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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-141](#), a report to Congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

U. S. energy needs rest heavily on ship-based imports. Tankers bring 55 percent of the nation's crude oil supply, as well as liquefied gases and refined products like jet fuel. This supply chain is potentially vulnerable in many places here and abroad, as borne out by several successful overseas attacks on ships and facilities. GAO's review addressed (1) the types of threats to tankers and the potential consequences of a successful attack, (2) measures taken to protect tankers and challenges federal agencies face in making these actions effective, and (3) plans in place for responding to a successful attack and potential challenges stakeholders face in responding. GAO's review spanned several foreign and domestic ports, and multiple steps to analyze data and gather opinions from agencies and stakeholders.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that cognizant agencies (1) plan for meeting a growing security workload for protecting liquefied natural gas shipments, (2) help ensure that ports plan for dealing with economic consequences of an attack, (3) integrate terrorism and spill response plans at the national and (4) local level, and (5) work to develop performance measures for emergency response. The agencies generally agreed with our recommendations, but the Department of Homeland Security took the final recommendation under advisement.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-141](#). For more information, contact Stephen Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or caldwells@gao.gov or Mark Gaffigan at (202) 512-3841 or gaffiganm@gao.gov

MARITIME SECURITY

Federal Efforts Needed to Address Challenges in Preventing and Responding to Terrorist Attacks on Energy Commodity Tankers

What GAO Found

The supply chain faces three main types of threats—suicide attacks such as explosive-laden boats, “standoff” attacks with weapons launched from a distance, and armed assaults. Highly combustible commodities such as liquefied gases have the potential to catch fire or, in a more unlikely scenario, explode, posing a threat to public safety. Attacks could also have environmental consequences, and attacks that disrupt the supply chain could have a severe economic impact.

Much is occurring, internationally and domestically, to protect tankers and facilities, but significant challenges remain. Overseas, despite international agreements calling for certain protective steps, substantial disparities exist in implementation. The United States faces limitations in helping to increase compliance, as well as limitations in ensuring safe passage on vulnerable transport routes. Domestically, units of the Coast Guard, the lead federal agency for maritime security, report insufficient resources to meet its own self imposed security standards, such as escorting ships carrying liquefied natural gas. Some units' workloads are likely to grow as new liquefied natural gas facilities are added. Coast Guard headquarters has not developed plans for shifting resources among units.

Multiple attack response plans are in place to address an attack, but stakeholders face three main challenges in making them work. First, plans for responding to a spill and to a terrorist threat are generally separate from each other, and ports have rarely exercised these plans simultaneously to see if they work effectively together. Second, ports generally lack plans for dealing with economic issues, such as prioritizing the movement of vessels after a port reopens. The President's maritime security strategy calls for such plans. Third, some ports report difficulty in securing response resources to carry out planned actions. Federal port security grants have generally been directed at preventing attacks, not responding to them, but a more comprehensive risk-based approach is being developed. Decisions about the need for more response capabilities are hindered, however, by a lack of performance measures tying resource needs to effectiveness in response.

Tanker *Limburg* after Terrorist Attack near Yemen



Source: AFP.