the contributions and impacts of surveillance technology on its border security mission.¹⁰ While CBP had yet to apply these measures, CBP had established a time line for developing performance measures for each technology. In November 2014, CBP officials stated that baselines for each performance measure were to be developed, at which time the agency was to begin using the data to evaluate the individual and collective contributions of specific technology assets deployed under the Plan. Moreover, CBP plans to establish a tool by the end of fiscal year 2016 that explains the qualitative and quantitative impacts of technology and tactical infrastructure on situational awareness in specific areas of the border environment. While these are positive steps, until CBP completes its efforts to address our recommendation and fully develop and apply key attributes for performance metrics for all technologies to be deployed under the Plan, it will not be able to fully assess its progress in implementing the Plan and determine when mission benefits have been fully realized.

Further, in March 2014, we found that CBP did not capture complete data on the contributions of these technologies, which in combination with other relevant performance metrics or indicators could be used to better determine the contributions of CBP's surveillance technologies and inform resource allocation decisions. Although CBP had a field within its Enforcement Integrated Database for data on whether technological assets, such as SBI-net surveillance towers, and nontechnological assets, such as canine teams, assisted or contributed to the apprehension of illegal entrants and seizure of drugs and other contraband, according to CBP officials, Border Patrol agents were not required to record these data.¹¹ This limited CBP's ability to collect, track, and analyze available data on asset assists to help monitor the contribution of surveillance technologies, including its SBI-net system, to Border Patrol apprehensions

¹⁰GAO, *Border Security: Progress and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Implement and Assess Infrastructure and Technology*, [GAO-15-595T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 13, 2015).

¹¹In addition to maintaining data on asset assists, the Border Patrol collects and maintains data on apprehensions and seizures in DHS's Enforcement Integrated Database.

and seizures and inform resource allocation decisions. We made two recommendations that (1) CBP require data on asset assists to be recorded and tracked within its database; and that once these data were required to be recorded and tracked, (2) analyze available data on apprehensions and technological assists, in combination with other relevant performance metrics or indicators, as appropriate, to determine the contribution of surveillance technologies to CBP's border security efforts. CBP concurred with our recommendations and has implemented one of them. In June 2014, in response to our recommendation, CBP issued guidance informing Border Patrol agents that the asset assist data field within its database was now a mandatory data field. Agents are required to enter any assisting surveillance technology or other equipment before proceeding. As we testified in May 2015, to fully address our second recommendation, CBP needs to analyze data on apprehensions and seizures, in combination with other relevant performance metrics, to determine the contribution of surveillance technologies to its border security mission.

In addition, with regard to fencing and other tactical infrastructure, CBP reported that from fiscal year 2005 through May 2015, the total miles of vehicle and pedestrian fencing along the nearly 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border increased from approximately 120 miles to 652 miles.¹² With the completion of the new fencing and other tactical infrastructure, DHS is now responsible for maintaining this infrastructure including repairing breached sections of fencing.¹³ We have previously reported on CBP's efforts to assess the impact of tactical infrastructure on border security. Specifically, in our May 2010 and September 2009 reports, we found that CBP had not accounted for the impact of its investment in border fencing and infrastructure on border security.¹⁴ CBP had reported an increase in control of southwest border miles, but could not account separately for the impact of the border fencing and other infrastructure. In September

¹²The length of the border with Mexico is defined by the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission at 1,954 miles. The length of the land border is 675 miles, while the length of the border along the Colorado River and Rio Grande is 1,279 miles.

¹³ CBP reported that maintaining the fence cost the department at least \$7.2 million in 2010.

¹⁴GAO, *Secure Border Initiative: DHS Has Faced Challenges Deploying Technology and Fencing Along the Southwest Border*, [GAO-10-651T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 4, 2010), and *Secure Border Initiative: Technology Deployment Delays Persist and the Impact of Border Fencing Has Not Been Assessed*, [GAO-09-896](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 9, 2009).

2009, we recommended that CBP determine the contribution of border fencing and other infrastructure to border security.¹⁵ DHS concurred with our recommendation, and in response, CBP contracted with the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute to conduct an analysis of the impact of tactical infrastructure on border security. We have ongoing work for this subcommittee and others assessing CBP's deployment and management of tactical infrastructure, and we plan to report on the results of this work later this year.

CBP Has Reassessed Its Mix and Placement of Air and Marine Assets to Better Address Mission Needs and Threats

Our March 2012 report on AMO assets highlighted several areas the agency could address to better ensure the mix and placement of assets is effective and efficient.¹⁶ These areas included: (1) documentation clearly linking deployment decisions to mission needs and threats, (2) documentation on the assessments and analysis used to support decisions on the mix and placement of assets, and (3) consideration of how deployment of border technology will affect customer requirements for air and marine assets across locations.

