



Testimony

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Maritime Security, Committee on
Homeland Security, House of
Representatives

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BORDER SECURITY

DHS Could Strengthen Efforts to Establish Collaborative Mechanisms and Assess Use of Resources

Statement of Rebecca Gambler, Director, Homeland
Security and Justice

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-495T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing U.S. borders is the responsibility of DHS, in collaboration with other federal, state, local, and tribal entities. Within DHS, CBP is the lead agency for border security and is responsible for, among other things, keeping terrorists and their weapons, criminals and their contraband, and inadmissible aliens out of the country. In recent years, GAO has reported on a variety of DHS collaborative mechanisms and efforts to assess its use of border security resources.

This statement addresses (1) DHS's efforts to implement collaborative mechanisms along the southwest border and (2) DHS's efforts to assess its use of resources and programs to secure the southwest border. This statement is based on GAO reports and testimonies issued from September 2013 through February 2017 that examined DHS efforts to enhance border security and assess the effectiveness of its border security operations. GAO's reports and testimonies incorporated information GAO obtained by examining DHS collaborative mechanisms, reviewing CBP policies and procedures for coordinating use of assets, analyzing DHS data related to enforcement programs, and interviewing relevant DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has previously made numerous recommendations to DHS to improve the function of collaborative mechanisms and use of resources for border security, and DHS has generally agreed. DHS has taken actions or described planned actions to address the recommendations, which GAO will continue to monitor.

View [GAO-17-495T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or GamblerR@gao.gov.

April 2017

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DHS Could Strengthen Efforts to Establish Collaborative Mechanisms and Assess Use of Resources

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have implemented various mechanisms along the southern U.S. border to coordinate security operations, but could strengthen coordination of Predator B unmanned aerial system (UAS) operations to conduct border security efforts. In September 2013, GAO reported that DHS and CBP used collaborative mechanisms along the southwest border—including interagency Border Enforcement Security Task Forces and Regional Coordinating Mechanisms—to coordinate information sharing, target and prioritize resources, and leverage assets. GAO interviewed participants from the various mechanisms who provided perspective on successful collaboration, such as establishing positive working relationships, sharing resources, and sharing information. Participants also identified barriers, such as resource constraints, rotation of key personnel, and lack of leadership buy-in. GAO recommended that DHS take steps to improve its visibility over field collaborative mechanisms. DHS concurred and collected data related to the mechanisms' operations. Further, as GAO reported in June 2014, officials involved with mechanisms along the southwest border cited limited resource commitments by participating agencies and a lack of common objectives. Among other things, GAO recommended that DHS establish written interagency agreements with mechanism partners, and DHS concurred. Lastly, in February 2017, GAO reported that DHS and CBP had established mechanisms to coordinate Predator B UAS operations but could better document their coordination procedures. GAO made recommendations for DHS and CBP to improve coordination of UAS operations, and DHS concurred.

GAO recently reported that DHS and CBP could strengthen efforts to assess their use of resources and programs to secure the southwest border. For example, in February 2017, GAO reported that CBP does not record mission data consistently across all operational centers for its Predator B UAS, limiting CBP's ability to assess program effectiveness. In addition, CBP has not updated its guidance for collecting and recording mission information in its data collection system since 2014. Updating guidance consistent with internal control standards would help CBP better ensure the quality of data it uses to assess effectiveness. In January 2017, GAO found that methodological weaknesses limit the usefulness for assessing the effectiveness of CBP's Border Patrol Consequence Delivery System. Specifically, Border Patrol's methodology for calculating recidivism—the percent of aliens apprehended multiple times along the southwest border within a fiscal year—does not account for an alien's apprehension history over multiple years. Border Patrol could strengthen the methodology for calculating recidivism by using an alien's apprehension history beyond one fiscal year. Finally, CBP has not developed metrics that systematically use the data it collects to assess the contributions of its pedestrian and vehicle border fencing to its mission. Developing metrics to assess the contributions of fencing to border security operations could better position CBP to make resource allocation decisions with the best information available to inform competing mission priorities and investments. GAO made recommendations to DHS and CBP to update guidance, strengthen its recidivism calculation methodology, and develop metrics, and DHS generally concurred.

