

Highlights of [GAO-11-449T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Somali pirates have attacked 640 ships and taken more than 3,150 hostages since 2007. A few U.S.-flagged vessels have been affected—most recently the SV *Quest*, a private yacht on which four Americans were killed in February 2011. The growing frequency and severity of attacks renew the urgency to address the piracy threat. As Somalia is unable to repress piracy, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) developed the interagency *Countering Piracy off the Horn of Africa: Partnership and Action Plan* in December 2008 to prevent, disrupt, and prosecute piracy in collaboration with international and industry partners. In September 2010, GAO issued a report evaluating the extent to which U.S. agencies (1) have implemented the plan, and the challenges they face, and (2) have collaborated with partners. This testimony is based on the September 2010 report and its objectives, and work GAO conducted in March 2011 to update report findings.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this statement. GAO previously recommended that the NSC (1) update its *Action Plan*; (2) assess the costs and effectiveness of U.S. counterpiracy activities; and (3) clarify agency roles and responsibilities. A National Security Staff (NSS) official provided a statement that an interagency group is reviewing U.S. piracy policy, costs, metrics, roles, and responsibilities. Agencies also commented to clarify information in this statement.

View [GAO-11-449T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Stephen Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or caldwells@gao.gov, or John Pendleton at (404) 679-1816 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

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MARITIME SECURITY

Updating U.S. Counterpiracy *Action Plan* Gains Urgency as Piracy Escalates off the Horn of Africa

What GAO Found

As GAO reported in September 2010, the U.S. government has made progress in implementing its plan for countering piracy, in collaboration with industry and international partners. However, piracy is an escalating problem, and the U.S. government has not updated its plan as GAO recommended. The United States has advised industry partners on self-protection measures, contributed leadership and assets to an international coalition patrolling pirate-infested waters, and concluded a prosecution arrangement with the Seychelles. Many stakeholders credit collaborative efforts with reducing the pirates' rate of success in boarding ships and hijacking vessels, but since 2007 the location of attacks has spread from the heavily patrolled Gulf of Aden—the focus of the *Action Plan*—to the vast and much harder to patrol Indian Ocean. Also, from 2007 to 2010 the total number of reported hijackings increased sevenfold, and, after dropping in 2008 and 2009, the pirates' success rate rebounded from 22 percent in 2009 to almost 30 percent in 2010. In addition, the number of hostages captured and the amount of ransom paid increased sharply, and pirate attacks have grown more violent. The *Action Plan's* objective is to repress piracy off the Horn of Africa as effectively as possible, but as pirate operations have evolved, changes to the plan have not kept pace. The United States has not systematically tracked the costs of its counterpiracy efforts and is unable to determine whether counterpiracy investments are achieving the desired results. According to a statement by an NSS official, the United States is reviewing U.S. piracy policy to focus future U.S. efforts. These recent steps are encouraging because the growing frequency and severity of piracy off the Horn of Africa provides a renewed sense of urgency for taking action.

GAO's September 2010 report found that U.S. agencies have generally collaborated well with international and industry partners to counter piracy, but they could take additional steps to enhance and sustain interagency collaboration. According to U.S. and international stakeholders, the U.S. government has, among other things, collaborated with international partners to support prosecution of piracy suspects and worked with industry partners to educate ship owners on how to protect their vessels from pirate attack. However, agencies have made less progress on several key efforts that involve multiple U.S. agencies—such as those to address piracy through strategic communications, disrupt pirate finances, and hold pirates accountable. For instance, the departments of Defense, Justice, State, and the Treasury all collect or examine information on pirate finances, but none has lead responsibility for analyzing that information to build a case against pirate leaders or financiers. In September 2010, GAO recommended that the NSC identify roles and responsibilities for implementing these tasks, and develop guidance to ensure agency efforts work together efficiently and effectively. In March 2011, an NSS official stated that an interagency policy review will examine roles and responsibilities and implementation actions to focus U.S. efforts for the next several years. It is too early to assess this effort's effectiveness in bolstering interagency collaboration in U.S. counterpiracy efforts.