

October 2006

HOMELAND SECURITY

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



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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.

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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.

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Abbreviations

AMOC	Air and Marine Operations Center
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HSIN	Homeland Security Information Network
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NOC	National Operations Center
NOC-Watch	National Operations Center-Interagency Watch
NTC	National Targeting Center
TSA	Transportation Security Agency
TSOC	Transportation Security Operations Center
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USSS	United States Secret Service

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

October 20, 2006

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Norm Coleman
Chairman, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Homeland Security Act of 2002¹ established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with the primary mission of preventing terrorist attacks against the United States. To accomplish this mission, DHS must be aware of the potential risks and vulnerabilities faced by the nation, including terrorist threats to our transportation infrastructure (such as rail, aviation, and shipping); terrorists entering our country through land, air, and sea ports; and terrorists operating within our borders. Because terrorists do not operate on a 9-to-5 schedule, DHS and some of its operational components (six DHS agencies and DHS's Operations Directorate²) have established information gathering and/or analysis centers that conduct activities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Staff at these operations centers conduct monitoring and surveillance activities to help detect, deter, and prevent terrorist acts by providing real-time situational awareness to a variety of federal, state, and local governments and private-sector entities. According to DHS, this constant situational awareness is needed to facilitate an immediate response during times of crisis or other national incidents.

The six DHS agencies and the DHS Operations Directorate that run national operations centers "24/7/365" gather and/or analyze information through monitoring and surveillance activities to help detect, deter, and

¹ Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135.

² Established in 2005, the Operations Directorate is a separate organization within DHS that is responsible for one 24/7/365 center and exists to improve operational efficiency and coordination across the department, among other things.

prevent terrorist acts across the entire United States.³ In addition, DHS conducts other 24/7/365 activities, such as telecommunications services, security alarm monitoring, and region-specific operations at a variety of other centers. We identified a total of 20 national and 5 regional DHS centers that conduct 24/7/365 activities.⁴ Twenty-one of the 25 centers employ staff from one DHS agency on a regular full-time basis and perform agency-specific functions. Appendix I provides details on the missions and functions of these centers.

DHS has determined that the remaining 4 centers have broader security missions and 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. In January 2003, we designated implementation and transformation of the new Department of Homeland Security as high risk based on three factors: the enormity of the effort, the challenges faced by the components, and the potential impact of failure to effectively carry out the homeland security mission.⁵ Given the critical homeland security role played by these operations centers and the opportunity to facilitate the department's transformation efforts by maximizing collaboration at the program level, this report focuses on these four national operations centers that are "multi-agency," that is, staffed by personnel from more than one agency within DHS, along with other federal, and sometimes state and local, agencies. The 4 centers are described in table 1.

³ The six primary component agencies that conduct 24/7/365 operations are the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Transportation Security Administration, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Secret Service; the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services does not have an operations center that conducts activities 24/7/365 days a year.

⁴ As defined for this report, the national centers conduct information gathering and/or analysis activities that cover the entire nation as opposed to a specific region or activities limited to alarm system monitoring or communications relays. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard has 46 command center locations at the area, district, and sector levels to serve as regional points of coordination for operational command and control, communications, and intelligence and analysis. Meanwhile, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Federal Protective Service Mega-Center System consists of four individual regional center locations that provide alarm monitoring to federally owned or leased buildings. We did not count these DHS regional centers with multiple locations more than once since they performed the same mission. As another example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Mobile Emergency Response Support Operations Centers are located in five regions that we counted as one center, for the purposes of our review.

⁵ GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-03-119](#) (Washington, D.C.: January 2003).

Table 1: 24/7/365 DHS National Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies

Sponsoring organization: center	Mission	Other participating DHS agencies	Other participating agencies outside DHS
Customs and Border Protection (CBP): Air Marine and Operations Center (AMOC)^a	To detect, sort, track, and facilitate the interdiction of criminal entities throughout the Western Hemisphere, by utilizing integrated air and marine forces, the latest technology, and tactical intelligence.	U.S. Coast Guard	Federal Aviation Administration Department of Defense National Guard Bureau-Air National Guard Government of Mexico
National Targeting Center (NTC)	To coordinate and support all agency field-level anti-terrorism activities by providing tactical targeting and analytical research, and to be a single point of reference for all agency anti-terrorism efforts.	Immigration and Customs Enforcement Federal Air Marshals Transportation Security Administration U.S. Coast Guard	Federal Bureau of Investigation Department of State Food and Drug Administration U.S. Department of Agriculture
Transportation Security Administration (TSA): Transportation Security Operations Center (TSOC)^b	To provide situational awareness and information sharing in day-to-day coordination and incident management for all transportation security-related operations and issues worldwide by monitoring, responding to, and investigating security incidents involving all transportation sectors.	U.S. Secret Service ^c Customs and Border Protection ^c	Federal Bureau of Investigation Federal Aviation Administration U.S. Capitol Police U.S. Air Force D.C. Metro Police
DHS Operations Directorate: National Operations Center Interagency Watch (NOC-Watch)^d	To act as the primary national-level hub for domestic situational awareness, common operating picture, combining and sharing of information, communications, and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management by facilitating information sharing with other federal, state, local, tribal, and nongovernmental emergency operations centers; and by fusing law enforcement, national intelligence, emergency response, and private-sector reporting.	U.S. Secret Service Immigration and Customs Enforcement Federal Protective Service Federal Air Marshals Transportation Security Administration Customs and Border Protection U.S. Coast Guard Federal Emergency Management Agency	Central Intelligence Agency Defense Intelligence Agency National Security Agency National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Federal Bureau of Investigation Department of Interior Drug Enforcement Administration Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Virginia State Police Fairfax County Police New York, Boston, and Los Angeles police departments

Source: GAO generated based on information from DHS.

^aOn August 22, 1988, the Customs Air Interdiction Program established the Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Center, West, at March Air Force Base in Riverside, California. In October 1994, the facility was renamed the Domestic Air Interdiction Coordination Center. In 1999, marine programs were merged with air interdiction programs, and the name of the Riverside facility was changed to the Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center. Effective March 1, 2003, the center was renamed the Air and Marine Operations Center.

^bThe TSOC comprises three watch functions—the National Capital Region Coordination Center is responsible for National Capital Region air security and defense functions; the National Infrastructure Coordination Center is responsible for continuously assessing the status of the nation’s critical infrastructure and key resources; and the TSA Command Watch is responsible for coordinating the execution of the TSOC mission.

^cThe National Capital Region Command Center, one of three watch functions of the TSOC, constitutes the multi-agency element because it is staffed by other DHS component agencies—the U.S. Secret Service and CBP.

^dPrior to May 25, 2006, the National Operations Center-Interagency Watch was called the Homeland Security Operations Center. The Interagency Watch also incorporates staff from DHS’s Offices of Information & Analysis; Infrastructure Protection, and Incident Management Division, as well as a variety of other DHS and non-DHS organizations.

To assess the collaboration among DHS agencies working at each multi-agency 24/7/365 operations center, this report answers the following questions:

1. What are the missions, functions, and products of the multi-agency 24/7/365 DHS operations centers and who are their customers?
2. To what extent has DHS implemented key practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration at these multi-agency centers?

To answer our first objective, we analyzed information obtained from the responsible component agencies and the Operations Directorate on the mission and functions of all of the 24/7/365 activities in DHS. We visited all 4 multi-agency centers, as well as centers operated by other component agencies including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Secret Service to observe their operations, interview officials responsible for managing the centers, and identify centers that employed staff from multiple DHS agencies.⁶ From the 4 national operations centers that employed staff from multiple DHS

⁶ During incidents or emergencies, other operations centers may employ staff from multiple agencies. For example, the Coast Guard’s regional command centers that normally focus on a variety of U.S. Coast Guard’s missions and are not normally interagency in structure have established protocols with other DHS agencies, such as Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to activate a unified or incident command structure when needed. These U.S. Coast Guard centers have extra space and equipment that allow for surge capabilities and full coordination with each partner agency to host ad hoc interagency operations.

component agencies—the Air and Marine Operations Center (AMOC), the National Targeting Center (NTC), the Transportation Security Operations Center (TSOC), and the National Operations Center-Interagency Watch (NOC-Watch)—we obtained additional information on both the products the centers regularly developed and their primary customers. We also interviewed several staff assigned to centers from participating DHS component agencies—referred to as watchstanders⁷—to discuss their roles and responsibilities at the centers and the overall mission of the centers to which they had been assigned.

To answer our second objective, we met with the acting director and other responsible officials from the Operations Directorate to discuss its role and responsibilities. We reviewed transition, management integration, and planning and policy documents as well as strategic plans and annual performance reports and planning documents from DHS and its component agencies. We also reviewed and analyzed the results of studies undertaken by DHS to assess and improve coordination and collaboration at the multi-agency centers as well as reports from GAO, the Congressional Research Service, the DHS Office of Inspector General, and others that addressed the integration, coordination, and collaboration of departmentwide program functions. We then assessed DHS's efforts related to integration, coordination, and collaboration at the multi-agency centers to determine the extent to which they reflect DHS's application of the key practices we have found can help enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies and found to be at the center of successful mergers and transformations.⁸

We conducted our work from October 2005 through September 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Appendix II includes more detailed information on our scope and methodology.

⁷ For the purpose of this report, we use the term “watchstander” to refer to an individual required to work full-time on a rotating 24-hour schedule, 7 days per week, to maintain situational awareness, conduct information assessment and threat monitoring to deter, detect, and prevent terrorist incidents. A watchstander may also act as a liaison between his agency and other agency representatives at the center, and may manage response to critical threats and incidents.

⁸ GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

Results in Brief

The four multi-agency operations centers each have their own mission and generate different products while performing some similar functions and sharing a number of customers. The missions of the AMOC, NTC, and TSOC are tactical, including such activities as monitoring the nation's airspace, the movement of potential terrorists, and the passengers on commercial flights, respectively. NOC-Watch's mission is more strategic in that it collects information gathered by the other multi-agency operations centers⁹ and provides a national perspective on situational awareness for potential terrorist activity. The products of the four multi-agency operations centers reflect their different missions and range from reports on suspicious private air and marine craft from the AMOC, individuals entering the country at land, sea and airports from the NTC, and individuals traveling on commercial flights from the TSOC, to an overview of the national threat environment from the NOC-Watch. The multi-agency operations centers all share common functions such as maintaining situational awareness, information sharing and communications; coordinating internal operations and coordinating among federal, state, local, tribal, and private-sector entities; and managing incidents and making decisions. In addition, the AMOC and NOC-Watch exercise operational command and control and, along with the NTC, coordinate with foreign governments. The four multi-agency operations centers' primary customers include federal, state, and local governments; private-sector entities; and some foreign governments.

DHS has leveraged its resources—one key collaborative practice—by having staff from multiple agencies work together at the four operations centers. However, opportunities exist to further implement this and the other relevant practices that our previous work has identified as important to enhancing and sustaining collaboration among federal agencies. Specifically, not all of the components responsible for managing the operation centers have

- established goals to define and articulate a common outcome and mutually reinforcing or joint strategies for collaboration (related to two of our key practices);
- assessed staffing needs to leverage resources;
- defined roles and responsibilities of watchstanders from agencies other than the managing one;

⁹ In addition, the NOC-Watch gathers information from other DHS operations centers, as well as a variety of other federal, state, and local government and law enforcement organizations.