Chairwoman McCally, Ranking Member Vela, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to coordinate and assess its border security operations. Securing U.S. borders is the responsibility of DHS, in collaboration with other federal, state, local, and tribal entities. Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is the lead agency for border security and is responsible for, among other things, keeping terrorists and their weapons, criminals and their contraband, and inadmissible aliens out of the country.¹ The United States international border with Mexico (southwest border) continues to be vulnerable to illegal cross-border, and DHS reported apprehending over 331,000 illegal entrants and making over 14,000 seizures of drugs in fiscal year 2015.

Over time, DHS and CBP have established various collaborative mechanisms along the southern U.S. border, including the southwest border and southern maritime approaches, to integrate CBP operations and improve interagency coordination. For example, CBP, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard), and other stakeholders have partnered to form multiple joint task forces. To further support collaboration, DHS and CBP coordinate use of resources, including a variety of technology and assets such as aircraft. For example, CBP's Air and Marine Operations (AMO) uses Predator B unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and other aircraft equipped with video and radar surveillance technology along the southwest border to conduct border security efforts, in part, through coordination with joint task forces.

GAO has identified best practices for implementing interagency collaboration—broadly defined as any joint activity that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when agencies act alone.² Among other things, these best practices note that agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by developing mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results. In addition, we found that all collaborative mechanisms benefit from certain key features, such as implementing processes to track and monitor progress toward

¹See 6 U.S.C. § 211(a) (establishing CBP within DHS), (c) (enumerating CBP's duties).

²GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005) and *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012).

short-term and long-term outcomes. With regard to assessing its progress and efforts to secure the border, CBP components collect a variety of data on their use of resources and programs. For example, CBP's U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) collects data that support efforts to address smuggling and other illegal cross-border activity along the U.S. southwest border through its Consequence Delivery System (CDS) program—a process to classify each apprehended alien into criminal or noncriminal categories and apply various criminal, administrative, and programmatic consequences, such as federal prosecution, most likely to deter future illegal activity. In addition, Border Patrol collects a variety of data on its apprehension of aliens and seizures of narcotics along the southwest border and on use of resources such as tactical infrastructure—fencing, gates, roads, bridges, lighting, and drainage—and surveillance technology, such as towers equipped with video cameras and radar technology. AMO also collects data on its use of air and maritime assets; for example, seizures and apprehensions provided for by support from its Predator B UAS and Tethered Aerostat Radar System (TARS) program—fixed site unmanned buoyant craft tethered to the ground equipped with radar technology.

Over the years, we have reported on the progress and challenges DHS faces in implementing its border security efforts, including establishing collaborative mechanisms and assessing the effectiveness of its use of resources and programs along the border. My statement discusses our past findings on (1) DHS's efforts to implement collaborative mechanisms along the southwest border and (2) DHS's efforts to assess its use of resources and programs to secure the southwest border.

My statement today is based on reports and testimonies we issued from September 2013 through February 2017 that examined DHS efforts to enhance border security and assess the effectiveness of its border security operations (see Related GAO Products at the end of this statement). Our reports and testimonies incorporated information we obtained by examining DHS's collaborative mechanisms established along the southwest border; reviewing CBP policies and procedures for coordinating use of assets; analyzing DHS data related to enforcement program and asset assists or instances in which a technological asset assisted in the apprehension of illegal entrants, seizure of drugs or other contraband; and interviewing relevant DHS officials. In addition, since 2013, we assessed the extent to which DHS and CBP have implemented recommendations by reviewing supporting documentation. More detailed information about our scope and methodology can be found in our reports and testimonies. We conducted all of this work in accordance with

generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

DHS and CBP Have Established Collaborative Mechanisms Along the Southwest Border, but Could Strengthen Coordination of Predator B UAS Operations

DHS and CBP Have Implemented a Variety of Collaborative Mechanisms to Coordinate Border Security Efforts

DHS and its components have used various mechanisms over time to coordinate border security operations. In September 2013, we reported that the overlap in geographic and operational boundaries among DHS components underscored the importance of collaboration and coordination among these components.³ To help address this issue and mitigate operational inflexibility, DHS components, including those with border security-related missions such as CBP, Coast Guard, and ICE, employed a variety of collaborative mechanisms to coordinate their missions and share information. These mechanisms had both similarities and differences in how they were structured and on which missions or

³GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Visibility over Collaborative Field Mechanisms*, [GAO-13-734](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2013). Among other things, we recommended that DHS take steps to increase its visibility over how collaborative field mechanisms operate. DHS concurred and implemented actions to collect information about the mechanisms.

threats they focused, among other things, but they all had the overarching goal of increasing mission effectiveness and efficiencies. For example:

- In 2011, the Joint Targeting Team originated as a CBP-led partnership among the Del Rio area of Texas, including Border Patrol, CBP's Office of Field Operations, and ICE. This mechanism was expanded to support the South Texas Campaign (STC) mission to disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations, and its membership grew to include additional federal, state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement agencies.⁴
- In 2005, the first Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) was organized and led by ICE, in partnership with CBP, in Laredo, Texas, and additional units were subsequently formed along both the southern and northern borders. The BESTs' mission was to identify, disrupt, and dismantle existing and emerging threats at U.S. land, sea, and air borders.
- In 2011, CBP, Coast Guard, and ICE established Regional Coordinating Mechanisms (ReCoM) to utilize the fusion of intelligence, planning, and operations to target the threat of transnational terrorist and criminal acts along the coastal border. Coast Guard served as the lead agency responsible for planning and coordinating among DHS components.

In June 2014, we reported on STC border security efforts along with the activities of two additional collaborative mechanisms: (1) the Joint Field Command (JFC), which had operational control over all CBP resources in Arizona; and (2) the Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats (ACTT), which was a multiagency law enforcement partnership in Arizona.⁵ We found that through these collaborative mechanisms, DHS and CBP had coordinated border security efforts in information sharing, resource targeting and prioritization, and leveraging of assets. For example, to coordinate information sharing, the JFC maintained an operations coordination center and clearinghouse for intelligence information. Through the ACTT, interagency partners worked jointly to target individuals and criminal organizations involved in illegal cross-border

⁴CBP developed and implemented the STC to identify and address current and emerging threats along the border in South Texas. The STC conducts targeted operations to disrupt and degrade the ability of transnational criminal organizations to operate throughout the South Texas corridor while it simultaneously facilitates legitimate trade and travel.

⁵GAO, *Border Security: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Collaborative Mechanisms along the Southwest Border*, [GAO-14-494](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 27, 2014).

activity. The STC leveraged assets of CBP components and interagency partners by shifting resources to high-threat regions and conducting joint operations.

More recently, the Secretary of Homeland Security initiated the Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan in November 2014 to address the region's border security challenges by commissioning three DHS joint task forces to, in part, enhance collaboration among DHS components, including CBP, ICE, and Coast Guard. Two of DHS's joint task forces are geographically based, Joint Task Force – East and Joint Task Force – West, and one which is functionally based, Joint Task Force – Investigations. Joint Task Force – West is separated into geographic command corridors with CBP as the lead agency responsible for overseeing border security efforts to include: Arizona, California, New Mexico/West Texas, and South Texas. Coast Guard is the lead agency responsible for Joint Task Force – East, which is responsible for the southern maritime and border approaches. ICE is the lead agency responsible for Joint Task Force – Investigations, which focuses on investigations in support of Joint Task Force – West and Joint Task Force – East. Additionally, DHS has used these task forces to coordinate various border security activities, such as use of Predator B UAS, as we reported in February 2017 and discuss below.⁶

Collaborative Mechanism Participants Identified Practices that Enhanced or Served as Challenges to Collaboration

In September 2013, we reported on successful collaborative practices and challenges identified by participants from eight border security collaborative field mechanisms we visited—the STC, four BESTs and 3 ReCoMs.⁷ Their perspectives were generally consistent with the seven key issues to consider when implementing collaborative mechanisms that we identified in our 2012 report on interagency collaboration.⁸ Among participants who we interviewed, there was consensus that certain practices facilitated more effective collaboration, which, according to participants, contributed to the groups' overall successes. For example,

⁶GAO, *Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Collection of Unmanned Aerial Systems and Aerostats Data*, [GAO-17-152](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 16, 2017).

⁷[GAO-13-734](#).

