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Testimony

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COMBATING TERRORISM

Observations on National  
Strategies Related to  
Terrorism

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to participate in this hearing on national strategies related to combating terrorism. More than 2 years ago, in July 2000, GAO testified before this subcommittee on this very topic and cited concerns over a potential proliferation of overarching national strategies.<sup>1</sup> At that time, we stated that there should be only one national strategy to combat terrorism. We added that additional planning guidance (e.g., at more detailed levels for specific functions) should fall under the one national strategy in a clear hierarchy. My testimony today is based upon GAO's body of work for this and other committees and subcommittees conducted over the past 6 years—much of it related to national strategies and their implementation. At the end of my statement is a list of related GAO products.

Over the last year or so, the administration developed and published several new national strategies related to combating terrorism. This constellation of strategies generally replaces a single strategy issued in December 1998—the Attorney General's *Five-Year Interagency Counterterrorism and Technology Crime Plan*—that focused on federal efforts. To date, we have identified 10 other national strategies related to terrorism

- *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002;
- *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, July 2002;
- *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003;
- *National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, September 1997;
- *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, October 2002;
- *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*, December 2002;
- *National Money Laundering Strategy*, July 2002;
- *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace*, February 2003;
- *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets*, February 2003; and
- *National Drug Control Strategy*, February 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Linking Threats to Strategies and Resources* [GAO/T-NSIAD-00-218](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 26, 2000).

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In my statement today, after providing some background on the strategies, I will discuss the questions raised in your letter inviting GAO to testify. I have divided the five hearing questions into two major topics. The first major topic addresses whether the new national strategies form a framework that is cohesive and comprehensive. The second major topic addresses whether the strategies will facilitate implementation of programs that are strategy-driven, integrated, and effective. Both topics present difficult questions to answer definitively at this point. The strategies by themselves, no matter how cohesive and comprehensive, will not ensure a strategy-driven, integrated, and effective set of programs to combat terrorism. The ultimate value of these strategies will be in their implementation. Also related to implementation, 9 of the 10 strategies are less than 14 months old, and 3 are less than 1 month old. Notwithstanding these limitations, I will provide GAO's observations to date on these strategies.

In our past work, we have stressed the importance of a national strategy to combat terrorism.<sup>2</sup> We stated that such a national strategy should provide a clear statement about what the nation hopes to achieve. A national strategy should not only define the roles of federal agencies, but also those of state and local governments, the private sector, and the international community. A national strategy also should establish goals, objectives, priorities, outcomes, milestones, and performance measures. In essence, a national strategy should incorporate the principles of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which requires federal agencies to set strategic goals, measure performance, and report on the degree to which goals are met.<sup>3</sup>

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## Summary

We view the new strategies as a positive step forward. While it will take some time for us to fully evaluate whether they form a cohesive and comprehensive framework, there are some positive indications. The new strategies show cohesion in that they are organized in a hierarchy, share common themes, and cross-reference each other. For example, they provide high-level goals and objectives on the issues of national security in general, and how combating terrorism fits into that larger picture, how to provide for homeland security, and how to combat terrorism overseas. In

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Selected Challenges and Related Recommendations*, GAO-01-822 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> P.L. 103-62 (Aug. 3, 1993).

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addition, they provide more detailed goals and objectives for specific functions or areas that include military operations, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), money laundering, cyber security, and the protection of physical infrastructures. In addition, the collective strategies are more comprehensive than the single strategy they generally replace because, consistent with our earlier recommendations, they include not just the federal government, but also state and local governments, the private sector, and the international community.

There will be many challenges to implementing these strategies in a manner that is strategy-driven, integrated, and effective. Given the recency of these strategies, it is premature to evaluate their collective implementation.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the question of whether these strategies are driving programs, it is important to note that these strategies reflect a host of pre-existing programs: Some of the programs to implement the new strategies have been in place for several years. Nonetheless, the strategies address the implementation of some programs more vigorously than before. Regarding the integration of programs, it is important that federal agencies have clear roles and responsibilities to combat terrorism. Given the number of agencies, it is also important that there be mechanisms to coordinate across agencies. We have identified federal agency roles and responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for both homeland security and combating terrorism overseas and will continue to evaluate their effectiveness. For example, we recently have designated the implementation and transformation of the Department of Homeland Security as a high-risk federal activity. Moreover, implementation must extend beyond the federal level to integrate these efforts with state and local governments, the private sector, and the international community. Regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, performance measures will be important to monitor the successes of programs. One key to assessing overall performance that we previously have identified is that strategies should define an end-state—what the strategies are trying to achieve. Some strategies meet this test, but they generally do not include detailed performance measures. This raises the importance of individual federal agencies having performance measures and reporting their progress. Beyond federal agencies, national measures of success may require a dialogue on appropriate performance measures for state and local

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<sup>4</sup> However, GAO does have a variety of work recently published or under way to look at more specific strategies and functions related to combating terrorism and homeland security. See the attached list of related GAO products.

