



Highlights of [GAO-10-651T](#), a statement for the record to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing the nation's borders from illegal entry of aliens and contraband, including terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, continues to be a major challenge. In November 2005, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the launch of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI)—a multiyear, multibillion dollar program aimed at securing U.S. borders and reducing illegal immigration. Within DHS, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) provides agents and officers to support SBI. As requested, this statement summarizes (1) the findings and recommendations of GAO's reports on SBI's technology, known as *SBI_{net}* (including such things as cameras and radars), and DHS's recent actions on *SBI_{net}*; and (2) the findings and recommendations of GAO's reports on tactical infrastructure, such as fencing, and the extent to which CBP has deployed tactical infrastructure and assessed its operational impact. This statement is based on products issued from 2007 through 2010, with selected updates as of April 2010. To conduct these updates, GAO reviewed program schedules, status reports and funding and interviewed DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made numerous recommendations on SBI design and implementation, which DHS generally concurred with and has begun taking action to implement.

View [GAO-10-651T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or RichardS@gao.gov.

SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

DHS Has Faced Challenges Deploying Technology and Fencing Along the Southwest Border

What GAO Found

Since the inception of *SBI_{net}*, GAO has reported on a range of issues regarding design and implementation, including program challenges, management weaknesses, and cost, schedule, and performance risks; DHS has largely concurred with GAO's recommendations and has started to take some action to address them. For example, in October 2007, GAO testified that the project involving the first segment of *SBI_{net}* technology across the southwest border had fallen behind its planned schedule. In a September 2008 testimony, GAO reported that CBP plans to initially deploy *SBI_{net}* technology along the southwest border had slipped from the end of 2008 to 2011 and that *SBI_{net}* would have fewer capabilities than originally planned. As of April 2010, *SBI_{net}*'s promised capabilities were still not operational. Limitations in the system's ability to function have contributed to delays. GAO has also reviewed CBP expenditure plans and found a lack of specificity on such things as planned activities and milestones. GAO made recommendations, including the need for future expenditure plans to include explicit and measurable commitments relative to the capabilities, schedule, costs, and benefits associated with individual SBI program activities. While DHS has concurred with GAO's recommendations, and its expenditure plans have improved from year to year in detail and quality, the plans, including the one for fiscal year 2009, did not fully satisfy the conditions set out by law. Further, in September 2008, GAO made recommendations to address *SBI_{net}* technological capabilities that were ambiguous or in a state of flux. DHS generally concurred with them. In January 2010, GAO reported that the number of new system defects identified over an 17 month period while testing was underway was generally increasing faster than the number of defects being fixed, not indicative of a maturing system. Given the program's shortcomings, in January 2010, the Secretary of Homeland Security ordered an assessment of the program, and in March 2010, the Secretary froze a portion of the program's fiscal year 2010 funding. GAO plans to report in May 2010 on the *SBI_{net}* solution and the status of its September 2008 recommendations.

CBP has completed deploying most of its planned tactical infrastructure and has begun efforts to measure its impact on border security, in response to a GAO recommendation. As of April 2010, CBP had completed 646 of the 652 miles of fencing it committed to deploy along the southwest border. CBP plans to have the remaining 6 miles of this baseline completed by December 2010. CBP reported that tactical infrastructure, coupled with additional trained agents, had increased the miles of the southwest border under control, but despite a \$2.6 billion investment, it cannot account separately for the impact of tactical infrastructure. In a September 2009 report, GAO recommended that to improve the quality of information available to allocate resources and determine tactical infrastructure's contribution to effective control of the border, the Commissioner of CBP conduct a cost-effective evaluation of the impact of tactical infrastructure. DHS concurred with our recommendation and, in April 2010, told GAO that the Homeland Security Institute had undertaken this analysis.