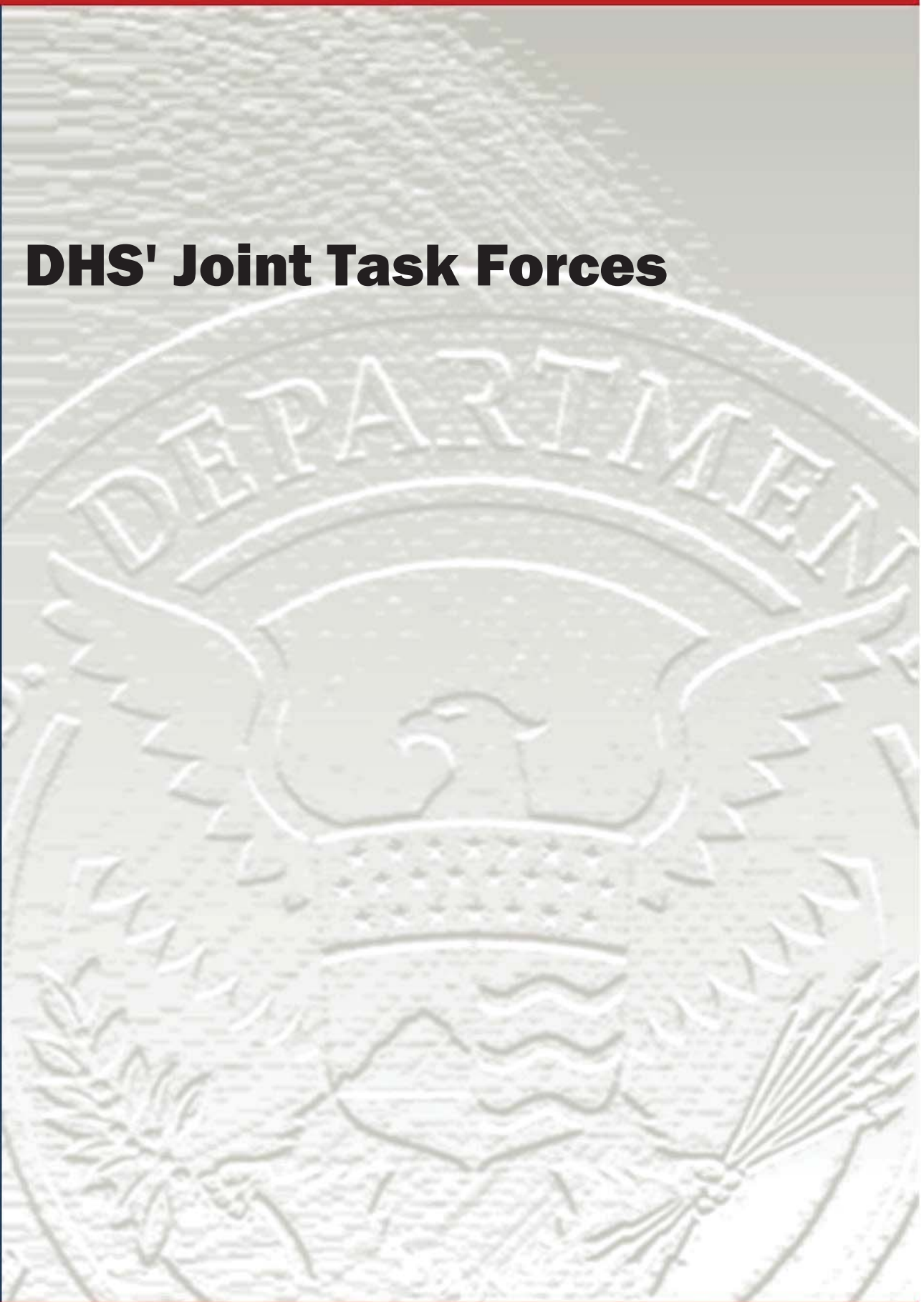


OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

DHS' Joint Task Forces



Homeland
Security

August 10, 2017
OIG-17-100



DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

DHS' Joint Task Forces

August 10, 2017

Why We Did This Report

In 2014, DHS created three pilot Joint Task Forces (JTF) to address challenges along the Southern Border. We initiated an audit in September 2016 to determine the Department's progress in implementing the JTFs. In December 2016, Congress passed the *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)* granting the Secretary additional authorities to establish JTFs headed by a presidentially appointed Director.

This report provides our views of successes and some challenges the JTFs face in achieving their mission.