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governments, the private sector, and the international community. The Congress also has an important role in authorizing, funding, and overseeing the implementation of these strategies to protect the American people from terrorism both at home and abroad.

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## Background on National Strategies Related to Terrorism

National efforts to combat terrorism derive from a series of presidential directives going back at least as far as 1986. The previous administration issued a federal strategy for combating terrorism—the Attorney General’s *Five-Year Interagency Counterterrorism and Technology Crime Plan*—in 1998.<sup>5</sup> The Congress mandated this plan, which was intended to serve as a baseline strategy for coordination of national policy and operational capabilities to combat terrorism both at home and abroad.<sup>6</sup> The Department of Justice said that plan, in combination with several related presidential directives, represented a comprehensive national strategy. The plan identified several high-level goals aimed at preventing and deterring terrorism, maximizing international cooperation to combat terrorism, improving domestic crisis and consequence planning and management, improving state and local capabilities, safeguarding information infrastructure, and leading research and development efforts to enhance counterterrorism capabilities. The plan set forth efforts by the Department of Justice in partnership with other federal agencies to improve readiness to address the terrorist threat. The Department of Justice issued annual updates to the *Five-Year Plan* in 1999 and 2000, which did not revise the basic plan but tracked agencies’ progress in implementing the original plan. More recently, Justice Department officials told us they are no longer providing annual updates because other interagency plans have been released, as discussed below.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, a series of new national strategies were developed and published to help guide U.S. policy. Some of these national strategies are specific to combating terrorism,

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<sup>5</sup> Another earlier and related plan was the *International Crime Control Strategy*, released in May 1998. While not specific to terrorism, this plan had 8 overarching goals and 30 implementing objectives related to international crime. For more information, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *International Crime Control: Sustained Executive-Level Coordination of Federal Response Needed*, [GAO-01-629](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 13, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Conference Committee Report (House Report 105-405), Nov. 13, 1997, accompanying the Fiscal Year 1998 Appropriations Act for the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State; the Judiciary; and related agencies (P.L. 105-119), Nov. 26, 1997.

while others involve terrorism to lesser degrees. Table 1 describes various national strategies related to combating terrorism.

**Table 1: National Strategies Related to Combating Terrorism**

Strategy	Description of strategy
<p><i>National Security Strategy of the United States of America</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the President, September 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document provides a broad framework for strengthening U.S. security in the future. It identifies the national security goals of the United States, describes the foreign policy and military capabilities necessary to achieve those goals, evaluates the current status of these capabilities, and explains how national power will be structured to utilize these capabilities. It devotes a chapter to combating terrorism that focuses on the disruption and destruction of terrorist organizations, the winning of the “war of ideas,” the strengthening of homeland security, and the fostering cooperation with allies and international organizations to combat terrorism.</p>
<p><i>National Strategy for Homeland Security</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the President, July 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document addresses the threat of terrorism within the United States by organizing the domestic efforts of federal, state, local, and private organizations. Although mostly domestic in focus, this strategy mentions various initiatives related to combating terrorism overseas, including: negotiating new international standards for travel documents, improving security for international shipping containers, enhancing cooperation with foreign law enforcement agencies, expanding specialized training and assistance to allies, and increasing the security of transnational infrastructure. The strategy stresses the importance of expanding international cooperation in research and development and enhancing the coordination of incident response. Finally, the strategy recommends reviewing current international treaties and law to determine where improvements could be made.</p>
<p><i>National Strategy for Combating Terrorism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the President, February 2003</li> </ul>	<p>This document elaborates on the terrorism aspects of the <i>National Security Strategy of the United States of America</i> by expounding on the need to destroy terrorist organizations, win the “war of ideas,” and strengthen security at home and abroad. Unlike the <i>National Strategy for Homeland Security</i> that focuses on preventing terrorist attacks within the United States, the <i>National Strategy for Combating Terrorism</i> focuses on identifying and defusing threats before they reach the borders of the United States. In that sense, although it has defensive elements, this strategy is an offensive strategy to complement the defensive <i>National Strategy for Homeland Security</i>.</p>
<p><i>National Military Strategy of the United States of America</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 1997</li> </ul>	<p>This document sets the strategic direction for all aspects of the Armed Forces. This includes force structure, acquisition, and doctrine as well as the strategic environment. The 1997 strategy notes the rising danger of asymmetric threats, such as terrorism. The strategy stresses the need for the military to adapt its doctrine, training, and equipment to ensure a rapid and effective joint and interagency response to these threats.</p>
<p><i>National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document provides a framework to guide the conduct of the “war on terrorism” by U.S. Armed Forces. It provides specific guidance from which regional commanders, the military services, and other agencies can formulate their own individual action plans. Individual regional commands drafted their own campaign plans in response to this plan. For example, one regional command plans to conduct maritime interception operations to disrupt terrorists’ use of commercial shipping to transport people and material.</p>
<p><i>National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issued by the President, December 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document presents a national strategy to combat weapons of mass destruction through three major efforts: (1) nonproliferation, (2) counterproliferation, and (3) consequence management in WMD incidents. The plan addresses the production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among states, as well as the potential threat of terrorists using WMD agents.</p>