⁸[GAO-12-1022](#). We identified seven features of successful collaborative mechanisms: (1) Outcomes and accountability; (2) Bridging organizational cultures; (3) Leadership; (4) Clarity of roles and responsibilities; (5) Participants; (6) Resources; and (7) Written guidance and agreements.

participants identified three of the seven categories of practices as keys to success: (1) positive working relationships/communication, (2) sharing resources, and (3) sharing information. Specifically, in our interviews, BEST officials stated that developing trust and building relationships helped participants respond quickly to a crisis, and communicating frequently helped participants eliminate duplication of efforts. Participants from the STC, BESTs, and ReCoMs also reported that having positive working relationships built on strong trust among participants was a key factor in their law enforcement partnerships because of the sensitive nature of law enforcement information, and the risks posed if it is not protected appropriately. In turn, building positive working relationships was facilitated by another collaborative factor identified as important by a majority of participants: physical collocation of mechanism stakeholders. Specifically, participants from the mechanisms focused on law enforcement investigations, such as the STC and BESTs, reported that being physically collocated with members from other agencies was important for increasing the groups' effectiveness.

Participants from the eight border security collaborative field mechanisms we visited at the time also identified challenges or barriers that affected their collaboration across components and made it more difficult. Specifically, participants identified three barriers that most frequently hindered effective collaboration within their mechanisms: (1) resource constraints, (2) rotation of key personnel, and (3) lack of leadership buy-in. For example, when discussing resource issues, a majority of participants said funding for their group's operation was critical and identified resource constraints as a challenge to sustaining their collaborative efforts. These participants also reported that since none of the mechanisms receive dedicated funding, the participating federal agencies provided support for their respective representatives assigned to the selected mechanisms. Also, there was a majority opinion among mechanism participants we visited that rotation of key personnel and lack of leadership buy-in hindered effective collaboration within their mechanisms. For example, STC participants stated that the rotation of key personnel hindered the STC's ability to develop and retain more seasoned personnel with expertise in investigations and surveillance techniques.

In addition, in June 2014, we identified coordination benefits and challenges related to the JFC, STC, and ACTT.⁹ For example, DHS and

⁹[GAO-14-494](#).

CBP leveraged the assets of CBP components and interagency partners through these mechanisms to conduct a number of joint operations and deploy increased resources to various border security efforts. In addition, these mechanisms provided partner agencies with increased access to specific resources, such as AMO air support and planning assistance for operations. Officials involved with the JFC, STC, and ACTT also reported collaboration challenges at that time. For example, officials from 11 of 12 partner agencies we interviewed reported coordination challenges related to the STC and ACTT, such as limited resource commitments by participating agencies and lack of common objectives. In particular, one partner with the ACTT noted that there had been operations in which partners did not follow through with the resources they had committed during the planning stages. Further, JFC and STC officials cited the need to improve the sharing of best practices across the various collaborative mechanisms, and CBP officials we interviewed identified opportunities to more fully assess how the mechanisms were structured. We recommended that DHS establish written agreements for some of these coordination mechanisms and a strategic-level oversight mechanism to monitor interagency collaboration. DHS concurred and these recommendations were closed as not implemented due to planned changes in the collaborative mechanisms.

CBP Has Established Mechanisms to Coordinate Its Use of Predator B UAS, but Could Benefit from Documented Procedures for Coordinating its Predator B UAS Operations

In February 2017, we found that as part of using Predator B aircraft to support other government agencies, CBP established various mechanisms to coordinate Predator B operations.¹⁰ CBP's Predator B aircraft are national assets used primarily for detection and surveillance during law enforcement operations, independently and in coordination with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. For example, at AMO National Air Security Operations Centers (NASOC) in Arizona, North Dakota, and Texas, personnel from other CBP components are assigned to support and coordinate mission activities involving Predator B operations.¹¹ Border Patrol agents

¹⁰[GAO-17-152](#).