-
- applied standards, policies, and procedures for DHS's information sharing network to provide a means to operate across agency boundaries;
 - prepared mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results of the operations centers to reinforce collaborative efforts; and
 - reinforced agency accountability for collaboration efforts through agency plans and reports.

For example, some DHS components have established a variety of internal and external working agreements, memorandums, and in the case of the Joint Field Offices, standard operating procedures. However, DHS's Operations Directorate, which is responsible for coordinating operations, has not provided guidance on how and when such agreements should be used to improve collaboration among the sponsoring and participating components at the operations centers we reviewed. Nor have any of these centers documented goals or joint strategies using these or other types of agreements. Without having a documented joint strategy for collaboration, there is a risk that center staff monitoring potential terrorist activities may not operate in the most collaborative manner. DHS has also not assessed staffing needs to leverage resources and help ensure that there are enough watchstanders, who occupy the primary positions at the multi-agency operations centers, to conduct surveillance activities. While three of the four multi-agency operations centers had developed descriptions for the watchstander position staffed by their own agency, only one center—the AMOC—had also developed a position description for staff assigned to the center from another DHS agency. The other centers relied on the components providing staff to define their watchstanders' roles and responsibilities. Lack of a consistent definition for the watchstander position may lead to people at the same center in the same role performing the same responsibilities differently or not at all. Because of the potentially critical, time-sensitive need for decisive action at 24/7/365 operations centers, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of watchstanders are described and understood by both the staff and the officials responsible for managing the operations centers. In another example, DHS had not provided the standards, policies, and procedures for the use of its Homeland Security Information Network, its primary information-sharing tool. Without the application of the standards, policies, and procedures, users were unsure of how to use the network and, therefore, did not maximize the operation centers' capacity for sharing security-related information. In terms of monitoring, evaluating, and reporting the results of joint efforts at the multi-agency operations centers, in January 2004, AMOC began collecting data to measure productivity, but had not yet evaluated efforts, and the rest of the multi-

agency centers have not developed any methods for evaluating and reporting results. Finally, neither DHS nor the multi-agency operations centers have reinforced accountability for collaborative efforts through joint agency planning and reporting. Such public accounting through published strategic and annual performance plans and reports makes agencies answerable for collaboration results. The Operations Directorate, established in November 2005 to improve operational efficiency and coordination, provides DHS with an opportunity to more fully implement the key practices that are important to enhancing and sustaining collaboration at its multi-agency operations centers. Although the Operations Directorate does not possess administrative, budgetary, or operational control over the other component's operations centers, guidance from the Operations Directorate could help the other components responsible for the 24/7/365 multi-agency operations centers make key advances in each collaborative practice.

To provide a setting for enhanced collaboration among the staff at each operations center, we recommend that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security charge the Director of the Operations Directorate with developing and providing guidance and helping to ensure the three component agencies of the four multi-agency operations centers take the following six actions: define common goals and joint strategies; clarify the roles and responsibilities for watchstanders; apply standards, policies, and procedures for using DHS's information network; conduct staffing needs assessments; prepare mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of collaborative efforts; and address collaborative efforts at the four multi-agency operations centers in plans and reports.

In reviewing a draft of this report, DHS agreed with the recommended actions to enhance collaboration at the DHS multi-agency operations centers. Among other things, DHS noted plans to conduct an independent study, initiated in September 2006, to leverage technical and analytical expertise to support expanding the capabilities of the Operations Directorate. In addition, DHS said it plans to move elements of the National Operations Center to the Transportation Security Operations Center in 2007 and, ultimately to collocate the DHS headquarters, and all the DHS component headquarters along with their respective staffs and operations centers, at one location. We agree that these leadership efforts provided by the Operations Directorate could further enhance collaboration among DHS's component agencies, along with the key practices suggested by our review of collaboration practices among agencies across the federal government. DHS's written comments are presented in appendix III.

Background

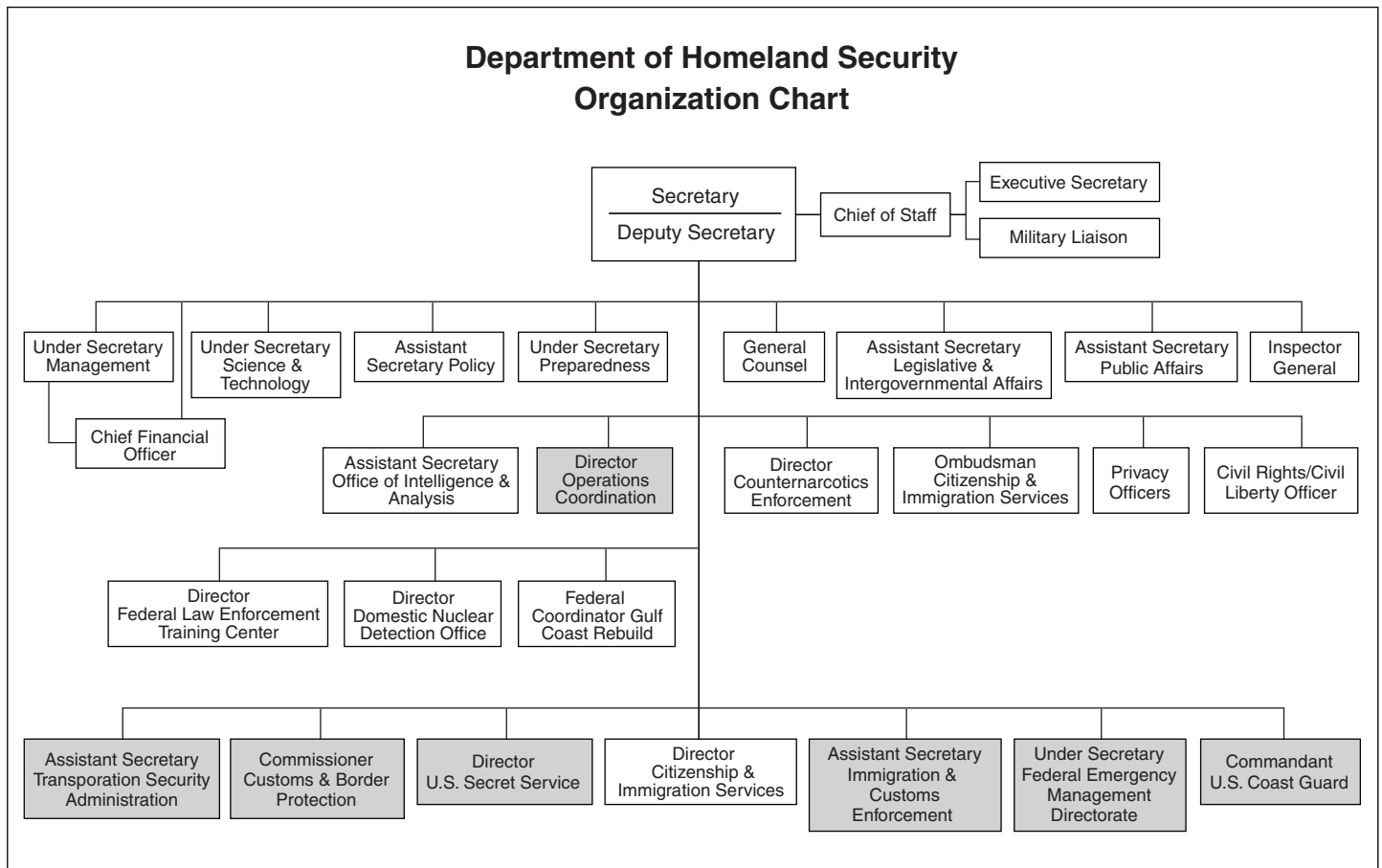
Twenty-two Agencies Merged to Form DHS in the Aftermath of 9/11

DHS was created in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Not since the creation of the Department of Defense in 1947 has the federal government undertaken an organizational merger of this magnitude. Enacted on November 25, 2002, the Homeland Security Act established DHS by merging 22 distinct agencies and organizations with multiple missions, values, and cultures.¹⁰ The 22 agencies whose powers were absorbed or in part assumed by DHS came from eight different departments (Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Justice, Transportation, and the Treasury) and two independent offices (the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the General Services Administration). In addition, DHS merged responsibilities from former agencies to create some new agencies, such as Customs and Border Protection. On March 1, 2003, DHS officially began operations as a new department. DHS is among the largest federal government agencies, with approximately 180,000 employees and an estimated budget of \$43.6 billion for fiscal year 2007.

DHS's mission is to lead the unified national effort to secure America, prevent and deter terrorist attacks, protect against and respond to threats and hazards to the nation, ensure safe and secure borders, welcome lawful immigrants and visitors, and promote the free flow of commerce. Six of the seven primary operational agencies, and the Operations Directorate of the department, have identified the need to conduct activities in support of the homeland security mission 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The department's July 2006 organizational chart, as illustrated in figure 1, highlights these six agencies and the Operations Directorate.

¹⁰ DHS was initially created with 22 originating agencies and organizations. Shortly thereafter in June 2003, a 23rd organization, the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, was transferred into DHS from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Figure 1: Organizations within the Department of Homeland Security That Conduct 24/7/365 Activities



Source: DHS.

Three DHS Components Sponsor Multi-Agency Operations Centers

The three components of DHS that have overall responsibility for the four multi-agency 24/7/365 operations centers were created in response to the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent establishment of DHS. By merging portions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture with elements of U.S. Customs, CBP was created as part of DHS in 2003 to protect the nation's borders in order to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering or exiting the United States while facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel. CBP sponsors two 24/7/365 multi-agency operations centers: the Air and Marine Operations Center and the National Targeting Center. TSA, established in

2001 (as part of the Department of Transportation), and incorporated into DHS in 2003, protects the nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce and sponsors the Transportation Security Operations Center. DHS established the Office of Operations Coordination (referred to as the Operations Directorate) after a broad internal review in 2005. The Operations Directorate, which sponsors the National Operations Center (includes the previous Homeland Security Operations Center), is responsible for coordinating internal and external operational issues throughout the department, conducting incident management, and facilitating rapid staff planning and execution.¹¹ The three sponsoring components provide overall direction and management for their respective centers.

Transformation Challenges and Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies

We have previously reported that establishing the new DHS is an enormous undertaking and the new department needs to build a successful transformation that does the following: instills the organization with important management principles; rapidly implements a phased-in transition plan; leverages the new department and other agencies in executing the national homeland security strategy; and builds collaborative partnerships with federal, state, local, and private-sector organizations.¹²

DHS faces significant management and organizational transformation challenges as it works to protect the nation from terrorism and simultaneously establish itself. For these reasons, in January 2005, we continued to designate the implementation and transformation of the department as high risk. DHS's Inspector General reported, in December 2004, that integrating DHS's many separate components into a single, effective, efficient, and economical department remains one of its biggest

¹¹ According to DHS, the National Operations Center incorporates the 24/7/365 Interagency Watch, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Response Coordination Center, and an office called the Planning Element. The National Operations Center also shares responsibility for the National Infrastructure Coordination Center which is colocated and integrated as a watch function at the Transportation Security Operations Center.