Strategy	Description of strategy
<p><i>National Money Laundering Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General, July 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document is intended to support planning for the efforts of law enforcement agencies, regulatory officials, the private sector, and overseas entities to combat the laundering of money generated from criminal activities. Although the 2002 strategy still addresses general criminal financial activity, that plan is the first to outline a major governmentwide strategy to combat terrorist financing. The strategy discusses the need to adapt traditional methods of combating money laundering to unconventional tools used by terrorist organizations to finance their operations.</p>
<p><i>National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued by the President, February 2003</li> </ul>	<p>This document is intended to provide an initial framework for both organizing and prioritizing efforts to protect our nation's critical cyber infrastructures. Also, it is to provide direction to federal departments and agencies that have roles in cyberspace security and to identify steps that state and local governments, private companies and organizations, and individual Americans can take to improve the nation's collective cybersecurity. The strategy is organized according to five national priorities, with major actions and initiatives identified for each. These priorities are: (1) a National Cyberspace Security Response System, (2) a National Cyberspace Security Threat and Vulnerability Reduction Program, (3) a National Cyberspace Security Awareness and Training Program, (4) Securing Governments' Cyberspace, and (5) National Security and International Cyberspace Security Cooperation. In describing the threats and vulnerabilities for the nation's cyberspace, the strategy highlights the potential for damage to U.S. information systems from attacks by overseas terrorist organizations.</p>
<p><i>National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued by the President, February 2003</li> </ul>	<p>This document provides a statement of national policy to remain committed to protecting critical infrastructures and key assets from terrorist attacks, and it is based on eight guiding principles, including establishing responsibility and accountability, encouraging and facilitating partnering among all levels of government and between government and industry, and encouraging market solutions wherever possible and government intervention when needed. The strategy also establishes three strategic objectives. The first is to identify and assure the protection of the most critical assets, systems, and functions, in terms of national-level public health and safety, governance, and economic and national security and public confidence. The second is to assure protection of infrastructures and assets facing specific, imminent threats. The third is to pursue collaborative measures and initiatives to assure the protection of other potential targets that may become attractive over time.</p>
<p><i>National Drug Control Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued by the President, February 2002</li> </ul>	<p>This document sets specific national goals for reducing drug use in America. The report underscores the need for international law enforcement cooperation to combat this problem. Although the plan does not directly deal with combating terrorism, it highlights drug revenue as a source of funding for 12 of the 28 international terrorist groups identified by the Department of State.</p>

Source: Published national strategies.

Note: GAO analysis of published national strategies.

## Some Strategies Define Terrorism and Include an Assessment of the Threat

The *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* all define terrorism. For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* characterizes terrorism as “any premeditated, unlawful act dangerous to human life or public welfare that is intended to intimidate or coerce civilian populations or governments.” This description, according to that strategy, captures the core concepts shared by the various definitions of terrorism contained in the U.S. Code,

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each crafted to achieve a legal standard of specificity and clarity. This description covers kidnappings; hijackings; shootings; conventional bombings; attacks involving chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons; cyber attacks; and any number of other forms of malicious violence. Terrorists can be U.S. citizens or foreigners, acting in concert with others, on their own, or on behalf of a hostile state.

Commonly accepted definitions of such terms as terrorism and homeland security help provide assurance that organizational, management, and budgetary decisions are made consistently across the organizations involved in a crosscutting effort. For example, they help guide agencies in organizing and allocating resources and can help promote more effective agency and intergovernmental operations by facilitating communication. A common definition also can help to enforce budget discipline and support more accurate monitoring of expenditures. Without commonly accepted definitions, the potential exists for an uncoordinated approach to combating terrorism caused by duplication of efforts or gaps in coverage, misallocation of resources, and inadequate monitoring of expenditures. We previously recommended that the President direct the Office of Homeland Security to (1) develop a comprehensive, governmentwide definition of homeland security and (2) include the definition in the [then] forthcoming national strategy.<sup>7</sup> Both recommendations were implemented with the publication of the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*.

As we have testified before this subcommittee, an important step in developing sound strategies to combat terrorism is to develop a thorough assessment of the terrorist threat. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies continuously assess the foreign and domestic terrorist threats to the United States. To be considered a threat, a terrorist group must not only exist, but also have the intention and capability to launch attacks.<sup>8</sup> In prior reports, we have recommended that the federal government conduct multidisciplinary and analytically sound threat assessments. Threat assessments are part of a risk management approach that can be used to

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security: Key Elements to Unify Efforts Are Underway but Uncertainty Remains*, [GAO-02-610](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 7, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Other factors to consider in analyzing threats include a terrorist group's history, its targeting, and the security environment in which it operates.



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establish requirements and prioritize program investments.<sup>9</sup> In 1999 we recommended that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conduct a national-level authoritative threat assessment.<sup>10</sup> According to FBI officials, they have recently completed their threat assessment related to our recommendation. We are in the process of reviewing the assessment to determine the extent it is consistent with our recommendation. We hope that such an assessment will be kept up to date and used to further develop and implement the new national strategies related to combating terrorism.