Specifically, we found that AMO had not documented significant events, such as its analyses to support its asset mix and placement across locations, and as a result, lacked a record to help demonstrate that its decisions to allocate assets were the most effective ones in fulfilling customer needs and addressing threats, among other things. While AMO's Fiscal Year 2010 Aircraft Deployment Plan stated that AMO deployed aircraft and maritime vessels to ensure its forces were positioned to best meet the needs of CBP field commanders and respond to the latest intelligence on emerging threats, AMO did not have documentation that clearly linked the deployment decisions in the plan to mission needs or threats.

We also found that AMO did not provide higher rates of support to locations Border Patrol identified as high priority, a fact that indicated that a reassessment of AMO's resource mix and placement could help ensure that it meets mission needs, addresses threats, and mitigates risk. AMO officials stated that while they deployed a majority of assets to high-

¹⁵[GAO-09-896](#).

¹⁶GAO, *Border Security: Opportunities Exist to Ensure More Effective Use of DHS's Air and Marine Assets*, [GAO-12-518](#), (Washington, D.C. Mar. 30, 2012).

priority sectors, budgetary constraints, other national priorities, and the need to maintain presence across border locations limited overall increases in assets or the amount of assets they could redeploy from lower-priority sectors. While we recognized AMO's resource constraints, the agency did not have documentation of analyses assessing the impact of these constraints and whether actions could be taken to improve the mix and placement of assets within them. Thus, the extent to which the deployment of AMO assets and personnel, including those assigned to the southwest border, most effectively utilized AMO's constrained assets to meet mission needs and address threats was unclear.

We further found in March 2012 that AMO did not document assessments and analyses to support the agency's decisions on the mix and placement of assets. DHS's 2005 aviation management directive requires operating entities to use their aircraft in the most cost-effective way to meet requirements. Although AMO officials stated that it factored in cost-effectiveness considerations, AMO did not have documentation of analyses it performed to make these decisions. AMO headquarters officials stated that they made deployment decisions during formal discussions and ongoing meetings in close collaboration with Border Patrol, and considered a range of factors such as operational capability, mission priorities, and threats. AMO officials said that while they generally documented final decisions affecting the mix and placement of assets, they did not document assessments and analyses to support these decisions.

Finally, we reported that CBP and DHS had ongoing interagency efforts under way to increase air and marine domain awareness across U.S. borders through deployment of technology that may decrease Border Patrol's use of AMO assets for air and marine domain awareness. However, at the time of our review, AMO was not planning to assess how technology capabilities could affect the mix and placement of air and marine assets until the technology has been deployed. Specifically, we concluded that Border Patrol, CBP, and DHS had strategic and technological initiatives under way that would likely affect customer requirements for air and marine support and the mix and placement of assets across locations—CBP and DHS also had ongoing interagency efforts under way to increase air and marine domain awareness across U.S. borders through deployment of technology that may decrease Border Patrol's use of AMO assets for air and marine domain awareness. AMO officials stated that they would consider how technology capabilities affect the mix and placement of air and marine assets once such technology has been deployed.

To address the findings of our March 2012 report, we recommended that CBP, to the extent that benefits outweigh the costs, reassess the mix and placement of AMO's air and marine assets to include mission requirements, performance results, and anticipated CBP strategic and technological changes. DHS concurred with this recommendation and responded that it planned to address some of these actions as part of the Fiscal Year 2012-2013 Aircraft Deployment Plan. In September 2014, CBP provided us this Plan, which was approved in May 2012, and updated information on its subsequent efforts to address this recommendation, including a description of actions taken to reassess the mix and placement of AMO's assets. According to AMO, after consulting with DHS and CBP officials and approval from the Secretary of Homeland Security in May 2013, the office began a realignment of personnel, aircraft, and vessels from the northern border to the southern border based on its evaluation of the utilization and efficiency of current assets and available funding to accomplish the transfers. In September 2015, AMO officials provided GAO with data and analysis documenting that personnel, aircraft, and vessels were in the process of being moved to support the realignment of assets, which addressed the intent of our recommendation.

Border Patrol Has Not Yet Developed Goals and Measures for Assessing Efforts and Identifying Resource Needs under the Fiscal Year 2012-2016 Strategic Plan

In December 2012, we reported on Border Patrol's efforts to develop performance goals and measures for assessing the progress of its efforts to secure the border between ports of entry and for informing the identification and allocation of resources needed to secure the border.¹⁷ We found that until fiscal year end 2010, DHS used Border Patrol's goal and performance measure of operational control as the publicly reported DHS goal and outcome measure for border security and to assess resource needs to accomplish this goal.¹⁸ We had previously testified in February 2011 that at the time this goal and measure was discontinued at the end of fiscal year 2010, Border Patrol reported achieving varying levels of operational control of 873 (44 percent) of the nearly 2,000 southwest border miles.¹⁹ Border Patrol officials attributed the uneven progress across sectors to multiple factors, including terrain, transportation infrastructure on both sides of the border, and a need to prioritize resource deployment to sectors deemed to have greater risk of illegal activity.