¹² GAO, *Results-Oriented Cultures, Implementation Steps to Assist Mergers and Organizational Transformations*, [GAO-03-669](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 2, 2003).

challenges.¹³ We also reported in 2005 that agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by engaging in eight key management practices:¹⁴

- defining and articulating a common outcome;
- establishing mutually reinforcing or joint strategies;
- identifying and addressing needs by leveraging resources;
- agreeing on roles and responsibilities;
- establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries;
- developing mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results of collaborative efforts;
- reinforcing agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports; and
- reinforcing individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems.

Although there is no commonly accepted definition for collaboration, in our previous assessment of collaborative efforts among federal agencies we defined it as any joint activity by two or more organizations that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when the organizations act alone. This report focuses on the actions DHS and its components have taken to make collaboration at multi-agency operations centers as effective as possible. Joint activities take place at operations centers where multiple components staff watchstander positions and provide liaison, expertise, and access to information that would not otherwise be on hand. For this report, we selected the first seven of the eight key practices listed above and assessed the first two key practices together, thereby reducing our focus to six areas. We did not address the eighth practice—reinforcing individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems—because an in-depth examination of component agencies’ performance management systems was beyond the scope of this review.

¹³ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Audits, *Major Management Challenges Facing The Department Of Homeland Security*, DHS/OIG-05-06 (Washington, D.C.: December 2004).

¹⁴ [GAO-06-15](#), 4.

While the Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers' Missions and Products Differ, Functions and Customers Are Similar

The four multi-agency operations centers each have their own mission and generate different products while performing similar functions and sharing a number of customers. The missions of the AMOC, NTC, and TSOC are tactical, including such activities as monitoring the nation's airspace, the movement of potential terrorists, and the passengers on commercial flights, respectively. NOC-Watch's mission is more strategic in that it collects information gathered by the other multi-agency operations centers¹⁵ and provides a national perspective on situational awareness. The products of the four multi-agency operations centers reflect their different missions and range from reports on suspect individuals traveling on commercial flights to reports on suspicious private air and marine craft. The multi-agency operations centers all share some common functions: maintaining situational awareness and information sharing and communications; coordinating internal operations and coordinating among federal, state, local, tribal, and private-sector entities; and managing incidents and making decisions. While all the multi-agency operations centers share common customers, such as foreign, federal, state, and local governments, the NOC-Watch has a larger number of customers, given its role as a hub for overall situational awareness.

The Different Missions of the Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Result in Different Products

Air and Marine Operations Center

Of the four multi-agency operations centers, three—AMOC, NTC and TSOC—have tactical yet different missions and provide different products that reflect their respective missions. The NOC-Watch has a more strategic mission in providing an overall assessment of situational awareness.

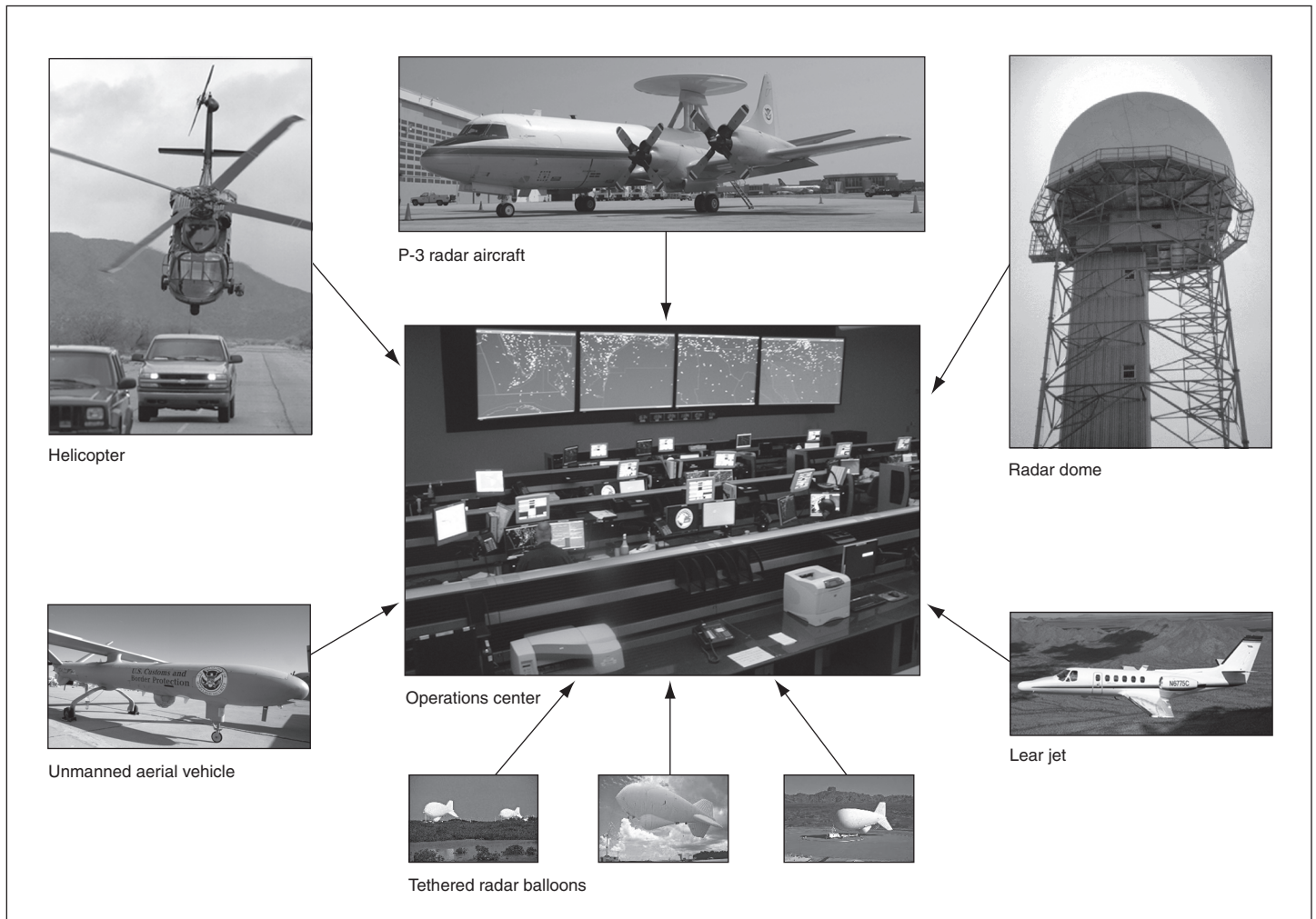
The AMOC's primary mission is to detect, sort, track, and facilitate the interdiction of criminal entities throughout the Western Hemisphere, by utilizing integrated air and marine forces, the latest technology, and tactical intelligence. AMOC's maintains day-to-day, around-the-clock airspace situational awareness of the nation's borders through identification and detection of foreign and domestic threats. Created in 1988 by the U.S. Customs Service and located in Southern California, the AMOC was established as the Air and Marine Operations Center on March 1, 2003. In addition to CBP and U.S. Coast Guard personnel, the AMOC is staffed by the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Department of

¹⁵ In addition, the NOC-Watch gathers information from other DHS operations centers, as well as a variety of other federal, state, and local government and law enforcement organizations.

Defense National Guard Bureau-Air National Guard, as well as a representative of the government of Mexico.

AMOC staff use surveillance systems and databases to detect, identify, and track potential threats, and to coordinate the apprehension of criminals using law enforcement air, marine, and ground interdiction forces. Staff utilize a surveillance system that includes an extensive network of over 200 ground-based radar and satellite tracking systems throughout North America and the Caribbean. Staff also use numerous law enforcement and Federal Aviation Administration databases to ensure that U.S. entry policy and procedures are followed. Figure 2 shows the variety of information and data sources employed by the AMOC.

Figure 2: Air and Marine Operations Center Sources of Information and Data



Sources: From left to right, top to bottom: CBP, CBP, FAA, CBP, CBP, CBP, and CBP.

Staff can conduct detailed research from a transnational and criminal threat perspective to identify suspect persons, aircraft, and marine vessels. AMOC staff use the resulting information to coordinate air and marine law enforcement activity with various agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard and Immigration and Customs Enforcement; federal, state, and local law enforcement; the Department of Defense; U.S. and foreign air traffic

control facilities; and foreign government coordination centers.¹⁶ The AMOC Daily Intelligence Report focuses on the nation's borders involving suspicious private air and marine craft that are detected by radar, eyewitnesses, or surveillance aircraft.