Some of the new strategies we reviewed include some assessment of the threat. While some of the new strategies lay out the nature of the threats and the vulnerabilities in detail, others briefly describe the threat in general terms. For example, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* discusses the nature of the terrorist threat today, including the structure of terrorism, the changing nature of terrorism, the interconnected terrorist organizations, the availability of weapons of mass destruction, and the new global environment. Some strategies describe both the threat of and vulnerability to terrorist attacks. For example, the *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace* discusses cyberspace threats and vulnerabilities facing the United States. It lays out the threats and vulnerabilities as a five-level problem—home user/small business, large enterprises, critical sectors and/or infrastructures, national issues and vulnerabilities, and global. Also, the *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets* and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* discuss both the threat and vulnerability of a terrorist attack. Other strategies we reviewed only briefly described the threat or simply defined the threat in general terms. For example, the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* defined the threat, while the *National Money Laundering Strategy* provided limited discussion about the nature and extent of the threat.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on a risk management approach, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Threat and Risk Assessments Can Help Prioritize and Target Program Investments*, [GAO/NSIAD-98-74](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 9, 1998) and U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security: A Risk Management Approach Can Guide Preparedness Efforts*, [GAO-02-208T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 31, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Need for Comprehensive Threat and Risk Assessments of Chemical and Biological Attacks*, [GAO/NSIAD-99-163](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 7, 1999).

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## New Strategies Form Framework

Now I will discuss the key topics that the subcommittee wants to address in this hearing, starting with the question of whether the new national strategies form a cohesive and comprehensive framework. While it will take some time for us to fully answer this question, we view the new strategies, and the framework they provide, as a positive step. The new strategies show cohesion in that they are organized in a hierarchy, share common themes, and cross-reference each other. In addition, the collective strategies are more comprehensive than the single strategy they generally replace because they include more detailed functions and more players.

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## New Strategies Show Cohesion through Hierarchy, Common Themes, and Linkages

In our analysis, we found specific indicators that the strategies form a cohesive framework. For the purpose of this testimony, we are defining cohesiveness as the extent that the strategies have some hierarchy, share common themes, and link to each other.

Regarding a hierarchy among strategies, I would like to again reference our July 2000 testimony. At that time, we stated that there should be one national strategy to combat terrorism with additional planning guidance (e.g., for specific functions) under the one strategy in a clear hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> While the administration has not taken that exact path, its approach is similar. The *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* provides the overarching strategy related to national security as a whole, including terrorism. The *National Strategy for Homeland Security* and the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* provide, respectively, the more specific strategies related to combating terrorism at home and overseas. This differs from what we had envisioned in that there are two top-level strategies dedicated to terrorism instead of one. However, this approach is consistent with our earlier views because the two strategies cover separate topics—the first covers defensive domestic issues and the

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<sup>11</sup> In that testimony, we also cited the potential danger from a proliferation of overarching national strategies to combat terrorism. At that time, the National Security Council and the FBI were planning to develop national strategies that would potentially compete with the Attorney General's *Five-Year Counterterrorism and Technology Crime Plan*. The recent constellation of new strategies generally is coordinated out of the Executive Office of the President or addresses different specific functions or subsets of combating terrorism.

