



Highlights of [GAO-08-1148T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Secure Border Initiative (SBI) is a multiyear, multibillion-dollar program to secure the nation's borders through, among other things, new technology, increased staffing, and new fencing and barriers. The technology component of SBI, which is known as *SBI_{net}*, involves the acquisition, development, integration, and deployment of surveillance systems and command, control, communications, and intelligence technologies.

GAO was asked to testify on its draft report, which assesses DHS's efforts to (1) define the scope, timing, and life cycle management approach for planned *SBI_{net}* capabilities and (2) manage *SBI_{net}* requirements and testing activities. In preparing the draft report, GAO reviewed key program documentation, including guidance, plans, and requirements and testing documentation; interviewed program officials; analyzed a random probability sample of system requirements; and observed operations of the initial *SBI_{net}* project.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1148T](#). For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

DHS Needs to Address Significant Risks in Delivering Key Technology Investment

What GAO Found

Important aspects of *SBI_{net}* remain ambiguous and in a continued state of flux, making it unclear and uncertain what technology capabilities will be delivered and when, where, and how they will be delivered. For example, the scope and timing of planned *SBI_{net}* deployments and capabilities have continued to be delayed without becoming more specific. Further, the program office does not have an approved integrated master schedule to guide the execution of the program, and the nature and timing of planned activities has continued to change. This schedule-related risk is exacerbated by the continuous change in, and the absence of a clear definition of, the approach that is being used to define, develop, acquire, test, and deploy *SBI_{net}*.

SBI_{net} requirements have not been effectively defined and managed. While the program office recently issued guidance that is consistent with recognized leading practices, this guidance was not finalized until February 2008, and thus was not used in performing a number of important requirements-related activities. In the absence of this guidance, the program's efforts have been mixed. For example, while the program has taken steps to include users in developing high-level requirements, several requirements definition and management limitations exist. These include a lack of proper alignment (i.e., traceability) among the different levels of requirements, as evidenced by GAO's analysis of a random probability sample of requirements, which revealed large percentages that were not traceable backward to higher level requirements, or forward to more detailed system design specifications and verification methods.

SBI_{net} testing has also not been effectively managed. While a test management strategy was drafted in May 2008, it has not been finalized and approved, and it does not contain, among other things, a high-level master schedule of *SBI_{net}* test activities, metrics for measuring testing progress, and a clear definition of testing roles and responsibilities. Further, the program office has not tested the individual system components to be deployed to the initial deployment locations, even though the contractor initiated testing of these components with other system components and subsystems in June 2008.

In light of these circumstances, our soon to be issued report contains eight recommendations to the department aimed at reassessing its approach to and plans for the program, including its associated exposure to cost, schedule and performance risks, and disclosing these risks and alternative courses of action to DHS and congressional decision makers. The recommendations also provide for correcting the weaknesses surrounding the program's unclear and constantly changing commitments and its life cycle management approach and processes, as well as implementing key requirements development and management and testing practices.