What We Recommend

This report contains no recommendations.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

What We Found

The Department of Homeland Security made progress in implementing the JTFs since their inception in 2014. According to JTF leaders, operational effectiveness and efficiency has increased; staff morale has improved; and components have successfully worked together to promote information sharing and communication.

Although the JTFs are a step forward for DHS, they face challenges, including a need for dedicated funding and outcome-based performance measures. Without dedicated funding, the JTFs rely on components that may have competing or conflicting priorities. Without performance metrics, the JTFs cannot show the value they add to homeland security operations.

During our fieldwork, Congress passed the 2017 *National Defense Authorization Act*, which called for establishing JTFs within DHS. In view of that legislation, we decided to report on our initial observations. Most importantly, we observed a commitment among DHS leaders to working together to promote and support a strong "unity of effort" within the JTFs. Our field visits confirmed those assertions.

DHS Response

The Department noted our positive recognition of these efforts and that we observed a strong unity of effort and commitment among DHS leaders in working together to promote and support the JTFs. According to DHS, the JTFs have demonstrated initial success at coordinating operations in support of Departmental operational priorities, thereby improving security along the Southern Border and Approaches. This success indicates the potential for continued, positive operational impact as planning, execution, and coordination processes mature.



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

August 10, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Elaine Duke
Acting Secretary

FROM: John Roth 
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *DHS' Joint Task Forces*

For your information is our final report, *DHS' Joint Task Forces*. It describes DHS' progress in implementing the Joint Task Forces (JTF). We incorporated the formal comments provided by your office.

According to JTF leaders, there has been an increase in operational effectiveness and efficiency; improved staff morale; and greater cooperation among components working together to promote information sharing and communication. During our fieldwork, Congress passed the 2017 *National Defense Authorization Act*, which called for establishing JTFs within DHS. In view of that legislation, we decided to report on our initial observations.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Don Bumgardner, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 254-4100, or Sean Pettersen, Audit Director at (303) 236-2876.



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Background

In May 2014, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security directed the creation of the *U.S. Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan* (SBACP). The overarching goals of SBACP were to enforce immigration laws and interdict individuals seeking to illegally cross our land, sea, and air borders; degrade transnational criminal organizations; and decrease the terrorism threat to the Nation, all without impeding the flow of lawful trade, travel, and commerce. In November 2014, further Secretary guidance directed DHS to develop a pilot program to address persistent challenges DHS faces along the Southern Border and maritime approaches. Specifically, it created three Joint Task Forces (JTF) to conduct integrated investigations and operations within joint operating areas.¹ The purpose of JTFs is to enhance DHS’ “unity of effort” in securing the Southern Border and maritime approaches. Two JTFs have a geographic area of responsibility (JTF-East and JTF-West) and the third has a functional area of responsibility (JTF–Investigations).

A JTF official recently testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, that —

[b]efore the creation of the DHS JTFs, DHS agencies in the field regularly worked together to achieve significant enforcement results; however, these results frequently relied upon a network of informal personal relationships and overlapping agency priorities, versus a clear framework that directed regional efforts. The JTF construct formalizes operational processes between regional and national level DHS components, and establishes enduring functional relationships between DHS agencies.

During our fieldwork, Congress passed the *2017 National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA), prompting us to modify our report objective. This abbreviated report provides our views of successes and some challenges the JTFs face in achieving their mission.

¹ The JTFs are a relatively small operation within DHS. Our office is also conducting an audit of how DHS fosters collaboration and unity of effort department-wide to enforce and administer immigration policy. The review, to be released this summer, will look at the day-to-day operations outside of the JTF structures.



Results of Inspection

DHS has made progress in implementing the JTFs. According to JTF leaders, operational effectiveness and efficiency has increased; staff morale has improved; and components have successfully worked together to promote information sharing and communication.

The JTFs have supported or completed important operations. In January 2015, JTF-Investigations developed a process for determining the top criminal networks impacting homeland security and conducting National Case Coordination to eliminate them. This process supports JTF-East and JTF-West. From May to August of 2016, JTF-West conducted Operation “All In” to disrupt human smuggling activities that affect the Southern Border. According to DHS, due to the success of this operation, the Secretary approved it as an “open-ended, steady-state enforcement effort.” Finally, in fiscal year 2017 JTF-East supported Operation “Caribbean Guard,” which resulted in migrant arrests, drug interdiction, and seized currency. However, as we note later, because the JTFs have not established performance metrics, we are unable to assess their effectiveness objectively.