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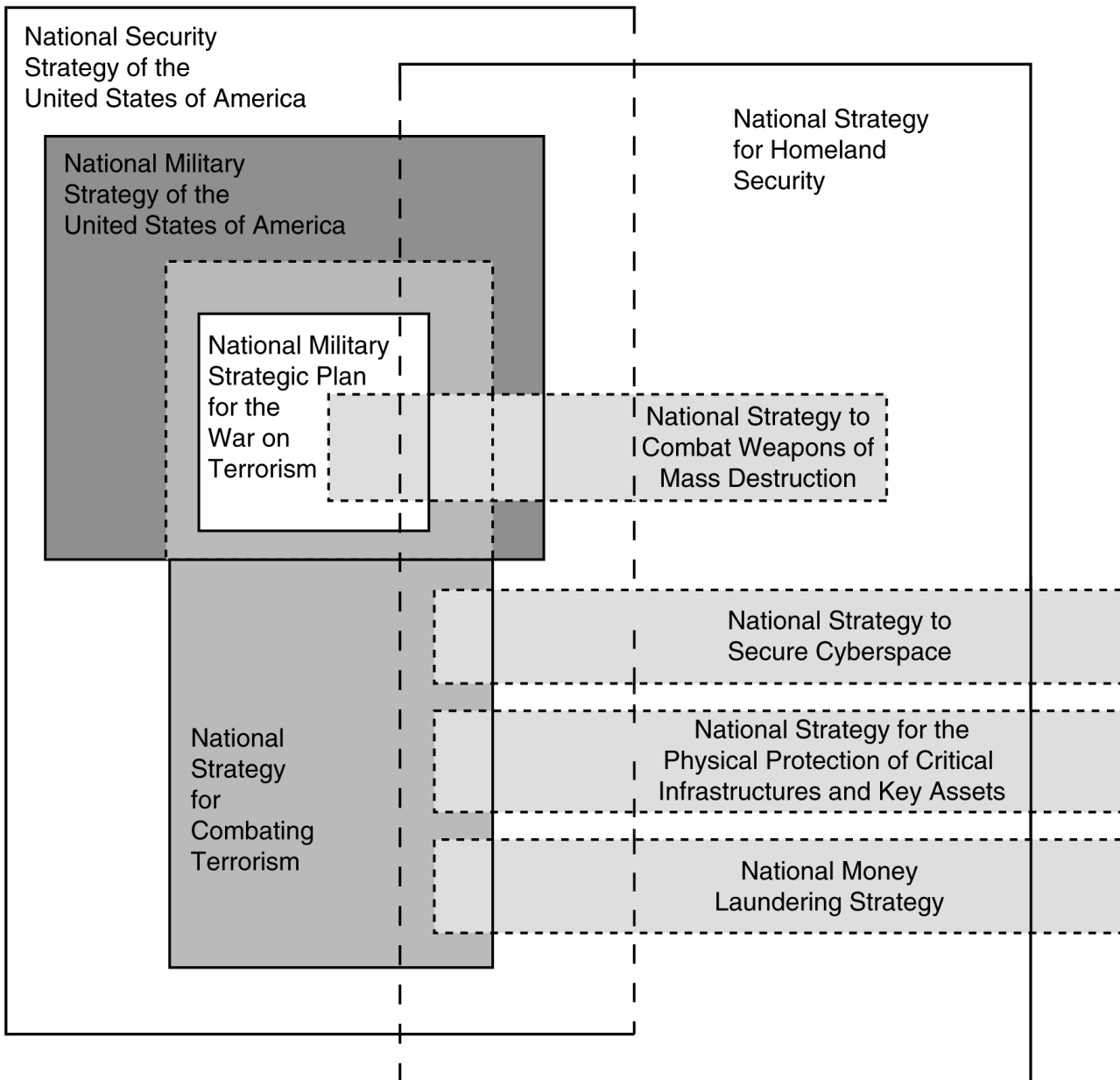
second covers offensive overseas issues.<sup>12</sup> The other strategies provide further levels of detail on the specific functions related to military operations, money laundering, weapons of mass destruction, cyber security, and protection of physical infrastructure.

Our interpretation of the hierarchy among strategies is somewhat different from how the administration has presented it. According to the administration, the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* are top-level strategies that together address U.S. security both overseas and domestically. According to the administration, these two strategies establish a framework that takes precedence over *all* other national strategies, plans, and programs. However, we do not view the hierarchy as that absolute because some strategies contain independent elements that do not overlap with the other strategies. For an example of the latter, both the *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace* and the *National Money Laundering Strategy* include some domestic criminal elements not associated with national security or terrorism. Further, the *National Drug Control Strategy* has relatively little overlap with these other strategies. Figure 1 is an attempt to display graphically how some of these national strategies fit into a hierarchy and overlap.

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<sup>12</sup> We recognize that this characterization of the strategies simplifies a complex relationship between the two. Both strategies contain both defensive and offensive elements. For example, while we characterize the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* as mainly defensive, it includes offensive initiatives to target and attack terrorist financing, and to track foreign terrorists and bring them to justice. Similarly, while we characterize the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* as mainly offensive, it includes defensive objectives to implement the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* and to protect U.S. citizens abroad.

**Figure 1: Relationships between and among National Strategies Related to Combating Terrorism**



Source: Published national strategies.

Note: This graphic is intended to show relationships and overlaps among these national strategies. The sizes and shapes of the boxes are not meant to imply the relative importance of all the strategies.

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Within the hierarchy of strategies, more detailed functional strategies might be useful, as illustrated by the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*. In our August 2002, report on the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration's research and development (R&D) program, we recommended that the Office of Homeland Security clarify that agency's Nonproliferation and Verification R&D Program's role in relation to other agencies conducting counterterrorism R&D and to achieve an appropriate balance between short-term and long-term research.<sup>13</sup> We also reported that there is a conflict among Department of Energy laboratories between short- versus long-term research and that this conflict has created a gap in which the most important immediate needs of users, or highest risks, are in some cases going unaddressed in favor of an advanced technology that only can be delivered over the long term. The *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* addresses our concerns, in part, by noting that the new Counterproliferation Technology Coordination Committee will act to improve interagency coordination of U.S. government counterproliferation research and development efforts. The committee is expected to assist in identifying gaps and overlaps in existing programs and in examining options for future investment strategies.

