

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-441](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. government has identified illicit drugs, as well as the criminal organizations that traffic them, as significant threats to the United States. In 2017, over 70,000 people died from drug overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DOD and DHS created joint task forces to help facilitate and strengthen interagency efforts in combating the flow of illicit drugs, particularly in the maritime domain.

GAO was asked to review the structure of these task forces and their ability to coordinate and conduct missions effectively. Among other objectives, this report (1) assesses the extent to which the task forces coordinate effectively to minimize duplication, and (2) examines how the task forces measure the effectiveness of their missions and activities. GAO reviewed and assessed documentation on the task forces' missions, coordination efforts, and performance assessments and compared them to best practices from prior work, departmental guidance, and federal internal control standards. GAO also met with task force officials to discuss and observe planning and coordination activities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that JIATF-West establish a vital few, consistent performance measures for its overall performance; and that DHS develop outcome-based performance measures for the JTFs' activities. DOD and DHS concurred with the three recommendations.

View [GAO-19-441](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or AndersonN@gao.gov.

July 2019

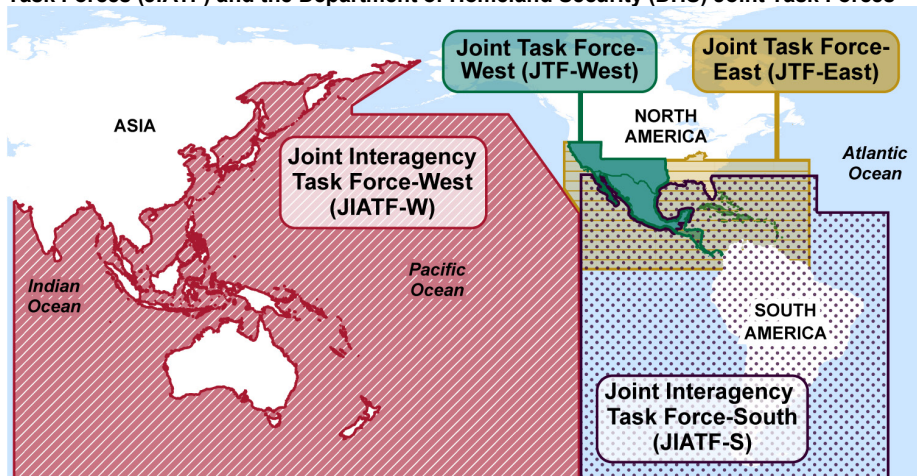
DRUG CONTROL

Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities

What GAO Found

Many federal agencies are involved in efforts to reduce the availability of illicit drugs by countering the flow of such drugs into the United States. Among them are the Department of Defense (DOD), which has lead responsibility for detecting and monitoring illicit drug trafficking into the country, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which is responsible for securing U.S. borders to prevent illegal activity. DOD and DHS lead and operate task forces—Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)—South, JIATF-West, and three DHS Joint Task Forces (JTF)—to coordinate and conduct counterdrug missions and activities. Task force officials reported that the task forces coordinated effectively with each other when they had shared purposes and overlapping or shared geographical boundaries (see map). The task forces also used coordination mechanisms that align with best practices, such as working groups and liaison officers, to minimize duplication of their missions and activities.

Map of the Areas of Responsibility for the Department of Defense (DOD) Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Joint Task Forces



Source: GAO adaptation based on DOD and DHS documentation; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-441

Note: DHS also has JTF-Investigations, which is a functional task force with no geographic area of responsibility.

Each of the five task forces GAO reviewed has performance measures, but only JIATF-South uses output (e.g., number of detected smuggling events) and outcome-based measures to assess the effectiveness of its activities. Specifically, JIATF-South developed an outcome-based measure of its overall effectiveness: the percentage of smuggling events it detected and provided to law enforcement that resulted in disrupted or seized illicit drugs. JIATF-West evaluates its numerous initiatives and activities, for instance, by determining if they were executed as planned, but has not established a vital few performance measures that consistently convey the overall effectiveness of its activities. Lastly, the DHS JTFs' performance measures are not outcome-based and do not fully assess the effectiveness of the task forces' activities. Enhancing their measures would better position JIATF-West and the JTFs to demonstrate contributions and convey trends in the overall effectiveness of their activities.