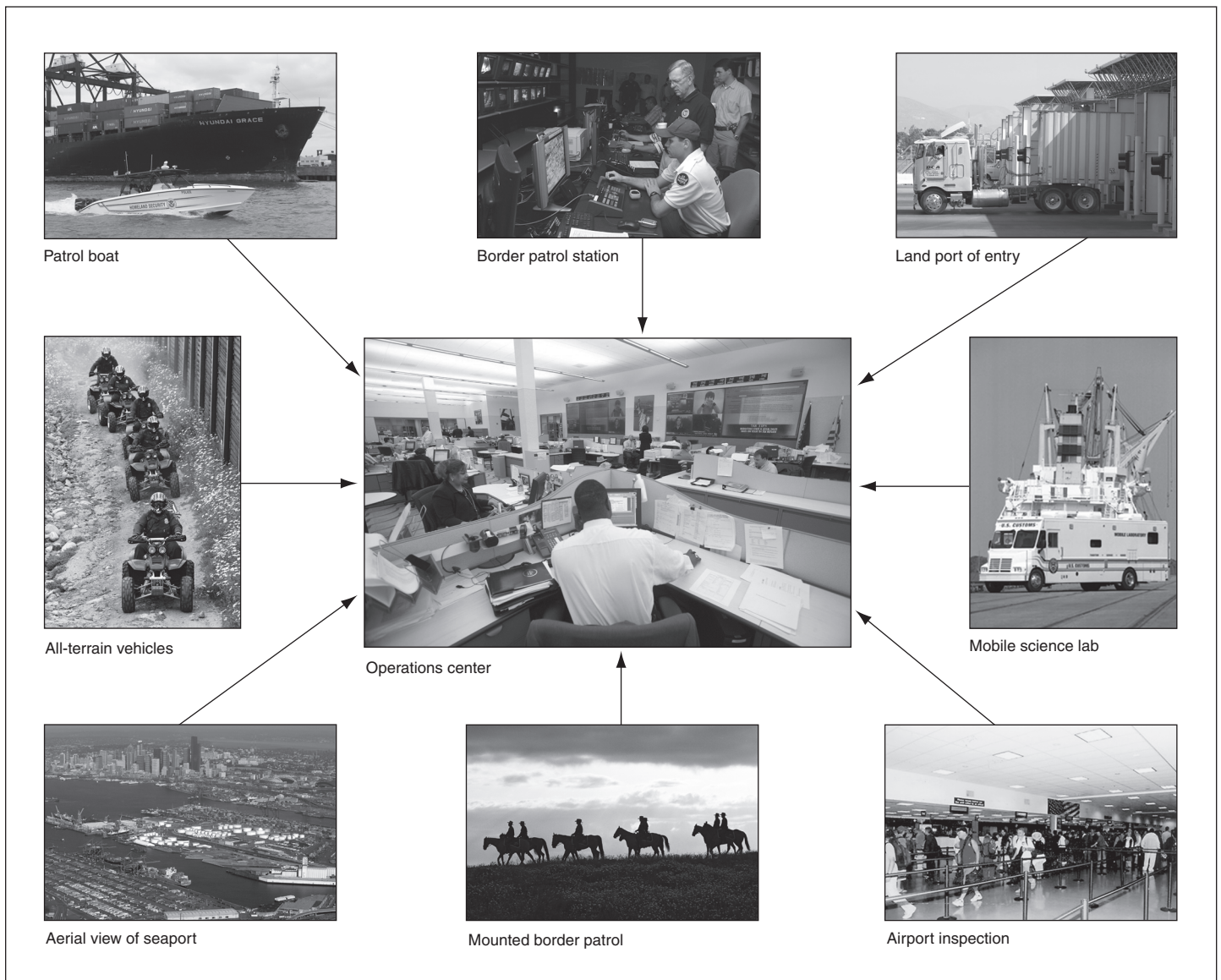
National Targeting Center

The NTC's mission is to coordinate and support all agency field-level anti-terrorism activities by providing tactical targeting and analytical research, and to be a single point of reference for all agency anti-terrorism efforts. NTC monitors the movement of potential terrorists and prevents them and any weapons of terror from entering and exiting our country through land, air, and sea ports. Established on October 22, 2001, under the U.S. Customs Service, the NTC, located in Northern Virginia, began 24/7/365 operations November 10, 2001. In addition to CBP personnel, the NTC is staffed by the U.S. Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Air Marshal Service, and the Transportation Security Administration.

NTC staff use sophisticated information-gathering techniques and analytical tools to look at data containing passenger and flight information. These data include lists of known terrorists, foreign visitors whose official authorization permitting entry into and travel within the United States has elapsed (visa overstays), passport information, and cargo listings to seek potential matches. Any inconsistency identified in the data can trigger additional analysis. Figure 3 shows the variety of sources of information and data sources employed by the NTC.

¹⁶ Foreign government coordination centers that partner with the Air and Marine Operations Center include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Joint Interagency Task Forces, Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos, the U.S. Embassy Mexico's Intelligence Analysis Center, and the Canadian National Operations Center.

Figure 3: National Targeting Center Sources of Information and Data at and between the Nation's Ports of Entry



Sources: Bottom right: Houston Airport System; all others: CBP.

NTC works with a variety of federal stakeholders. For example, the NTC works with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Terrorist Screening Center to identify persons on the National Terrorist Watch List. NTC staff also provide information from CBP's Advance Passenger Information System for TSA's performance of a risk assessment on crewmembers on

international flights. Federal Air Marshals use information developed by the NTC to determine if they need to put resources on a specific flight. Using NTC capabilities to screen crew, vessel, and cargo, along with other information, the U.S. Coast Guard determines vessels and crewmembers that warrant further surveillance or assessment and can prioritize its inspection efforts. NTC also helps in implementing the pilot Immigration Advisory Program by reviewing advance information on travelers forwarded by program teams to identify travelers at foreign airports that may present a risk or warrant more intensive examination before they board aircraft bound for the United States. (Passengers whose travel documents are invalid, expired, or otherwise may have been altered, counterfeited or obtained through fraud are advised, as is the airline, before they leave their foreign location that they will likely be deemed inadmissible and denied entry upon arrival in the United States.) The NTC reports we reviewed primarily identified individuals at and between domestic ports of entry and certain critical foreign ports.

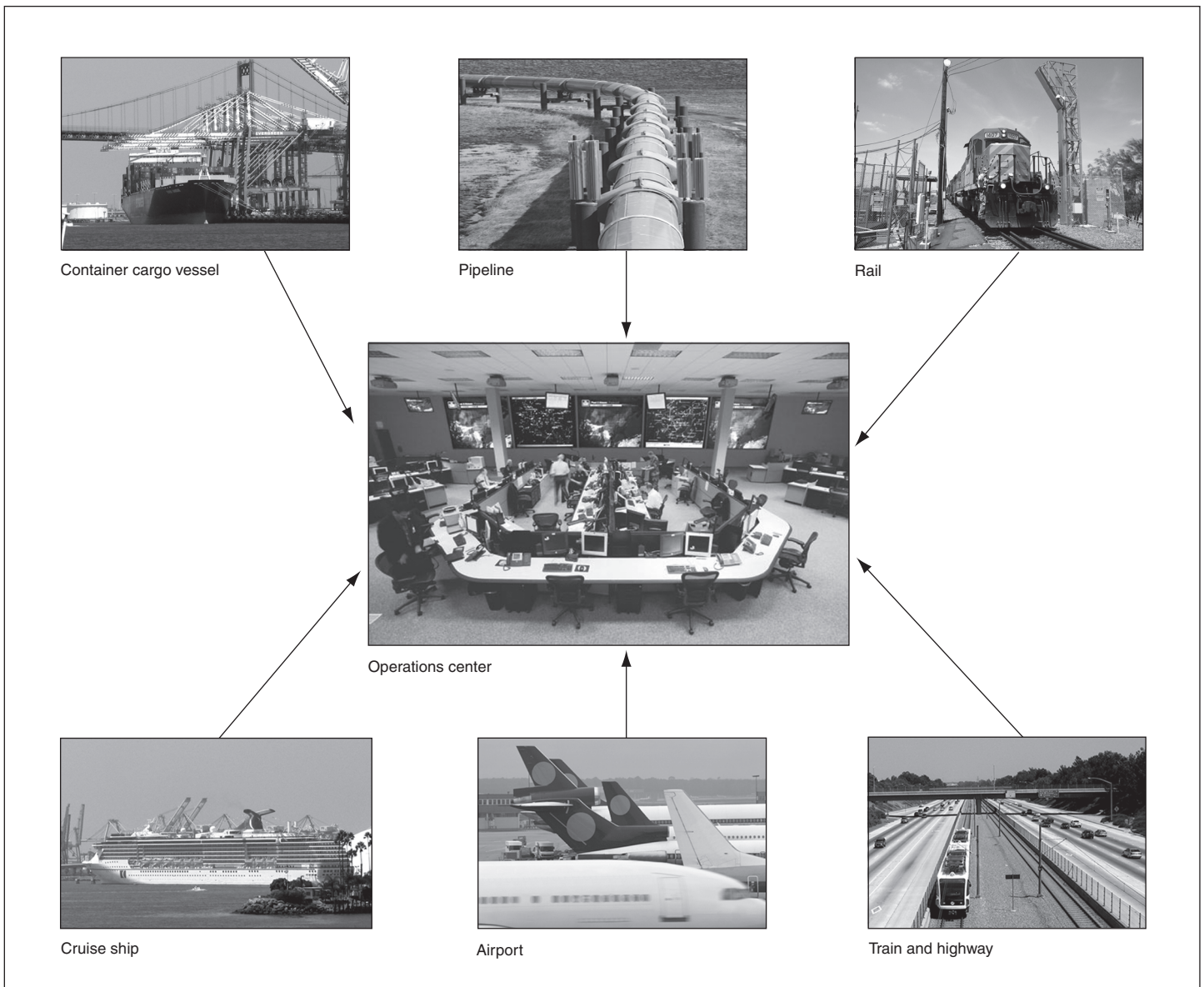
Transportation Security Operations Center

The TSOC's mission is to provide situational awareness and information sharing in day-to-day coordination and incident management for all transportation security related operations and issues worldwide by monitoring, responding to, and investigating security incidents involving all transportation sectors. TSOC maintains situational awareness of passengers on commercial flights and works to minimize and mitigate security vulnerabilities of the National Capital Region and critical infrastructure such as commercial airports, rail stations, and pipelines. The TSOC, located in Northern Virginia, began 24/7/365 operations in August 2003. The National Capital Region Command Center constitutes the multi-agency element of the TSOC because it is staffed by other DHS component agencies—specifically the U.S. Secret Service and Customs and Border Protection. In addition, representatives of organizations outside of DHS such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, District of Columbia Metro Police, Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Capitol Police, and the U.S. Air Force (Northeast Air Defense Sector) provide watchstanders for the TSOC.

As part of its mission, TSOC staff coordinate with federal, state, and local homeland security entities to identify activities that might indicate a threat to national security and isolate indications of impending attack while assessing their potential impact. The TSOC also furnishes alerts and reports to field security organizations while combining intelligence with operational information across all modes of transportation. Last, it monitors incidents and crises, including national special events such as presidential inaugurations and the Super Bowl, for TSA headquarters and

makes recommendations to DHS leadership. Figure 4 shows the modes of transportation monitored by the TSOC.

Figure 4: Modes of Transportation Monitored by the Transportation Security Operations Center



Sources: From left to right, top to bottom: GAO, PhotoDisc, CBP, TSA, GAO, PhotoDisc, and GAO.

National Operations Center-
Interagency Watch

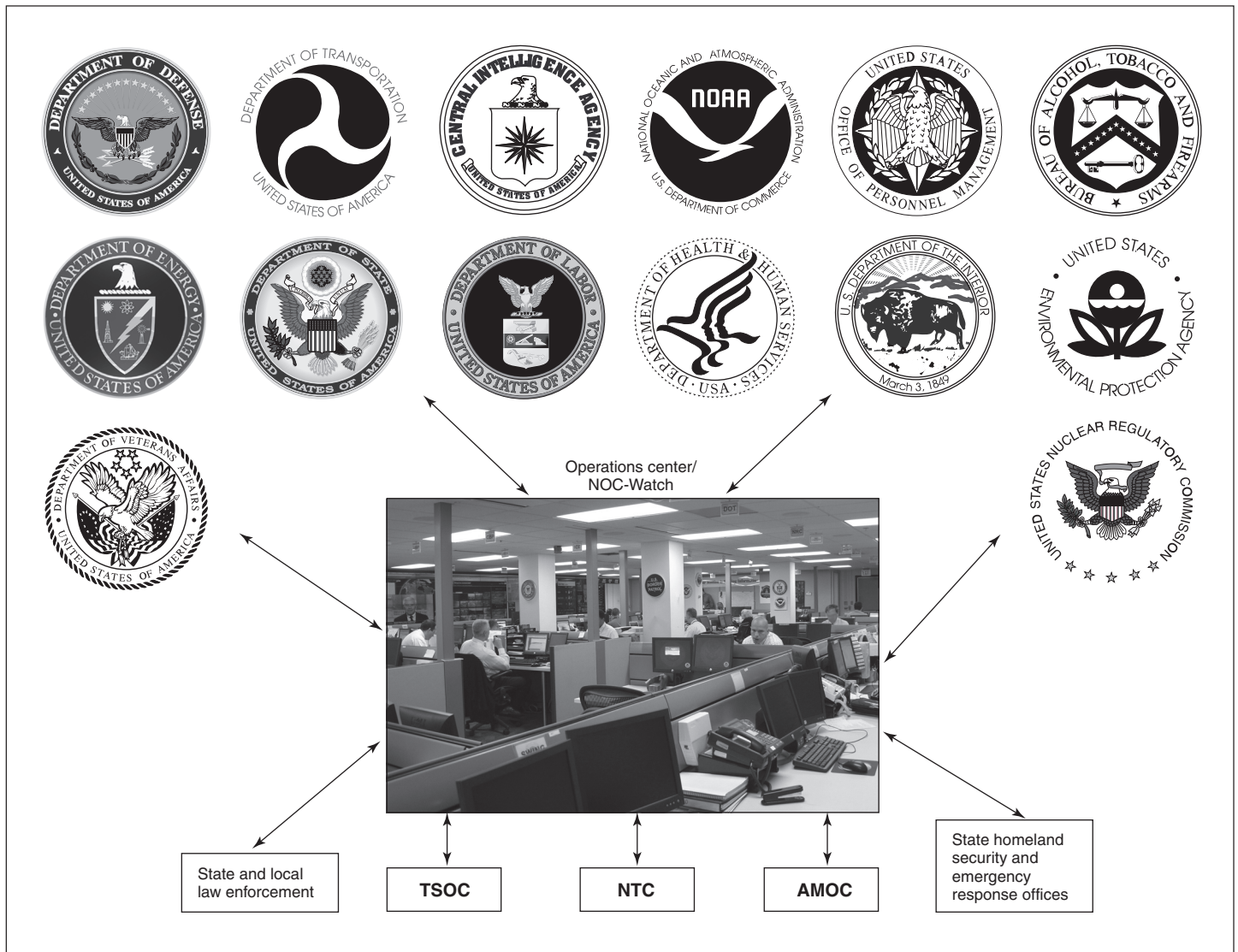
The TSOC reports we reviewed provided information on incidents across all modes of transportation, including National Capital Region security incidents, critical infrastructure, and individuals of interest related to the No-Fly List.¹⁷