The various strategies also show cohesion by sharing common themes. For example, nearly all of the strategies contain either goals or objectives relating to strengthening international relationships and cooperation and strengthening intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities, while just over half of the strategies contain either goals or objectives relevant to the strengthening of capabilities to deter, prevent, and respond to weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, among the four strategies most relevant to homeland security—the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, the *National Strategy for Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets*, the *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace*, and the *National Money Laundering Strategy*—all contain a number of additional, similar themes. With the exception of the *National Money Laundering Strategy*, which does not address critical infrastructure and key asset protection, all of these homeland security-related strategies contain either goals or objectives aimed at strengthening intergovernmental and private sector relationships, critical infrastructure and key asset protection, and

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office *Nonproliferation R&D: NNSA's Program Develops Successful Technologies, but Project Management Can Be Strengthened*, [GAO-02-904](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 23, 2002).

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information-sharing capabilities. Similarly, among the strategies more relevant to combating terrorism overseas—such as the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*, and the *National Military Strategy of the United States of America*—all contain either goals or objectives relating to strengthening international relationships; strengthening intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities; and improving capabilities to deter, prevent, and respond to weapons of mass destruction. As mentioned earlier, the *National Drug Control Strategy* has relatively little overlap with the other strategies. It does not share many of these themes—with the exception of strengthening border control capabilities and, to some extent, the strengthening of international relationships and cooperation.

In addition, the strategies show evidence of cohesion through linkages among them. These linkages occur through specific citations and cross-references from one document to another. At least half of the strategies cite either the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* or the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. The most extensively linked strategies include the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, and the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Strategies that cover topics beyond terrorism, such as criminal law enforcement, are less extensively linked to these documents. For example, the *National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace* and the *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets* solely cite each other and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. The *National Drug Control Strategy* and the *National Money Laundering Strategy* contain no explicit linkages to any of the other strategies, but are referenced in the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. There are some areas where linkages could be improved. For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* is the only strategy to explicitly cite virtually all of the strategies and explain their relationships to it and to one another. Some strategies contain broad themes that are covered in more detail by other strategies, but do not cite these documents. For instance, although the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* mentions the topic of terrorist financing, it does not mention the *National Money Laundering Strategy*. Nevertheless, it mentions the *National Drug Control Strategy*, a document with considerably less thematic overlap in terms of terrorism. The *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* covers many broad strategic themes, but refers to no other national strategies, although many of the strategies refer back to it.

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## New Strategies Include Key Functions and Organizations

Potential indicators of comprehensiveness are whether the strategies include all relevant functions and organizations. As stated earlier, they collectively provide not only the broader context of combating terrorism, but also the more detailed strategies for the functions of military operations, money laundering, weapons of mass destruction, cyber security, and protection of physical infrastructure. While parts of the strategies overlap, GAO has not yet done a complete analysis to determine whether gaps exist in the collective coverage of these strategies. However, some of our work for this subcommittee indicates that intelligence is a critical function that cuts across all the other strategies, but does not have a strategy itself related to terrorism, at least according to Central Intelligence Agency officials with whom we spoke.

Regarding the inclusion of all relevant organizations, the collective strategies are more comprehensive than the Attorney General's *Five-Year Interagency Counterterrorism and Technology Crime Plan* that they generally replaced. In our September 2001 report on combating domestic terrorism, we had characterized this plan as a "federal" plan and not a "national" plan because it did not include state and local governments, where appropriate.<sup>14</sup> In addition, our more recent work on homeland security stressed the need for partnerships with state and local governments and the private sector.<sup>15</sup> Consistent with GAO's earlier findings and recommendations, some of the new strategies include not just the federal government, but also these other players as well as the international community.

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## Potential Challenges in Implementing the Strategies

The strategies by themselves, no matter how cohesive and comprehensive, will not ensure a strategy-driven, integrated, and effective set of programs to combat terrorism. The ability to ensure these things will be determined through time as the strategies are implemented. Given that these strategies are relatively new, GAO has not yet evaluated their implementation, either individually or collectively. However, we have done work that demonstrates the federal government, and the nation as a whole, will face many implementation challenges. For example, we have designated the implementation and transformation of the Department of Homeland

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<sup>14</sup> See [GAO-01-822](#).

<sup>15</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security: Management Challenges Facing Federal Leadership*, [GAO-03-260](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 20, 2002).

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Security as a high-risk federal activity. The Congress also will play a key role in implementing these strategies.

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### New Strategies Reflect Long-Standing Programs

Regarding the question of whether these strategies are driving programs, it is important to note that these new strategies reflect a host of pre-existing programs. For example, certain themes and related programs contained in the new strategies—preventing and deterring terrorism, maximizing international cooperation to combat terrorism, improving domestic crisis and consequence planning and management, improving state and local capabilities, safeguarding information infrastructure, and leading research and development efforts to enhance counterterrorism capabilities—were included in the Attorney General’s *Five-Year Interagency Counterterrorism and Technology Crime Plan*. Some of the related policies and programs have been in place for several years. For example, the State Department’s Antiterrorism Assistance Program, which provides assistance to other countries to improve their capabilities, has existed since 1983. In another example, federal assistance programs for state and local first responders to help them prepare to respond to weapons of mass destruction—the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici training—was established in 1996.

