



Highlights of [GAO-08-252](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) established U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to conduct homeland defense and civil support missions in and around the United States. It is important that NORTHCOM coordinate with the National Guard Bureau (NGB), because NGB has experience dealing with state and local authorities during incidents and functions as NORTHCOM's formal link to the states. GAO was asked to (1) determine the extent to which NORTHCOM has ongoing efforts to coordinate with the states and NGB in planning, exercises and other preparedness activities and (2) identify the extent to which there are any gaps in this coordination. To do this, GAO surveyed the state adjutants general, the highest ranking guardsman in each state, and received a 100 percent response rate, and reviewed interagency coordination plans and guidance.

## What GAO Recommends

To improve NORTHCOM's coordination with the states, GAO recommends that NORTHCOM develop an established and thorough process to guide its coordination with the states. To improve the command's coordination with NGB, GAO recommends that NORTHCOM and NGB revise their agreement to more fully and clearly define how they will coordinate and the responsibilities each will have. DOD generally agreed with our recommendations and suggested ongoing and future efforts to satisfy the intent of the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-252](#). For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND DEFENSE

### Steps Have Been Taken to Improve U.S. Northern Command's Coordination with States and the National Guard Bureau, but Gaps Remain

#### What GAO Found

NORTHCOM has several ongoing efforts to improve coordination with the states and NGB in planning for its missions and responding to requests for civil support. For example, during hurricane season NORTHCOM facilitates weekly conferences with the relevant local, state, and federal emergency management officials, through which it has begun to build more productive relationships. NORTHCOM also conducted two large-scale exercises and participated in over 30 smaller regional, state, and local exercises annually to help responders prepare for man-made and natural disasters. In addition, NORTHCOM has been informally including NGB in reviewing its plans.

We identified gaps in coordination between NORTHCOM, the states, and NGB in three areas.

- NORTHCOM officials minimally involved the states in the development of its homeland defense and civil support plans. Less than 25 percent of the state adjutants general reported that they were involved in developing and reviewing these plans. For civil support, NORTHCOM officials told us that they are reaching out directly to states to better understand states' plans and capabilities, but for homeland defense, they rely on NGB to provide states' perspectives.
- NORTHCOM was not familiar with state emergency response plans and has no process for obtaining this information. Fifty-four percent of the state adjutants general reported that they believed that NORTHCOM was not at all or only slightly familiar with their states' emergency response plans. This may be attributable, in part, to the fact that NORTHCOM does not have an established and thorough process for cooperating and interacting with the states. By not obtaining and using information on states' plans and capabilities, NORTHCOM increases the risk that it will not be prepared to respond to an incident with the needed resources to support civil authorities.
- A 2005 agreement, which is intended to provide the procedures by which NORTHCOM and NGB interact, does not clearly define each agency's roles and responsibilities for planning for homeland defense and civil support. The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities has resulted in confusion and duplicative or wasted efforts. For example, as required in NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan, NGB compiled the states' homeland defense plans and made them available to NORTHCOM; however, NORTHCOM planners told us that they neither requested nor needed access to this information. Without clearly defined roles and responsibilities, there is a risk that NORTHCOM's and NGB's responses to an event could be fragmented and uncoordinated.

Addressing these gaps could help integrate intergovernmental planning for catastrophic incidents, enhance overall coordination, and help ensure that NORTHCOM's plans for its missions and responses to incidents are as effective as possible.