The NOC-Watch is designed to perform a more strategic mission than the other three multi-agency operations centers. NOC-Watch acts as the primary national-level coordination point for awareness of events that may affect national security or safety. The center is responsible for combining and sharing of information, communications, and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management by facilitating information sharing with other federal, state, local, tribal, and nongovernmental entities and by fusing law enforcement, national intelligence, emergency response, and private-sector reporting. Created as the Homeland Security Operations Center and located in Northwest Washington, D.C., the center was established on February 19, 2003, and redesignated the National Operations Center on May 25, 2006. The NOC-Watch is the 24/7/365 element of the center. In addition to staff from the Operations Directorate, the NOC-Watch includes other DHS staff from 20 components and offices such as representatives from the U.S. Secret Service, Federal Protective Service, Federal Air Marshal Service, Transportation Security Administration, Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, National Biological Surveillance Group, U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team, Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, and other DHS directorates. The NOC-Watch also includes representatives from 35 other federal, state, and local agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency; Defense Intelligence Agency; National Security Agency; National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Department of Interior (U.S. Park Police); Drug Enforcement Administration; Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Virginia State Police; Fairfax County Police; and the New York, Boston, and Los Angeles police departments; and a number of other organizations.

¹⁷ The No-Fly List is a list of individuals who are prohibited from boarding an aircraft. Originally created and maintained by TSA, the No-Fly List is the consolidated terrorist watch list maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation-administered Terrorist Screening Center. Both TSA and CBP use the No-Fly List for screening airline passengers. TSA is responsible for screening domestic airline passengers; CBP screens international passengers. CBP also uses this list to screen cruise line passengers.

NOC-Watch staff use information gathered and communicated by the three tactical centers; other DHS operation centers; other federal, state, and local entities; and a wide variety of other information sources to provide overall national situational awareness related to homeland security. The NOC-Watch reports, via the DHS Director of Operations, to the Secretary of Homeland Security and coordinates directly with the White House and focuses on two goals: (1) the detection, prevention, and deterrence of terrorist attacks and (2) domestic incident management during crises and disasters or national special events. Figure 5 shows some of the sources of information and agencies with which that information is shared.

Figure 5: National Operations Center-Interagency Watch Information and Data Sources



Sources: Logos from GAO, photo from DHS.

Situation reports prepared by the Operations Directorate’s NOC-Watch that we reviewed contained information reported from other DHS subcomponents and operations centers such as the TSOC, NTC, and AMOC, as well as external intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and the private sector. The NOC-Watch also prepares a Homeland Security Operations Morning Brief that provides information to federal, state, and

local law enforcement agencies on the national picture at the sensitive but unclassified level.

The Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Share Common Functions and Customers

All four centers conduct common functions to maintain situational awareness and communicate and coordinate with other federal, state, and local governments, as well as private-sector entities. The centers do so to support both the mission of the sponsoring component organization and the underlying homeland security mission of DHS. On the basis of our discussions with center officials and our assessment of documents they provided, we summarized these functions and found that all DHS multi-agency operations centers perform 9 of 11 functions identified in table 2. (According to TSOC officials, the TSOC does not coordinate with foreign governments, and NTC and TSOC officials said they do not exercise command and control functions.)

Table 2: Description of the Functions Performed by the Four DHS Multi-Agency Operations Centers

Functions	Description
Situation awareness/information sharing and communications	
Situation awareness/monitoring (all four centers)	The continual process of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence, information, and knowledge to allow organizations and individuals to anticipate requirements and to react effectively and to establish a common operational picture—a broad view of the overall situation as reflected by situation reports, aerial photography, and other information or intelligence.
Situation assessment/analysis (all four centers)	The evaluation and interpretation of information gathered from a variety of sources (including weather information and forecasts, computerized models, Geographic Information Systems data mapping, remote sensing sources, ground surveys, etc.) that, when communicated to emergency managers and decision makers, can provide a basis for incident management decision making.

Functions	Description
Information dissemination and real-time communications (all four centers)	The process of providing information such as current threat-level information, announcements, reports, and urgent alerts to federal, state, local, tribal, and private-sector officials about possible terrorism activities ^a on a continuous basis.
Coordination	
Intradepartmental coordination (all four centers)	The sharing of information and operations with other DHS component agencies to synchronize activities and accomplish a collective task.
Other federal agency coordination and state, local, tribal coordination (all four centers)	The sharing of information, activities, and operations with federal, state, and local governments who have a shared responsibility in preparing for terrorist attacks as well as other disasters to accomplish a collective task.
Private-sector, nongovernment coordination (all four centers)	The sharing of information, activities, and operations with organizations and entities that are not part of any governmental structure to accomplish a collective task (e.g., for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, formal and informal structures, commerce and industry, private emergency response organizations, and private voluntary organizations).
Foreign government coordination (NOC-Watch, NTC, and AMOC)	The sharing of information and operations with representatives of other foreign national governments to synchronize activities and accomplish a collective task.
Incident management and decision-making	
Incident management (all four centers)	The development of strategies and tactics and the ordering, coordination, and release of resources in response to an event, such as a terrorist attack or natural disaster.
Decision-making support (all four centers)	The development of ideas, alternatives, or plans to aid decision makers in selection of a course of action, in responding to a new event or to make adjustments as an ongoing situation changes.

Operational activities

Operational coordination
(all four centers)

The integrating or linking together of different organizational elements by synchronizing activities to accomplish a collective task.

Operational command and control
(NOC-Watch and AMOC)

The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated command organization over assigned forces or assets in the accomplishment of a specified mission.

Source: GAO based on DHS information.

^aSection 892(f)(1) of the Homeland Security Information Sharing Act, Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2252 (2002), defines homeland security information to include information possessed by a federal, state, or local agency that (A) relates to the threat of terrorist activity; (B) relates to the ability to prevent, interdict, or disrupt terrorist activity; (C) would improve the identification or investigation of a suspected terrorist or terrorist organization; or (D) would improve the response to a terrorist act.

Multi-agency operations centers' customers include federal, state, and local governments and private-sector entities, along with foreign governments. The NOC-Watch has a larger number of overall customers; as the national-level multi-agency hub for situational awareness and a common operating picture, the NOC-Watch provides information to a wider range of government customers, including federal executive leadership, and intelligence and law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local level.

Opportunities Exist to Enhance Collaboration at DHS's Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers

DHS has leveraged its resources—one key collaborative practice—by having staff from multiple agencies work together at the four operations centers. However, opportunities exist to further implement this and the other relevant practices that our previous work has identified as important to enhancing and sustaining collaboration among federal agencies. For example, not all of the components responsible for managing the operation centers had

- established goals to define and articulate a common outcome and mutually reinforcing or joint strategies for collaboration (related to two of our key practices);
- assessed staffing needs to leverage resources;
- defined roles and responsibilities of watchstanders from agencies other than the managing one;
- applied standards, policies, and procedures for DHS's information sharing network to provide a means to operate across agency boundaries;

-
- prepared mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results of the operations centers to reinforce for collaborative efforts; and
 - reinforced agency accountability for collaboration efforts through agency plans and reports.

The Operations Directorate, established in November 2005 to improve operational efficiency and coordination, provides DHS with an opportunity to more consistently implement these practices that can enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies at multi-agency operations centers.

The Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Lack Documented Goals and Joint Strategies

The three DHS components responsible for the four multi-agency centers have not developed and documented common goals or joint strategies for their operation that our work has shown could enhance collaboration among the agencies. Officials at the four multi-agency operations centers we visited said they did consider formally documenting working agreements but concluded it was not essential since all of the agencies involved were part of DHS. Officials from the NOC said that the lack of formal agreements is a reflection of the speed with which the center was established and the inherent flexibility offered to DHS agencies in order to get them to staff the operation center positions. Nonetheless, as the DHS Office of Inspector General has reported, memorandums of understanding are valuable tools for establishing protocols for managing a national-level program between two organizations.¹⁸ Within DHS, external and internal memorandums of agreement and other interagency joint operating plans are often used to document common organizational goals and how agencies will work together. For example:

- The *National Interdiction Command and Control Plan*¹⁹ among the Department of Defense, Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the AMOC highlights an agreement between a DHS component and other federal agencies.

¹⁸ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Inspections and Special Reviews, *An Assessment of the Proposal to Merge Customs and Border Protection with Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, OIG-06-04 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 2005).

¹⁹ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Interdiction Command and Control Plan*, (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2005).

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- The *Joint Field Office Activation and Operations Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedure*²⁰ describes how a temporary federal multi-agency coordination center should be established locally to facilitate field-level domestic incident management activities related to prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery and addresses the roles and responsibilities of multiple DHS components such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
 - *Guidelines Governing Interaction Between ICE's Office of Investigations and CBP's Office of Border Patrol*²¹ documents a memorandum of understanding between the Office of Investigations at Immigration and Customs Enforcement and CBP's Border Patrol, entered into in November 2004, that governs the interaction between the two components and formalizes roles and responsibilities in order to further enhance information sharing.

Thus, although some DHS components have established a variety of internal and external working agreements, memorandums, and in the case of the Joint Field Offices, standard operating procedures, DHS's Operations Directorate, which is responsible for coordinating operations, has not provided guidance on how and when such agreements should be used to improve collaboration among the sponsoring and participating components at the operations centers we reviewed. Nor have any of these centers documented goals or joint strategies using these or other types of agreements.