¹¹As of fiscal year 2016, CBP operated nine Predator B aircraft from four AMO NASOCs in Arizona, Florida, North Dakota, and Texas. CBP's Predator B aircraft are launched and recovered at its NASOCs in Sierra Vista, Arizona; Corpus Christi, Texas; and Grand Forks, North Dakota; while the NASOC in Jacksonville, Florida remotely operates Predator B aircraft launched from other NASOCs. CBP's Predator B aircraft are equipped with video and radar sensors primarily to provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.

assigned to support NASOCs assist with directing agents and resources to support its law enforcement operations and collecting information on asset assists provided for by Predator B operations. Further, two of DHS's joint task forces also help coordinate Predator B operations. Specifically, Joint Task Force – West, Arizona and Joint Task Force – West, South Texas coordinate air asset tasking and operations, including Predator B operations, and assist in the transmission of requests for Predator B support and communication with local field units during operations, such as Border Patrol stations and AMO air branches.¹²

In addition to these mechanisms, CBP has documented procedures for coordinating Predator B operations among its supported or partner agencies in Arizona specifically by developing a standard operating procedure for coordination of Predator B operations through its NASOC in Arizona. However, CBP has not documented procedures for coordination of Predator B operations among its supported agencies through its NASOCs in Texas and North Dakota. CBP has also established national policies for its Predator B operations that include policies for prioritization of Predator B missions and processes for submission and review of Predator B mission or air support requests. However, these national policies do not include coordination procedures specific to Predator B operating locations or NASOCs. Without documenting its procedures for coordination of Predator B operations with supported agencies, CBP does not have reasonable assurance that practices at NASOCs in Texas and North Dakota align with existing policies and procedures for joint operations with other government agencies. Among other things, we recommended that CBP develop and document procedures for Predator B coordination among supported agencies in all operating locations. CBP concurred with our recommendation and stated that it plans to develop and implement an operations coordination structure and document its coordination procedures for Predator B operations through Joint Task Force – West, South Texas and document its coordination procedures for Predator B operations through its NASOC in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

¹²Joint Task Force – West, Arizona's area of responsibility includes Tucson and Yuma Border Patrol sectors. Joint Task Force – West, South Texas's area of responsibility includes Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and Del Rio Border Patrol sectors.

DHS and CBP Could Strengthen Efforts to Assess Use of Resources and Programs to Secure the Border

Border Patrol Could Benefit From Improving Its Methodology to Assess Effectiveness of its Consequence Delivery System Program

In January 2017, we reported that Border Patrol agents use the CDS to classify each alien apprehended illegally crossing the border and then apply one or more post-apprehension consequences determined to be the most effective and efficient to discourage recidivism, that is, further apprehensions for illegal cross-border activity.¹³ We found that Border Patrol uses an annual recidivism rate to measure performance of the CDS; however, methodological weaknesses limit the rate's usefulness for assessing CDS effectiveness. Specifically, Border Patrol's methodology for calculating recidivism—the percent of aliens apprehended multiple times along the southwest border within a fiscal year—does not account for an alien's apprehension history over multiple years. In addition, Border Patrol's calculation neither accounts for nor excludes apprehended aliens for whom there is no ICE record of removal from the United States. Our analysis of Border Patrol and ICE data showed that when calculating the recidivism rate for fiscal years 2014 and 2015, Border Patrol included in the total number of aliens apprehended, tens of thousands of aliens for whom ICE did not have a record of removal after apprehension and who may have remained in the United States without an opportunity to recidivate. Specifically, our analysis of ICE enforcement and removal data showed that about 38 percent of the aliens Border Patrol apprehended along the southwest border in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 may have remained in the United States as of May 2016.

¹³GAO, *Border Patrol: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Post-Apprehension Consequences*, [GAO-17-66](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2017). Under U.S. immigration law, an "alien" is any person that is not a U.S. citizen or national. See 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3). According to the National Institute of Justice, recidivism refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.

