



Highlights of [GAO-07-1044T](#), a report to Subcommittee on Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has spent and continues to invest hundreds of millions of dollars each year in its U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) program to collect, maintain, and share information on selected foreign nationals who enter and exit the United States at over 300 air, sea, and land ports of entry (POEs). The program uses biometric identifiers (digital finger scans and photographs) to screen people against watch lists and to verify that a visitor is the person who was issued a visa or other travel document.

GAO's testimony addresses the status of US-VISIT entry and exit capabilities and DHS's management of past and future exit efforts. In developing its testimony, GAO drew from eight prior reports on US-VISIT as well as ongoing work for the committee.

What GAO Recommends

In light of the department's longstanding challenges in delivering an operational exit capability and the uncertainty surrounding its future exit efforts, GAO urges the department to approach its latest attempt at deploying mission critical exit capabilities with the kind of rigor and discipline that GAO has previously recommended.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1044T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randy Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov, or Rich Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Prospects for US-VISIT Biometric Exit Capability Remain Unclear

What GAO Found

After investing about \$1.3 billion over 4 years, DHS has delivered essentially one-half of US-VISIT, meaning that biometrically enabled entry capabilities are operating at almost 300 air, sea, and land POEs but comparable exit capabilities are not. To the department's credit, operational entry capabilities have reportedly produced results, including more than 1,500 people having adverse actions, such as denial of entry, taken against them. However, DHS still does not have the other half of US-VISIT (an operational exit capability) despite the fact that its funding plans have allocated about one-quarter of a billion dollars since 2003 to exit-related efforts. During this time, GAO has continued to cite weaknesses in how DHS is managing US-VISIT in general, and the exit side of US-VISIT in particular, and has made numerous recommendations aimed at better ensuring that the program delivers clearly defined and adequately justified capabilities and benefits on time and within budget.

The prospects for successfully delivering an operational exit solution are as uncertain today as they were 4 years ago. The department's latest available documentation indicates that little has changed in how DHS is approaching its definition and justification of future US-VISIT exit efforts. Specifically, DHS has indicated that it intends to spend \$27.3 million (\$7.3 million in fiscal year 2007 funding and \$20 million in fiscal year 2006 carryover funding) on air and sea exit capabilities. However, it has not produced either plans or analyses that adequately define and justify how it intends to invest these funds. Rather, it has only described in general terms near-term deployment plans for biometric exit capabilities at air and sea POEs, and acknowledged that a near-term biometric solution for land POEs is not possible. Beyond this high-level schedule, no other exit program plans are available that define what will be done by what entities and at what cost.

In the absence of more detailed plans and justification governing its exit intentions, it is unlikely that the department's latest efforts to deliver near-term air and sea exit capabilities will produce results different from the past. Therefore, the prospects for having operational exit capabilities continue to be unclear. Moreover, the longer the department goes without exit capabilities, the more its ability to effectively and efficiently perform its border security and immigration enforcement missions will suffer. Among other things, this means that DHS cannot ensure the integrity of the immigration system by identifying and removing those people who have overstayed their original period of admission, which is a stated goal of US-VISIT. Further, DHS immigration and customs enforcement entities will continue to spend limited resources on investigating potential visa violators who have already left the country.