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### Implementation Requires Integration Among Many Sectors

Integrating federal agencies is a major challenge in implementing the new strategies. It is important, for example, that federal agencies have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The new strategies define the roles and responsibilities of agencies for functional areas to varying degrees. Some of the strategies described lead agency roles responsibilities in detail. For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* described lead agency responsibilities for various functional areas, such as intelligence and warning, border and transportation security, and protecting critical infrastructure and key assets. Other strategies, including the *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets* and the *National Money Laundering Strategy*, also identified key agencies’ roles and responsibilities in leading various functional areas. Other strategies we reviewed either were silent in terms of identifying agencies to lead functional areas or only generally described agency roles and responsibilities. For example, the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* focused more on areas of national priorities and initiatives and did not identify agency roles and responsibilities. In addition, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* only briefly identified lead functional areas for agencies. We recognize that documents other than these strategies, such as presidential directives, also assign agency roles.



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A key component in integrating federal agencies is interagency coordination. While the strategies generally do not address such coordination mechanisms, we identified them for both homeland security and combating terrorism overseas. Homeland security is coordinated through the Office of Homeland Security and the Homeland Security Council, which have 11 interagency working groups (called policy coordination committees) to manage crosscutting issues in such areas as detection, surveillance, and intelligence; law enforcement and investigation; and WMD consequence management. The Department of Homeland Security is responsible for coordination with other federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector. In addition, the new department will serve a coordination role by consolidating several agencies that currently are under separate departments. In combating terrorism overseas, the National Security Council plays a major coordinating role by sponsoring a policy coordination committee called the Counterterrorism Security Group, which has several subordinate interagency working groups on such topics as interagency exercises and assistance to other countries. Coordination overseas occurs in other ways as well, through interagency groups at U.S. embassies and regional military commands.

The challenge of integration goes beyond the federal level to include state and local governments, the private sector, and the international community. As mentioned earlier, the strategies do address these other entities, but in varying degrees of detail. For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* and the *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets* provide extended discussions of the importance of partnerships among various federal agencies, state and local governments, the private sector, and to a lesser degree, the international community. In contrast, the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* discusses the role of the international community in more general terms.

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### New Strategies Generally Do Not Include Performance Measures

Performance measures are important for monitoring the successes of strategies and their related programs. One key to assessing overall performance that we have previously called for in strategies is that they define an end-state—what a strategy is trying to achieve. Some of these strategies do this, although the clarity of their end-states varies considerably. For instance, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* details a very specific desired end-state where the scope and capabilities of global terrorist organizations are reduced until they become localized, unorganized, unsponsored, and rare enough that they can be

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dealt with exclusively by criminal law enforcement. Other end-states focus on federal capabilities, rather than the terrorist target. For example, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* stresses the need for a fully integrated national emergency response system that is adaptable enough to deal with any terrorist attack, no matter how unlikely or catastrophic. Finally, some end-states are more strategic in nature, the prime example belonging to the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, which seeks to create a “balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty.”

Although some strategies identify an end-state, most strategies lack detailed performance goals and measures to monitor and evaluate the success of combating terrorism programs. In our past work concerning a national strategy for homeland security, we said the national strategy should establish explicit national objectives, outcome-related goals, and performance measures to guide the nation’s homeland security efforts. This approach would provide a clearer statement on what the nation hopes to achieve through its programs to combat terrorism. The strategies generally describe overarching objectives and priorities, but not measurable outcomes. More explicit actions or initiatives in some of the plans begin to provide a greater sense of what is expected, but these often are in the form of activities or processes, which are not results-oriented outcomes. For example, the *National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets* discusses coordinating and consolidating federal and state protection plans, but does not give a clear description of the result of such coordination and consolidation. The *National Money Laundering Strategy* devotes a section to measuring effectiveness and calls for developing measures and institutionalizing systems for such measures.

The general lack of specific performance goals and measures in the strategies makes it more important that individual federal agencies have explicit performance goals and related measures. The primary vehicle for setting federal strategic and annual performance goals is the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, commonly referred to as GPRA or the Results Act.<sup>16</sup> The Results Act provides agencies with a systematic approach for managing programs. The Results Act’s principles include clarifying missions, developing a strategy, identifying goals and objectives,

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<sup>16</sup> P.L. 103-62 (Aug. 3, 1993).

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and establishing performance measures. We believe that federal agencies with national strategy responsibilities should address them through the Results Act process.

The Department of State is an example of an individual agency that has performance measures related to combating terrorism. The department's *Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2003* specifically identifies countering terrorism as one of the department's strategic goals. The goal is to reduce international terrorist attacks, especially against the United States and its citizens. To measure its progress toward achieving this goal, the department identified the following performance indicators and targets for fiscal year 2003:

- Some 25 bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism consultations will be completed.
- Some 96 countries will implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373, which requires all member states to suppress and prevent terrorism.
- Some 210 Antiterrorism Assistance training courses will be provided to 60 countries, with all programs reviewed within 18 months after the training. This training is expected to increase the ability of key countries to fight terrorism.
- The Foreign Emergency Support Team will deploy to participate in two of the Combatant Commanders' International Counterterrorism Exercises.
- All of the reviews of foreign terrorist organizations will be completed within 1 year.

