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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-07-89](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Because terrorists do not operate on a 9-5 schedule, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its operational components have established information gathering and analysis centers that conduct activities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Staff at these operations centers work to help detect, deter, and prevent terrorist acts. DHS has determined that out of 25 operations centers, four require higher levels of collaboration that can only be provided by personnel from multiple DHS agencies, and other federal, and sometimes state and local, agencies. For these four multi-agency operations centers, this report (1) describes their missions, products, functions, and customers and (2) assesses the extent to which DHS efforts to promote collaboration among the multiple agencies responsible for the centers reflect key practices for enhancing and sustaining collaborative efforts. To do so, GAO visited operations centers, reviewed data and reports from the centers, and interviewed center and other DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of the DHS Operations Directorate provide guidance to multi-agency operations centers to implement key practices to enhance and sustain collaboration. DHS agreed with our recommendations and identified a number of actions that the Operations Directorate plans to take to enhance collaboration.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-89.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Paul L. Jones at (202) 512-8777 or jonespl@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Opportunities Exist to Enhance Collaboration at 24/7 Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies

What GAO Found

Each of the four multi-agency 24/7/365 operations centers has a different mission and therefore produces different products, yet all contribute to the larger mission of DHS and have similar functions and customers. Customs and Border Protection runs two of the four multi-agency operations centers—the National Targeting Center and the Air and Marine Operations Center. The former monitors the international movement of potential terrorists and produces reports on suspect individuals; the latter maintains situational awareness of the nation's airspace, general aviation, and searlanes and produces reports on suspicious private air and marine craft. The Transportation Security Administration's operations center monitors passengers on commercial flights; works to mitigate the vulnerabilities of commercial airports, rail stations, and pipelines, the National Capital Region, and critical infrastructure across the nation; and produces reports on these topics. DHS's Operations Directorate runs the National Operations Center Interagency Watch and works to enhance efficiency and collaboration among DHS components. This operations center has a more strategic mission in that it uses information gathered by the other operations centers to provide overall national situational awareness, and it prepares security briefs for federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

Opportunities exist to enhance collaboration among 24/7/365 multi-agency operations centers. While DHS has leveraged resources by having staff from multiple agencies work together, the centers lack joint strategies for collaboration and staffing needs assessments, and they have not established a definition of watchstander roles for all agencies at each center. The centers also lack standards and procedures for using DHS's primary information sharing network; mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results; and reinforced accountability through agency plans and reports. GAO's previous work has shown that such practices are effective in enhancing and sustaining collaboration among federal agencies. The establishment of DHS's Operations Directorate in 2005 provides a means to promote implementation of more collaborative practices at the centers.

Staff Working to Maintain Situational Awareness at Operations Centers



Sources: From left to right: TSA and CBP.