Our previous work has shown that memorandums of agreement or understanding and strategic plans can both be used to establish common goals and define joint strategies for how agencies will work together. According to our work, collaborative efforts are further enhanced when staff working across agency lines define and articulate a common federal outcome, or purpose, that is consistent with their respective agency goals and missions. Joint strategies or mutual agreements also contribute to another key area when they are used as a vehicle for identifying and

²⁰ Department of Homeland Security, *Joint Field Office Activation and Operations Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedure*, version 8.3 Interim Approval (Washington, D.C.: April 2006) i-ii.

²¹ As cited in DHS-OIG-06-04, 42.

defining more specific expectations of the roles and responsibilities of staff provided by collaborating agencies.

The Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Are at Varying Stages of Assessing Staffing Needs

The extent to which officials responsible for managing the four multi-agency operations centers had conducted needs assessments to determine the staffing requirements of each center varied. For example, CBP officials conducted an evaluation in June 2005 that addressed AMOC capabilities and continuing staffing needs related to AMOC personnel, but did not address the need for, or responsibilities of, U.S. Coast Guard staff at the center. AMOC officials did cite a requirement for additional staff from the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as a requirement for an Immigration and Customs Enforcement position in a subsequent strategic planning effort (although these requirements had not been filled). However, there was not a specific assessment supporting the need for these staff positions. NTC officials had not conducted a staffing needs assessment but said they plan to conduct an assessment based upon current targeting programs, the scheduled expansion of existing programs, and the onset of additional CBP targeting programs. They said they plan to include data on the volume of telephone calls handled by the center and the number of information requests completed by the NTC in support of CBP targeting and operations, and they expect to complete the assessment in October 2006. TSOC and NOC-Watch officials said they had not documented a needs analysis for staff from agencies other than the sponsoring agency. Instead, they viewed the cross-agency staffing requirement as a historical edict based on a general assumption that other agency staff expertise was needed to fulfill the mission of their operations center.

Our work has shown that collaborating agencies should identify the resources, including human resources, needed to initiate or sustain their collaborative effort and take steps to leverage those resources. Because each agency, or component, has different strengths and limitations, assessing these varying levels allows them collectively to obtain additional resources otherwise unavailable individually. Formal assessment of the need for all participating agencies' staff to perform specific functions allows for the leveraging of resources to more effectively meet the operational needs of each agency or component.

Three of the Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Have Not Established a Definition of Watchstander Roles and Responsibilities for All Agencies at Each Center

While three of the four multi-agency operations centers had developed descriptions for the watchstander position staffed by their own agency, only one center—the AMOC—had developed a position description for staff assigned to the center from another DHS agency. At the AMOC, center officials require that Coast Guard staff meet a standardized set of requirements for radar watchstanders. The other centers relied on the components providing staff to define their watchstanders' roles and responsibilities. Lack of a consistent definition for the watchstander position may lead to people at the same center in the same role performing the same responsibilities differently or not at all.

Our work has shown that defining roles and responsibilities both enhances and sustains collaboration among federal agencies. Because of the potentially critical, time-sensitive need for decisive action at 24/7/365 operations centers, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of watchstanders are described and understood by both the staff and the officials responsible for managing the operations centers. Further, a definition of the watchstander role and responsibilities is important for supporting agency officials who must make staffing decisions about assigning qualified and knowledgeable personnel to the centers. Finally, internal controls standards²² require that management and employees establish a positive control environment as a foundation for strong organizational internal controls. According to the standard, one activity that agency officials may consider implementing as part of the control environment is to identify, define, and provide formal, up-to-date job descriptions or other means of identifying and defining job-specific tasks.

²² GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C. November 1999).

DHS Did Not Provide All Multi-Agency Operations Centers with Standards, Policies, and Procedures for Use of Its Information Sharing Network to Operate across Agency Boundaries

To collaborate by sharing information through DHS's primary information sharing system, the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN),²³ agencies participating in multi-agency operations centers need to be connected to the network and have the guidance that enables its use. In the course of our work, we learned that CBP's National Targeting Center could not collaborate with other users of HSIN because the system was not connected for NTC watchstanders.²⁴ Other concerns about the use of HSIN to enhance coordination and collaboration have also been identified by the DHS Inspector General. According to the Inspector General, DHS did not provide adequate user guidance, including clear information sharing processes, training, and reference materials needed to effectively implement HSIN.²⁵ The report noted that in the absence of clear DHS direction, users were unsure of how to use the system. Though DHS officials said other networks such as the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network and the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System are primarily used for coordination of intelligence analysis, the connectivity problem with the primary DHS-wide information sharing system, HSIN, remained unresolved as of September 2006.

Our work has shown that to facilitate collaboration, agencies need to address the compatibility of standards, policies, procedures, and data systems used in the collaborative effort. Furthermore, as agencies bring diverse cultures to the collaborative effort, it is important to address these differences to enable a cohesive working relationship and to create the mutual trust required to enhance and sustain the collaborative effort. Frequent communication among collaborating agencies is another means to facilitate working across agency boundaries and prevent

²³ The HSIN is an unclassified, Web-based system that provides a secure, collaborative environment for real-time information sharing that includes reporting, graphics, and chat capabilities, as well as a document library that contains reports from multiple federal, state, local, and private-sector sources. HSIN supplies suspicious incident and pre-incident information, mapping and imagery tools, 24x7 situational awareness, and analysis of terrorist threats, tactics, and weapons.

²⁴ Other single agency operations centers such as the U.S. Coast Guard's Intelligence Coordination Center were also not fully connected. For example, U.S. Coast Guard officials told us that HSIN has never been widely used by analysts or watchstanders at their Intelligence Coordination Center due to technical and testing issues that made the system unavailable. We were also told that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Operations Center had never been connected to HSIN due to technical problems.

²⁵ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Information Technology, *HSIN Could Support Information Sharing More Effectively*, DHS/OIG-06-38 (Washington, D.C.: June 2006).

misunderstanding. The lack of standards, policies, and procedures for use of HSIN at DHS operations centers could limit the frequency and effectiveness of communications among the centers.

Three of Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Have Not Developed Methods to Monitor, Evaluate, and Report Results of Joint Efforts

With the exception of AMOC, the multi-agency centers have not developed methods to monitor, evaluate, and report the results of joint efforts. For example, the Office of Management and Budget's assessment of the NOC-Watch for 2005 determined that center officials had not established effective annual or long-term performance goals.²⁶ Nor were performance measures or other mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the joint efforts of multiple DHS agencies at the TSOC and NTC. In response to a report by the DHS Office of Inspector General in March 2004 that found the AMOC did not have organizational performance measures and individual performance standards to assess AMOC's effectiveness and productivity,²⁷ AMOC officials reported to the Inspector General that they began collecting data in January 2004 on a daily basis to measure productivity for the overall operations center as well as individual watchstanders, including U.S. Coast Guard representatives.

Our work has shown that developing means to monitor, evaluate, and report areas of improvement allow agencies to enhance collaboration. Developing performance measures and mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the contributions can help management, key decision makers, and both stakeholders and customers obtain feedback through internal reports in order to improve operational effectiveness and policy. Developing goals and providing performance results can also help reinforce accountability through joint planning and reporting of collaborative efforts.

²⁶ As reported on ExpectMore.gov found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/detail.10003615.2005.html>.

²⁷ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Audits, *AMOC Needs To Improve Written Guidelines For Providing Assistance To Other Agencies*, DHS/OIG-04-20 (Washington, D.C.: March 2004).

The Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Are at Various Stages of Reinforcing Accountability for Collaborative Efforts through Joint Agency Planning and Reporting

Neither DHS nor the component agencies responsible for managing the four multi-agency operations centers consistently discuss or include a description of the contribution of collaborative efforts of the multi-agency operations centers in their strategic or annual performance plans and reports. The most recent DHS strategic plan, issued in 2004, neither included a discussion of performance goals nor addressed the joint operations of the multi-agency centers. The plan reported only that DHS “will provide integrated logistical support to ensure a rapid and effective response and coordinate among Department of Homeland Security and other federal, state, and local operations centers consistent with national incident command protocols.” CBP’s 2005 annual report on the operations of the NTC does, however, include a section dedicated to the contributions of the external liaisons in describing the roles and responsibilities of other DHS agency personnel including the Federal Air Marshal Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Coast Guard, and the accomplishments they have made in the center’s operations. In addition, the AMOC strategic plan for 2005 generally discussed the importance of collaboration with other component agencies and included a goal to strengthen component agency partnerships to maximize homeland security strategies. Reports of the components responsible for managing the other centers do not address the roles and contributions of other supporting agencies in accomplishing the centers’ missions. DHS agencies responsible for providing staff to support watchstander positions for multi-agency operations centers managed by other agencies also do not address their participation in the operations of the operations center in strategic plans or performance reports. In general, managing and supporting agencies that do mention the operations centers do not include any discussion of the relationship between the participating agencies’ missions or strategies and those of the centers.

Our work has shown that federal agencies can use their strategic and annual performance plans as tools to drive collaboration with other agencies and partners and establish complementary goals and strategies for achieving results. These performance plans can also be used to ensure that goals are consistent and, if possible, mutually reinforcing. Accountability is also reinforced when strategic and annual performance plans help to align agency policy with collaborative goals. A public accounting through published strategic and annual performance plans and reports makes agencies answerable for collaboration.

DHS's Operations Directorate Has an Opportunity to Help Ensure That Key Practices for Collaboration Are Implemented at the Multi-Agency Operations Centers

DHS established a new Office of Operations Coordination in November 2005 (referred to as the Operations Directorate) to increase its ability to prepare for, prevent, and respond to terrorist attacks and other emergencies and improve coordination and efficiency of operations. In responding to a draft of this report, DHS cited a number of efforts that the new directorate plans to take to fulfill this leadership role. Among other things, DHS said it plans to conduct an independent study, initiated in September 2006, to leverage technical and analytical expertise to support expanding the capabilities of the Operations Directorate. In addition, DHS said it plans to move elements of the National Operations Center to the Transportation Security Operations Center in 2007 and, ultimately to collocate the DHS headquarters and all the DHS component headquarters along with their respective staffs and operations centers at one location. DHS also cited the development of a new working group that is developing a national command and coordination capability. While we agree that these leadership efforts proposed by the Operations Directorate could further enhance collaboration among DHS's component agencies, because DHS officials did not provide any information or documentation of these efforts in response to our requests during the course of the review, we were unable to determine the extent to which these efforts are likely to enhance and sustain departmental collaboration. Nonetheless, further departmental focus on the key practices we have identified could enhance collaboration among the component agencies. For example, at the time of our review, the directorate had not taken steps to gather information on the resources available at each center. The director's office did not have ready access to information such as centers' budgets or other financial information needed for reporting across the components, the number of staff employed at the multi-agency centers, or the number and type of operations centers managed by the various components. After being directed to the components for budget and staffing information, we found that the managing components of the multi-agency operations centers also did not have ready access to up-to-date information on the number of staff the centers employed. Such information could be useful to the directorate's efforts to develop a national command and coordination capability and further enhance collaboration among the components with multi-agency operations centers. Directorate officials said that the Operations Directorate had not assumed its full range of responsibilities due to not being fully staffed until March 2006 and because of the revisions to the National Response Plan formalized in May 2006.²⁸ In responding to a

²⁸ Department of Homeland Security, Notice of Change to the National Response Plan Version 5.0, (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2006).

draft of this report, DHS said that the Operations Directorate does not have the authority to direct or exercise control over other components' operations centers with respect to administration and support, including organization, staffing, control of resources and equipment, personnel management, logistics, and training. Nonetheless, while the Operations Directorate lacks authority to direct the actions of the other components' operations centers and obtaining compatible data may be difficult since the reporting systems of several centers were in place prior to the creation of DHS, without compatible staffing and financial data Operations Directorate leadership officials are hampered in their ability to understand and compare the relative personnel and operating costs of the 24/7/365 operations centers and use such information to promote the expected unity of effort within the department.