To better inform the effectiveness of CDS implementation and border security efforts, we recommended that, among other things, (1) Border Patrol strengthen the methodology for calculating recidivism, such as by using an alien's apprehension history beyond one fiscal year and excluding aliens for whom there is no record of removal; and (2) the Assistant Secretary of ICE and Commissioner of CBP collaborate on sharing immigration enforcement and removal data to help Border Patrol account for the removal status of apprehended aliens in its recidivism rate measure. CBP did not concur with our first recommendation and stated that CDS uses annual recidivism rate calculations to measure annual change, which is not intended to be, or used, as a performance measure for CDS, and that Border Patrol annually reevaluates the CDS to ensure that the methodology for calculating recidivism provides the most effective and efficient post apprehension outcomes. We continue to believe that Border Patrol should strengthen its methodology for calculating recidivism, as the recidivism rate is used as a performance measure by Border Patrol and DHS. DHS concurred with our second recommendation, but stated that collecting and analyzing ICE removal and enforcement data would not be advantageous to Border Patrol for CDS purposes since CDS is specific to Border Patrol. However, DHS also stated that Border Patrol and ICE have discussed the availability of the removal and enforcement data and ICE has agreed to provide Border Patrol with these data, if needed. DHS requested that we consider this recommendation resolved and closed. While DHS's planned actions are a positive step toward addressing our recommendation, DHS needs to provide documentation of completion of these actions for us to consider the recommendation closed as implemented.

CBP Collects Data that Could be Useful in Assessing How Border Fencing Contributes to Border Security Operations but Needs Metrics to Assess the Contribution to Its Mission

In February 2017, we reported on CBP's efforts to secure the border between U.S. ports of entry using tactical infrastructure, including fencing, gates, roads, bridges, lighting, and drainage.¹⁴ For example, border fencing is intended to benefit border security operations in various ways, according to Border Patrol officials, including supporting Border Patrol agents' ability to execute essential tasks, such as identifying illicit-cross border activities. CBP collects data that could help provide insight into how border fencing contributes to border security operations, including the location of illegal entries. However, CBP has not developed metrics that systematically use these data, among other data it collects, to assess the contributions of its pedestrian and vehicle border fencing to its mission. For example, CBP could potentially use these data to determine the extent to which border fencing diverts illegal entrants into more rural and remote environments, and border fencing's impact, if any, on apprehension rates over time. Developing metrics to assess the contributions of fencing to border security operations could better position CBP to make resource allocation decisions with the best information available to inform competing mission priorities and investments.

To ensure that Border Patrol has the best available information to inform future investments and resource allocation decisions among tactical infrastructure and other assets Border Patrol deploys for border security, we recommended, among other things, that Border Patrol develop metrics to assess the contributions of pedestrian and vehicle fencing to border security along the southwest border using the data Border Patrol already collects and apply this information, as appropriate, when making investment and resource allocation decisions. DHS concurred with our recommendation and plans to develop metrics and incorporate them into the Border Patrol's Requirements Management Process. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

¹⁴GAO, *Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing's Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps*, [GAO-17-331](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 16, 2017). Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where DHS officers or employees are assigned to clear passengers, merchandise, and other items; collect duties; and enforce customs laws; and where DHS officers inspect persons seeking to enter or depart, or applying for admission into, the United States, pursuant to U.S. immigration law.

CBP Has Taken Actions to Assess the Effectiveness of Its Predator B UAS and Aerostats for Border Security, but Could Improve Its Data Collection Efforts

In February 2017, we found that CBP has taken actions to assess the effectiveness of its Predator B UAS and tactical aerostats for border security, but could improve its data collection efforts.¹⁵ CBP collects a variety of data on its use of the Predator B UAS, tactical aerostats, and TARS, including data on their support for the apprehension of individuals, seizure of drugs, and other events (asset assists). For Predator B UAS, we found that mission data—such as the names of supported agencies and asset assists for seizures of narcotics—were not recorded consistently across all operational centers, limiting CBP’s ability to assess the effectiveness of the program. We also found that CBP has not updated its guidance for collecting and recording mission information in its data collection system to include new data elements added since 2014, and does not have instructions for recording mission information such as asset assists. In addition, not all users of CBP’s system have received training for recording mission information. We reported that updating guidance and fully training users, consistent with internal control standards, would help CBP better ensure the quality of data it uses to assess effectiveness. For tactical aerostats, we found that Border Patrol collection of asset assist information for seizures and apprehensions does not distinguish between its tactical aerostats and TARS. Data that distinguishes between support provided by tactical aerostats and support provided by TARS would help CBP collect better and more complete information and guide resource allocation decisions, such as the redeployment of tactical aerostat sites based on changes in illegal cross-border activity for the two types of systems that provide distinct types of support when assisting with, for example, seizures and apprehensions.