DHS transitioned from using operational control as its goal and outcome measure for border security in its Fiscal Year 2010-2012 Annual Performance Report. Specifically, citing a need to establish a new border security goal and measure that reflected a more quantitative methodology as well as the department's evolving vision for border control, DHS established the interim performance goal and measure of the number of apprehensions between the land border ports of entry until a new border control goal and measure could be developed. We testified in May 2012 that the interim goal and measure provided information on activity levels, but did not inform program results or resource identification and allocation decisions, and therefore, until new goals and measures could be developed, DHS and Congress could experience reduced oversight and DHS accountability.²⁰ Further, studies commissioned by CBP documented that the number of apprehensions bore little relationship to

¹⁷See [GAO-13-25](#).

¹⁸Border Patrol sector officials assessed the miles under operational control using factors such as operational statistics, third-party indicators, intelligence and operational reports, resource deployments, and discussions with senior Border Patrol agents.

¹⁹GAO, *Border Security: Preliminary Observations on Border Control Measures for the Southwest Border*, [GAO-11-374T](#) (Washington D.C.: Feb. 15, 2011).

²⁰GAO, *Border Patrol Strategy: Progress and Challenges in Implementation and Assessment Efforts*, [GAO-12-688T](#) (Washington D.C.: May 8, 2012).

effectiveness because agency officials did not compare these numbers with the amount of cross-border illegal activity.²¹

In our December 2012 report, we found that Border Patrol was in the process of developing performance goals and measures for assessing the progress of its efforts to secure the border between ports of entry and for informing the identification and allocation of resources needed to secure the border, but had not identified milestones and time frames for developing and implementing them. According to Border Patrol officials, establishing milestones and time frames for the development of performance goals and measures was contingent on the development of key elements of the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, such as a risk assessment tool, and the agency's time frames for implementing these key elements—targeted for fiscal years 2013 and 2014—were subject to change. Specifically, under the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, the Border Patrol planned to continuously evaluate border security—and resource needs—by comparing changes in risk levels against available resources across border locations. Border Patrol officials stated that the agency was in the process of identifying performance goals and measures that could be linked to the new risk assessment tools that would show progress and status in securing the border between ports of entry, and determine needed resources, but had not established milestones and time frames for developing and implementing goals and measures because the agency's time frames for implementing key elements of the plan were subject to change.²²

We recommended in our December 2012 report that Border Patrol establish milestones and time frames for developing a (1) performance goal, or goals, for border security between the ports of entry that defines how border security is to be measured and (2) performance measure, or measures—linked to a performance goal or goals—for assessing progress made in securing the border between ports of entry and

²¹For example, see Homeland Security Institute, *Measuring the Effect of the Arizona Border Control Initiative* (Arlington, Va.: Oct. 18, 2005).

²²Border Patrol officials stated that DHS and Border Patrol had established a performance goal—linked to relevant measures—addressing border security that, as of October 2012, was being used as an internal management indicator. However, a DHS official said it had not been decided whether this goal and the associated measures would be publicly reported or used as an overall performance goal and as measures for border security.

informing resource identification and allocation efforts.²³ DHS agreed with these recommendations and since our December 2012 report, has added performance measures for border security to its Annual Performance Report. In its Fiscal Year 2015-2017 Annual Performance Report, these measures included the percent of people apprehended multiple times on the southwest border and the rate of effectiveness in responding to illegal activity. Further, as part of its efforts to revise the Border Patrol strategic plan, Border Patrol has developed outcome measures for each of 14 objectives, and according to officials, Border Patrol continues to work toward the development of goals and measures to support its overarching performance goal of low-risk borders. Until these new goals and measures are in place, it is unknown the extent to which they will address our past findings and would provide DHS and Congress with information on the results of CBP efforts to secure the border between ports of entry and the extent to which existing resources and capabilities are appropriate and sufficient.

Chairman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and members of the subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or members of the committee may have.

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions about this statement, please contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals making key contributions to this statement included David Alexander; Cindy Ayers; Tom Lombardi; Krista Mantsch; Jon Najmi; and Edith Sohna.

²³[GAO-13-25](#).

GAO Related Products

Border Security: Progress and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Implement and Assess Infrastructure and Technology, [GAO-15-595T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 13, 2015).

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