



Highlights of [GAO-09-63](#), a report to the Co-Chairman, Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Given the global context of the war on drugs—coupled with growing recognition since September 11, 2001 (9/11), of the nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism—the mission of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and efforts to forge effective interagency partnerships and coordination are increasingly important. GAO was asked to examine, in the context of the post-9/11 environment, DEA's (1) priorities, (2) interagency partnerships and coordination mechanisms, and (3) strategic plan and performance measures. GAO reviewed DEA policy, planning, and budget documents and visited 7 of DEA's 21 domestic field offices and 3 of its 7 regional offices abroad—sites selected to reflect diverse drug-trafficking threats, among other factors. GAO also contacted other relevant federal agencies—including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—and various state and local partner agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security take actions to enhance the effectiveness of (1) interagency partnerships involving DEA, ICE, and CBP and (2) the multiagency Special Operations Division and the OCDETF Fusion Center. DOJ agreed. DHS responded that discussions with DOJ are ongoing. DHS neither explicitly agreed nor disagreed with GAO's recommendations but suggested revisions to the wording, which GAO did not make.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-63](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-6510 or larencee@gao.gov.

DRUG CONTROL

Better Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and an Updated Accountability Framework Can Further Enhance DEA's Efforts to Meet Post-9/11 Responsibilities

What GAO Found

Since 9/11, while continuing its primary mission of enforcing U.S. controlled substances laws, DEA has supported U.S. counterterrorism efforts by prioritizing narcoterrorism cases—drug-trafficking cases linked to terrorism—and by implementing other policies and actions, such as collecting terrorism-related intelligence from confidential informants and foreign partners. Also, DEA is using a new enforcement authority to pursue and arrest narcoterrorists—even those who operate outside the United States.

Because most of the nation's illegal drug supply is distributed by Mexican drug organizations, DEA's partnerships and coordination with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies that have border-related missions—ICE and CBP—are important. However, an outdated interagency agreement—and long-standing disputes involving ICE's drug enforcement role and DEA's oversight of that role—have led to conflicts and the potential for duplicative investigative efforts. Another interagency agreement, predating CBP's formation under DHS, has led to operational inefficiencies, as reflected in a bifurcated process for handling illegal drugs seized at the nation's borders. That is, drugs seized by CBP *between* ports of entry are to be referred to DEA, but drugs seized *at* ports of entry are to be referred to ICE. According to CBP, an updated agreement that specifies a standardized process would be more efficient and less confusing. Further, in conducting the war on drugs, an important interagency coordination mechanism is the Special Operations Division, a DEA-led intelligence center that targets the command and control capabilities of major drug-trafficking organizations. Another coordination mechanism is the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) Fusion Center, which collects and analyzes drug-trafficking and related financial information and disseminates investigative leads. However, ICE is providing limited information to the Special Operations Division and is not participating in the OCDETF Fusion Center. As a result, according to DEA, these coordination entities are not as effective as they could be. Resolution of these interagency issues necessitates involvement by both the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security, given that their respective departments' component agencies have been unable to reach mutually acceptable agreements. Notably, because of links between drug trafficking and terrorism, DEA has established new partnerships with the Department of Defense (DOD), especially in Afghanistan, where they share intelligence and DOD provides airlift and other support for DEA operations.

DEA's strategic plan has not been updated since 2003; also, DEA's annual performance plans do not provide results-focused measures for assessing the agency's post-9/11 activities, such as counterterrorism efforts. A current and comprehensive strategic planning and performance measurement framework would help to ensure accountability by providing crucial information to DEA's senior leadership for making management decisions and to the Congress and the administration for assessing program effectiveness. In February 2009, DOJ reported that it was reviewing DEA's updated strategic plan.