Enhanced leadership from the Operations Directorate to support consistent reporting of operations centers' budgets and staffing could also support collaborative actions in two of the previously mentioned key areas: assessing staffing needs to leverage resources, and applying standards, policies, and procedures to operate across agency boundaries. In the absence of leadership to support these and other collaborative efforts, DHS officials have not yet taken full advantage of an opportunity to meet the directorate's responsibilities.²⁹

Conclusions

The establishment of the Operations Directorate with the express intent of enhancing collaboration and coordination among the department's operational components provides an opportunity to implement practices that could enhance collaboration among DHS agencies working together at each multi-agency 24/7/365 operations center. Having staff from multiple agencies work together is a way of leveraging resources, one key practice for enhancing collaboration. However, those resources may not be used to their full potential if other steps to enhance collaboration are not taken, and the Operations Directorate could provide guidance to help ensure that the sponsors of the operations centers take the appropriate steps. There are multi-agency operations centers that lack common goals and joint

²⁹ Our work on mergers and transformations suggests that leadership within the department must set the direction, pace, and tone and provide a clear, consistent rationale that brings everyone together behind a single mission and establish integrated strategic goals to guide the transformation. *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).

strategies; clearly defined roles and responsibilities; compatible standards, policies, and procedures for information networking; consistent staffing assessments; prepared mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of collaborative efforts; and reinforced agency accountability through agency plans and reports. Our previous work has shown that these are all critical components in enhancing collaboration among federal agencies. Given that the collaboration in multi-agency operations centers focuses on gathering and disseminating information on real-time situational awareness related to disasters and possible terrorist activity, it is important that the staff at the centers achieve the most effective collaboration possible.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To provide a setting for more effective collaboration among the staff at each multi-agency 24/7/365 operations center, we recommend that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security charge the Director of the Operations Directorate with developing and providing guidance and helping to ensure the agencies that sponsor the centers take the following six actions:

- define common goals and joint strategies;
- clarify the roles and responsibilities for watchstanders;
- implement compatible standards, policies, and procedures for using DHS's information network to provide a means of operating across agency boundaries;
- conduct staffing needs assessments;
- implement mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of collaborative efforts; and
- address collaborative efforts at the four multi-agency operations centers in plans and reports on the level of each operation center's managing agency.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

On October 16, 2006, DHS provided written comments on a draft of this report (see app. III.) DHS agreed with the six recommended actions to enhance collaboration at the DHS multi-agency operations centers and said it planned to take action to implement the practices. In the draft report, we said that the Operations Directorate had not yet taken actions to fulfill its leadership role and that a lack of leadership by the Operations Directorate to support consistent reporting of operations centers' budgets and staffing limits collaborative actions. DHS did not agree that leadership provided by the Operation Directorate to support collaboration is lacking and provided a number of examples of leadership efforts. Among other

things, DHS noted plans to conduct an independent study, initiated in September 2006, to leverage technical and analytical expertise to support expanding the capabilities of the Operations Directorate. In addition, DHS said it plans to move elements of the National Operations Center to the Transportation Security Operations Center in 2007 and, ultimately to collocate the DHS headquarters and all the DHS component headquarters along with their respective staffs and operations centers at one location. We identified the planned actions in the report and agree that these leadership efforts by the Operations Directorate have the potential to further enhance collaboration among DHS's component agencies, along with the key practices suggested by our efforts to review collaboration among agencies across the federal government. However, because Operations Directorate officials did not provide any information or documentation of these efforts in response to our requests during the course of the review, we were unable to determine the extent to which these efforts are likely to enhance and sustain departmental collaboration.

In addition, DHS officials cited what they considered to be misconceptions expressed in the draft report. They said that the Operations Directorate does not have the administrative, budgetary, programmatic, or command and control authority to direct or exercise control over other component's operations centers. They also said that our draft incorrectly reported that the National Operations Center replaced the Homeland Security Operations Center. Although it was not our intent to imply that the Operations Directorate has administrative, budgetary, programmatic, or command and control authority to direct or exercise control over other component's operations centers, we added a clarifying reference to address DHS's concern. Finally, although we reported that the new National Operations Center includes (rather than replaced) the previous Homeland Security Operations Center, we also added a footnote to further clarify that the scope of responsibilities of the new National Operations Center is greater than that of the Homeland Security Operations Center.

We are sending copies of this report to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, the Secretary of Homeland Security; the Assistant Secretary of the Transportation Security Administration, the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, and interested congressional committees. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, or wish to discuss the matter further, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or Jonespl@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul L. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Paul L. Jones
Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues

Appendix I: Missions of 24/7/365 DHS Centers Staffed by One DHS Component

DHS agency	#	Center	Mission
Department of Homeland Security Headquarters (DHS)	1.	U.S.-Computer Emergency Readiness Team	To monitor cyber security, respond to incidents, and direct communications.
	2.	National Communications Center	To assist in the initiation, coordination, restoration, and reconstitution of national security and emergency preparedness telecommunications services or facilities under all conditions, crises, or emergencies.
Transportation Security Administration (TSA)	3.	TSA Office of Intelligence	To provide warning and intelligence analysis to inform field operators, industry, and TSA leadership.
	4.	Federal Air Marshal Service, Mission Operations Control Center	To provide support to for scheduling, law enforcement situations, crisis management, and safety and security-related matters.
Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	5.	Situation Room	To provide information on significant incidents from field and sector offices, providing situational awareness to the Commissioner and senior CBP management.
	6.	Caribbean Air Marine Operations Center (Regional Operations)	To utilize integrated air and marine forces, technology, and tactical intelligence to detect, sort, track, and facilitate the interdiction of criminal entities throughout the Caribbean area.
	7.	National Airspace Security Operations Center (Regional Operations)	To utilize integrated air forces, technology, and tactical intelligence to maintain air domain awareness, and detect, sort, track, and facilitate the interception of intruder aircraft throughout the National Capital Region.
	8.	National Law Enforcement Communications Center	To monitor radio communications among CBP personnel for officer safety purposes, and to coordinate tactical communications and analytical investigative support to various DHS and other law enforcement agencies to support homeland security.
Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)	9.	ICE Operations Center	To provide senior management with daily reports and coordination on all significant incidents, events, and matters that have an impact on the mission of ICE and DHS.
	10.	ICE Intelligence Watch	To provide timely, effective classified intelligence support to ICE headquarters and field personnel by serving as a clearinghouse for the screening, evaluation, processing, exploitation, dissemination, and coordination of intelligence information.
	11.	Law Enforcement Support Center	To provide timely immigration status and identification information to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies on aliens suspected, arrested, or convicted of criminal activity.
	12.	Federal Protective Service Mega-Center System (4 regional centers) ^a	To provide alarm monitoring and dispatch services to all federally owned and leased buildings.

**Appendix I: Missions of 24/7/365 DHS Centers
Staffed by One DHS Component**

DHS Agency	#	Center	Mission
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	13.	National Response Coordination Center	To maintain national situational awareness and to monitor emerging incidents or potential incidents with possible operational consequences (becomes multi-agency under incident surge conditions).
	14.	FEMA Operations Center ^b	To facilitate, in coordination with the NOC, the distribution of warnings, alerts, and bulletins to the entire emergency management community using a variety of communications systems.
	15.	Mobile Emergency Response Support Operations Centers (5 regional centers)	To serve as the emergency operations center for FEMA regions and associated state operations centers providing time-sensitive information flow affecting federal involvement and provide a deployed operations center platform using assigned mobile assets during all catastrophic events.
United States Secret Service (USSS)	16.	Joint Operations Center	To provide command, control, communication, and monitoring for ensuring the security of the White House complex and surrounding grounds.
	17.	Intelligence Division Duty Desk	To coordinate communications for the receipt, coordination, and dissemination of protective intelligence information and activities that require immediate action in support of protection assignments. Also provides "as needed" information and coordination support for the service.
United States Coast Guard (USCG)	18.	U.S. Coast Guard Command Center	To gather, coordinate, and disseminate information as the direct representative of the Coast Guard Commandant and the National Response Center. Serves as the primary communications link of priority operational and administrative matters between USCG field units, District and Area Commanders, senior Coast Guard officials, DHS officials, the White House, other federal agencies, state and local officials, and foreign governments.
	19.	Intelligence Coordination Center (includes three 24/7/365 watch locations with one, the Intel Plot, colocated at U.S. Coast Guard Command Center)	To function as the national-level coordinator for collection, analysis, production, and dissemination of Coast Guard intelligence. Provides all-source, tailored, and integrated intelligence and intelligence services to DHS, Coast Guard, Commandant/staff, intelligence community, combatant commanders, and other services and agencies. The Intel Plot provides predictive and comprehensive intelligence support to priority requirements of the Commandant and senior staff at Coast Guard headquarters.
	20.	National Response Center ^c	To serve as the single federal point of contact for all pollution incident reporting. Also serves as a communications center in receiving, evaluating, and relaying information to predesignated federal responders, and advises FEMA of potential major disaster situations.

Appendix I: Missions of 24/7/365 DHS Centers Staffed by One DHS Component

DHS Agency	#	Center	Mission
	21.	Regional Command Centers (46) ^d Area Command Centers (2) District Command Centers (9) Sector Command Centers (35)	To serve as points of coordination at various organizational levels for operational command, control, communications, intelligence, and analysis.

Source: GAO generated based on information from DHS.

^aAccording to a Federal Protective Service official, the service has expanded its mission parameters in recent years beyond physical protection, and has initiated programs to better identify vulnerabilities, threats, and response requirements for attacks by international or domestic terrorist individuals or groups. The official said that with the advent of the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, the service is applying a specialized intelligence capability to support its expanded role as national coordinator for enhancing the protection of all federal, state, and local government facilities that are determined to be nationally critical.

^bAccording to FEMA officials, the FEMA Operations Center serves as the alternate NOC. Should the NOC be rendered incapable of functioning for any reason, they said the FEMA Operations Center will assume critical NOC functions until the NOC is returned to normal operating status.

^cAccording to U.S. Coast Guard officials, the National Response Center is a joint effort cochaired by the U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency that is housed at U.S. Coast Guard headquarters.

^dAccording to a U.S. Coast Guard official, the Area and District Command Centers are also designated as International Rescue Coordination Centers, and all Sector Command Centers are also designated Rescue Sub-Centers in accordance with international convention.

Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our overall objective was to assess the collaboration among the four multi-agency DHS operations centers. The key questions addressed were as follows:

1. What are the missions, functions, and products of the multi-agency 24/7/365 DHS operations centers and who are their customers?
2. To what extent has DHS implemented key practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration at these multi-agency centers?

To answer our first objective, we obtained and reviewed information on the missions and functions of all 24/7/365 operations centers in DHS. We visited centers managed by the Operations Directorate, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Transportation Security Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Secret Service to observe their operations, interview officials responsible for managing the centers, and identify centers that employed staff from multiple DHS agencies. We identified four centers that employed staff from multiple DHS component agencies: the Air and Marine Operations Center, the National Targeting Center, the Transportation Security Operations Center, and the National Operations Center-Interagency Watch. We gathered and analyzed information regarding the products the multi-agency centers developed on a regular basis and the primary customers served by the centers.

To answer our second objective, we met with responsible officials of the NOC-Watch and the acting Director of the Operations Directorate to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the new organization established as a result of the department's Second Stage Review. We discussed the transition, current operations, and policy and procedures put in place by the Operations Directorate since the reorganization. We also met with officials from TSA, USCG, CBP, ICE, and the Operations Directorate to discuss how staff are assigned by these agencies to the four multi-agency operations centers. We spoke with watchstanders assigned to several of the centers from other DHS component agencies to discuss their roles and responsibilities at the centers, and the overall mission of the centers to which they had been assigned. We reviewed planning and policy documents including DHS's strategic plans and performance and

accountability reports as well as our prior reports¹ and reports from DHS's Inspector General that addressed DHS management issues. For the four national operations centers we identified as multi-agency DHS centers, we also reviewed strategic plans, standard operating procedures, and annual reports and performance and accountability reports. We assessed DHS's efforts and actions taken by the Operations Directorate to encourage coordination among the multi-agency centers and to promote collaboration among the staff representing DHS agencies at the centers to determine the extent that they reflected consideration of key practices that our previous work has shown can enhance and sustain a collaborative relationship among federal agencies. Eight practices we identified to enhance and sustain collaboration are identified below:

- defining and articulating a common outcome;
- establishing mutually reinforcing or joint strategies;
- identifying and addressing needs by leveraging resources;
- agreeing on roles and responsibilities;
- establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries;
- developing mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results;
- reinforcing agency accountability for collaboration efforts through agency plans and reports; and,
- reinforcing individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems.

For the purposes of this review, we selected the first seven of the eight practices. We combined our discussion of the implementation of the first two practices—defining and articulating a common outcome and establishing mutually reinforcing or joint strategies. We did not address the eighth practice—reinforcing individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems—because an in-depth examination of component agencies' performance management systems was beyond the scope of this review. We selected examples that, in our best judgment, clearly illustrated and strongly supported the need for improvement in specific areas where the key practices could be implemented.

¹ GAO, *A Comprehensive and Sustained Approach Needed to Achieve Management Integration*, GAO-05-139 (Washington, D.C.: March 2005); *Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

**Appendix II: Objectives, Scope, and
Methodology**

We conducted our work from October 2005 through September 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

October 16, 2006

Mr. Paul L. Jones
Director
Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Jones:

Re: Draft Report GAO-07-89, Homeland Security Opportunities for Enhancing Collaboration at 24/7 Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report. DHS appreciates the GAO's efforts, insights, identification of improvement opportunities, and recommendations.

Overview

In general, DHS agrees with the GAO's six recommended actions to enhance collaboration at the DHS multi-agency operations centers:

- (1) Define common goals and joint strategies.
- (2) Clarify the roles and responsibilities for watch-standers.
- (3) Implement compatible standards, policies, and procedures for using DHS's information network to provide a means of operating across agency boundaries.
- (4) Conduct staffing needs assessments.
- (5) Implement mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of collaborative efforts.
- (6) Address collaborative efforts at the multi-agency operations centers in plans and reports on the level of each operation center's managing agency.

To that end, the Office of Operations Coordination (OPS) works to provide guidance aimed at improving collaboration among DHS components' operations centers. It is crucial, however, to recognize that OPS does not possess administrative, budgetary or operational control over the component's operations centers, which is implied in the text of the report:

[OPS] "...had not yet taken actions to fulfill this leadership role...for example, by gathering information on the resources available at each center...did not have ready access to centers' budgets...other financial information needed for reporting across the components, the number of staff employed..."

www.dhs.gov

“The lack of leadership from the Operations Directorate to support consistent reporting of operations centers’ budgets and staffing...”

DHS respectfully disagrees with the report’s implication that needed collaboration is tied to a lack of leadership in OPS. Although DHS’s operations centers closely collaborate, centers are responsible for supporting the mission of their respective parent organization and are not designed to serve, or report to OPS. Nevertheless, the Office of Operations Coordination has strong working relationships with all operations centers in DHS, which has helped provide the situational awareness needed by DHS leadership to make critical decisions. This cooperation is enhanced through real-world events and exercises. In addition, OPS is driving a significant effort to improve collaboration by planning to collocate the National Operations Center (NOC) and Transportation Security Operations Center (TSOC).

Progress

DHS recognizes that the Office of Operations Coordination has made many significant strides forward with regard to subject areas comprising the GAO’s six recommendations, notwithstanding that OPS is a newly created DHS Component. Examples of such achievements are:

(1) In addition to leading the effort to cascade the operations function throughout the Department (strategic, operational, and tactical levels), OPS has spearheaded the development and implementation of the following Homeland Security Council Katrina Report’s tasks:

- Establish a National Operations Center (NOC)
- Establish National Information and Knowledge Management System
- Establish a National Reporting System
- Establish National Information Requirements and a National Information Reporting Chain
- Establish and Maintain Deployable Communications Capability
- Develop & Resource a Federal Planning and Execution System
- Establish a Permanent Planning/Operations Staff Housed within the NOC

(2) OPS established the National Operations Center (NOC), the Planning Element and a deployable communications capability. Also, OPS has developed a conceptual interagency planning process and continue to accomplish the above tasks in the context of the NRP scenarios via an incremental development process. OPS’s initial focus has been on hurricane preparation, response and recovery. For hurricane scenarios, OPS identified the information requirements, worked through interagency roles and responsibilities, and implemented the following processes: reporting, resolution, information flow, information integrity, products (SPOTREPS, EXSUMS, SITREPS, COP/COD, POTUS Slides). OPS has developed the associated business process for the NOC and its interagency partners. OPS intent is to continue forward from natural disasters to terrorist events, so that it will accomplish the above tasks for all threats and all hazards.

(3) Additionally, OPS is supporting a pioneering effort in the Directorate of Preparedness for a National Command and Coordination Capability. This effort is being developed via an interagency working group and it has produced the following:

- Terms of Reference
- Strategic Concept
- Functional Requirements and Implementation Plan
- Plan of Action and Milestones
- 'To Be' Architectural Framework

The Way Ahead

A. Mission Blueprint Development and Implementation. In order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of OPS, an independent study was started in early September 2006. The intent is to leverage technical and analytical expertise to support expanding the capabilities of OPS (conceptual, procedural, technical) in a comprehensive and rapid manner.

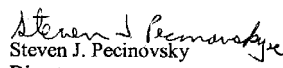
B. Operating Focus. Continue to focus on current operations, development of the NOC and the Planning Element capabilities, and providing a unified National operating capability in support of the NRP scenarios and the War on Terrorism.

C. Implement GAO Key Practices. Continue overall efforts to develop improve and sustain relationships, functionality, processes, integration, collaboration, and documentation in order to enhance operational readiness and mission accomplishment.

D. NOC Move to TSOC. Moving elements of the NOC to the TSA facility in Herndon, VA is scheduled for 2007. The move is intended to enhance the functionality, efficiency and effectiveness of the NOC. This is an interim step bridging the development of the DHS Campus.

E. DHS Campus. Collocating the DHS headquarters and all the DHS Component headquarters along with their respective staffs and operations centers at one location. One idea has the NOC at the center of a 'hub and spoke' configuration with a Component operations centers at each spoke. The Pentagon-like idea is intended to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of DHS operations.

Sincerely,


Steven J. Pecinovsky
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Appendix 1: Misconceptions

There are three basic misconceptions that underlie this report:

- (1) That OPS has administrative control (budgetary, programmatic, etc) over all DHS operations centers. While OPS does have administrative control over the NOC-Watch, it does not have the authority to direct or exercise control over Component/subordinate operations centers with respect to administration and support, including organization, staffing, control of resources and equipment, personnel management, logistics and training.
- (2) That OPS has command and control authority. There is no Secretary's Delegation of Authority for OPS to assume command and control over the Department's operations centers. OPS is a staff element and as such does not command.
- (3) That the NOC replaced the HSOC.
 - a. The NOC did more than replace the HSOC, because it integrates the HSOC's "watch function" with other critical functions to include a new planning capability. The NOC has five components: The Watch, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (OIA), the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC), the National Infrastructure Coordinating Center (NICC), and the Planning Element (PE). Each is responsible for distinct but complementary tasks toward accomplishing the overall DHS mission.
 - b. The only DHS operations center that OPS administratively controls is the the NOC-Watch and planning element. Thus, the NOC operates as a matrix organization in order to accomplish its mission. The descriptions below provide a brief overview of the composition and roles of each NOC element.
 - (1). The Watch is comprised of representatives from DHS components and agencies from Federal, State, and local departments and agencies, as required, supporting steady-state, 24/7, threat-monitoring requirements and domestic incident management activities. The organizational structure of The Watch is designed to integrate a full spectrum of interagency subject matter expertise and reach-back capability and planning to meet the demands of a wide range of potential incident scenarios.
 - (2). In partnership with other elements of the NOC, the OIA is responsible for interagency intelligence collection, analysis, production, and product dissemination for DHS. To accomplish this function the OIA is integrated into the NOC and is critical to the "quick look" capability and "Indications & Warning" capability.
 - (3). The NRCC is FEMA's operations center located in the FEMA Headquarters building, Washington, DC. The NRCC surges, from a small watch team who provide 24/7 coverage, by calling in Emergency Support Function (ESF) personnel as needed for incident coverage. There are 15 ESFs and the NRCC provides overall Federal response coordination for the ESFs and the incidents. The NRCC monitors potential or developing incidents and supports the efforts of regional and field components.

(4). The NICC belongs to Infrastructure Protection in the Preparedness Directorate and it is located in the TSA building, Herndon, VA. The NICC monitors the Nation's critical infrastructure and key resources on an ongoing basis and conducts daily polling of the standing information-sharing entities for incidents and abnormalities. During an incident, the NICC provides mechanisms to share and assess information across infrastructure and key resources sectors through appropriate information-sharing entities.

(5). The Planning Element supports crisis planning and the production and execution of national operational plans under a unified planning effort for domestic incidents that would require a Federal response. The PE will participate in the development of strategic guidance, concept development, plan development, and plan refinement leading to publication of a series of plans for potential homeland security events.

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Paul L. Jones (202) 512-8777

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Christopher Keisling, Kathleen Ebert, Dorian Dunbar, Scott Behen, Keith Wandtke, Amanda Miller, Christine Davis, and Willie Commons III made key contributions to this report. Additional assistance was provided by Katherine Davis.

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