To improve its efforts to assess the effectiveness of its Predator B and tactical aerostat programs, we recommended, among other things, that CBP (1) update guidance for recording Predator B mission information in its data collection system; (2) provide training to users of CBP’s data collection system for Predator B missions; and (3) update Border Patrol’s data collection practices to include a mechanism to distinguish and track asset assists associated with tactical aerostats from TARS. CBP concurred and identified planned actions to address the recommendations, including incorporating a new functionality in its data collection system to include tips and guidance for recording Predator B mission information and updating its user manual for its data collection

¹⁵[GAO-17-152](#). Tactical aerostats are relocatable unmanned buoyant craft tethered to the ground and equipped with video surveillance cameras. As of fiscal year 2016, CBP deployed six tactical aerostats sites along the U.S.-Mexico border in south Texas.

system; and making improvements to capture data to ensure asset assists are properly reported and attributed to tactical aerostats, and TARS, among other actions.

CBP Uses Other Assets to Provide Security at the Arizona Border, and Would Benefit from Reporting and Tracking Asset Assist Data

In March 2014, we reported that CBP had identified mission benefits for technologies under its Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan—which included a mix of radars, sensors, and cameras to help provide security for the Arizona border—but had not yet developed performance metrics for the plan.¹⁶ CBP identified mission benefits such as improved situational awareness and agent safety. Further, a DHS database enabled CBP to collect data on asset assists, instances in which a technology—such as a camera, or other asset, such as a canine team—contributed to an apprehension or seizure, that in combination with other relevant performance metrics or indicators, could be used to better determine the contributions of CBP’s surveillance technologies and inform resource allocation decisions. However, we found that CBP was not capturing complete data on asset assists, as Border Patrol agents were not required to record and track such data. We concluded that requiring the reporting and tracking of asset assist data could help CBP determine the extent to which its surveillance technologies are contributing to CBP’s border security efforts.

To assess the effectiveness of deployed technologies at the Arizona border and better inform CBP’s deployment decisions, we recommended that CBP (1) require tracking of asset assist data in its Enforcement Integrated Database, which contains data on apprehensions and seizures and (2) once data on asset assists are required to be tracked, analyze available data on apprehensions and seizures and technological assists, in combination with other relevant performance metrics to determine the contribution of surveillance technologies to CBP’s border security efforts. DHS concurred with our first recommendation, and Border Patrol issued guidance in June 2014 and Border Patrol officials confirmed with us in June 2015 that agents are required to enter this information into the database. These actions met the intent of our recommendation. DHS also concurred with our second recommendation, and as of September 2016 has taken some action to assess its technology assist data and other measures to determine contributions of surveillance technologies to its

¹⁶GAO, *Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Management and Assess Effectiveness*, [GAO-14-368](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2014).

mission. However, until Border Patrol completes its efforts to fully develop and apply key attributes for performance metrics for all technologies to be deployed under the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan, it will not be well positioned to fully assess its progress in determining when mission benefits have been fully realized.

Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and members of the subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For further information about this testimony, please contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov. In addition, contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals making key contributions to this statement included Kirk Kiester (Assistant Director), as well as Stephanie Heiken, David Lutter, Sasan “Jon” Najmi, and Carl Potenzieri.

Related GAO Products

Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing's Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps. [GAO-17-331](#). Washington, D.C.: February 16, 2017.

Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Collection of Unmanned Aerial Systems and Aerostats Data. [GAO-17-152](#). Washington, D.C.: February 16, 2017.

Border Patrol: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Post-Apprehension Consequences. [GAO-17-66](#). Washington, D.C.: January 12, 2017.

Border Security: DHS Surveillance Technology Unmanned Aerial Systems and Other Assets. [GAO-16-671T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2016.

Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Assess Resource Deployment and Progress. [GAO-16-465T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 1, 2016.

Border Security: Progress and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Implement and Assess Infrastructure and Technology. [GAO-15-595T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 13, 2015.

Border Security: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Collaborative Mechanisms along the Southwest Border. [GAO-14-494](#). Washington, D.C.: June 27, 2014.

Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan: Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Management and Assess Effectiveness. [GAO-14-368](#). Washington, D.C.: March 3, 2014.

Arizona Border Surveillance Technology: More Information on Plans and Costs Is Needed before Proceeding. [GAO-12-22](#). Washington, D.C.: November 4, 2011.

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