Beyond federal agencies, national goals and measures of success may warrant a dialogue about performance goals and measures for nonfederal partners—state and local governments, the private sector, and the international community. In the absence of definitive nonfederal goal and measurement approaches, we believe there is a strong potential the national strategies will revert to primarily a federal responsibility. While this is a difficult area given federalism principles, international sovereignty, and private sector independence, national strategies to combat terrorism require national (and international) performance expectations if they are to be successfully implemented.

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## Many Other Management Issues Will Make Implementation a Challenge

In addition to the implementation issues in the subcommittee's letter—whether implementation will be strategy-driven, integrated, and effective—we have identified several other management challenges. Our previous work regarding homeland security and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security raised several issues that are applicable to implementing the new strategies.<sup>17</sup> We designated the implementation and transformation of the department as a high risk for three reasons. First, the size and complexity of the effort make the challenge especially daunting, requiring sustained attention and time to achieve the department's mission in an effective and efficient manner. Second, components being merged into the department already face a wide variety of existing challenges that must be addressed. Finally, the department's failure to effectively carry out its mission exposes the nation to potentially very serious consequences.

Successful implementation will require adherence to certain management practices and key success factors. These factors include strategic planning, risk management, information technology management, human capital strategy and management, and a variety of other critical management processes and tools that will improve opportunities for achieving significant combating-terrorism objectives. For example, strong financial management will be necessary to assure accountability over significant direct and indirect federal expenditures. Improvements in leveraging information technology also will be necessary to not only enhance the effective utilization of management systems, but also to increase information sharing among and between all parties. Additionally, implementing the strategic framework for combating terrorism will require addressing key, specific federal management capabilities. Some of the federal departments and agencies assigned to carry out the strategy face management challenges in administering their programs, managing their human capital, and implementing and securing information technology systems. Federal agencies will need to address these challenges as well as develop or enhance specific homeland security management capabilities, such as identifying threats, risks, vulnerabilities, and responses and effectively working in interagency, intergovernmental, and private sector relationships.

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Major Management Challenges and Program Risks: Department of Homeland Security*, [GAO-03-102](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2003); [GAO-03-260](#); and U.S. General Accounting Office, *Highlights of a GAO Forum: Mergers and Transformation: Lessons Learned for a Department of Homeland Security and Other Federal Agencies*, [GAO-03-293SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 14, 2002).

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Similarly, we must recognize that a number of agencies will face challenges in meeting dual or unrelated missions while maintaining and strengthening their combating terrorism operations. Additional actions to clarify missions and activities will be necessary, and some agencies will need to determine how best to support both combating terrorism and non-combating terrorism missions. For example, in a recent report we raised issues regarding the need for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and U.S. Coast Guard—both now part of the Department of Homeland Security—to balance multiple missions.<sup>18</sup> Creating an effective structure that is sensitive to balancing the needs of homeland security and non-homeland security functions will be critical to the successful implementation of the strategies.

Finally, many agencies tasked with carrying out the initiatives and objectives of the various strategies have long-standing human capital problems that will need to be addressed. One of these challenges has been the ability to hire and retain a talented and motivated staff. For example, we reported that the Immigration and Naturalization Service was unable to reach its program goals in large part because of such staffing problems as hiring shortfalls and agent attrition.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, to accomplish national and homeland security missions some agencies have recognized the need for new skills in the workforce. It is anticipated that agencies will need employees skilled in information technology, law enforcement, foreign languages, and other proficiencies. For example, we have reported that the FBI has an action plan to hire translators, interpreters, and special agents with language skills—areas where the federal government currently has a shortage.<sup>20</sup>

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## The Next Steps in Implementing Programs to Combat Terrorism

To implement the new constellation of national strategies, we see some additional next steps that should be taken. These are based upon our body of work on federal programs to combat terrorism. Among other unfinished business, the Executive Branch will have to (1) establish and refine performance measures, (2) establish milestones for completing tasks, (3)

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<sup>18</sup> [GAO-03-102](#).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Immigration Enforcement: Challenges to Implementing the INS Interior Enforcement Strategy*, [GAO-02-861T](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, [GAO-02-375](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2002).

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link resources to threats and strategies, and (4) use a risk management approach.

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### The Congress Will Play an Important Role in Implementing the Strategies

The Congress will play an important role as well in addressing the challenges faced in implementing these strategies. The Congress recently passed legislation reorganizing the federal government to combat terrorism by creating the Department of Homeland Security. The Congress will be appropriating funds—billions of dollars—to that department and other federal agencies that combat terrorism. And finally, the Congress will need to provide oversight, in hearings like this one today, to ensure that the programs are appropriately designed and implemented. GAO will continue to assist this subcommittee, and the Congress as a whole, in helping the federal government develop and implement programs to protect the United States from terrorism both at home and abroad.

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This concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

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# GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

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