Although the JTFs are a step forward for DHS, they face challenges, including a need for dedicated funding and outcome-based performance measures. Without dedicated funding, the JTFs rely on components that may have competing or conflicting priorities. Without performance metrics, the JTFs cannot show the value they add to homeland security operations.

On a positive note, the JTFs address the “unity of effort” challenge that we identified in our November 2016 report on the Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security.² We observed a strong “unity of effort” and commitment among DHS leaders in working together to promote and support the JTFs. The JTF leaders reported both an increase in operational effectiveness and efficiency because of integration, and improved staff morale. They asserted that JTFs leveraged component resources and authorities to target criminal organizations nationwide. In addition, they cited staff from different DHS components working together promoted information sharing and better communication. Our visits to JTF offices supported those assertions. As an illustration, while at JTF-Investigations, we noted that officials from CBP’s United States Border Patrol and the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) were dressed in business attire, not uniforms. The officials told us that they do not wear their uniforms because they are “considered a barrier to communication.” At JTF-West, we saw component personnel operated in a large open space and around a conference table that they referred to as the “unity table.” Officials we

² *Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security* (OIG-17-08, November 2016).



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interviewed stated that they were “very proud of the fact that the JTF framework is a catalyst of the Unity of Effort movement.”

JTF Organizations

Following the issuance of SBACP in January 2015, the DHS Secretary held monthly video conferences with component and JTF staff to guide the establishment of operational priorities. Currently, the highest SBACP priorities are to mitigate the flow of illegal immigration with a focus on special interest aliens and to conduct counter-network operations to dismantle priority transnational criminal organizations.

Each task force has a lead agency and is responsible for a specific region or function. Table 1 illustrates these designations.

Table 1: JTF Organizations

Task Force	When Operations Began	Lead Agency	Region or Function
JTF-East	November 2016	Coast Guard	Southern maritime border and approaches
JTF-West	May 2016	U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	Southern land border and the maritime borders in southern California and Texas
JTF-Investigations	January 2015	Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)	Investigative support to the other two task forces

Source: U.S. Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan

Although each JTF has a lead agency, the JTFs operate as “Joint Staffs,” meaning they draw personnel from multiple DHS components. For example, the JTF-West Director is a CBP Border Patrol official; the Deputy Directors are from the Coast Guard and ICE Homeland Security Investigations.

JTF Budget and Staff

The JTFs do not have a separate budget or permanent staff. Instead, they rely on support from DHS components. According to a JTF official, relying solely on components to fund JTF expenses is challenging because the components may have competing or conflicting priorities. In fiscal year 2016, CBP, ICE, and the Coast Guard reported spending almost \$17 million for JTF efforts.³ Each DHS component is responsible for assigning staff to the JTFs. They typically do on a rotational basis with assignments ranging from 18 to 48 months. Table 2

³ FY 2016 spending includes salaries, temporary duty, services, equipment, supplies, utilities, rent, communications, and contract services.



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shows the amount of money spent on each JTF, their initial staff allocation, and the number of staff assigned as of October 2016. Despite the benefits derived from the JTFs, they have not yet been fully staffed.

Table 2: JTF Budget and Staff

Task Force	Amount Spent	Initial Staff Allocation	Staff as of October 2016
JTF-East	\$4,422,313	68	44
JTF-West	\$5,324,487	80	71
JTF- Investigations	\$7,231,540	57	55
Total	\$16,978,340	205	170

Source: DHS information

JTF Operations

JTF-Investigations

In January 2015, JTF-Investigations began supporting the other JTFs by prioritizing and supporting criminal investigations, based upon the priorities of the Secretary and the JTF Directors. As part of that effort, JTF-Investigations developed the DHS Homeland Criminal Organization Target (HOMECORT) process for determining the top criminal networks impacting homeland security and conducting National Case Coordination to eliminate them. The JTFs and other DHS agencies nominate investigations for HOMECORT status. Once approved by a panel of DHS and component leadership, HOMECORT investigations receive prioritized, dedicated investigative support from an integrated team of experienced intelligence analysts, special agents, and other officers. JTF-Investigations facilitate the development of a collaborative, case-specific, HOMECORT Action Plan to more comprehensively disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations. As of April 2017, JTF-Investigations reported it has coordinated and supported the targeting of 14 HOMECORT criminal networks and dismantled 11 of these while the other 3 remain active investigations. According to JTF-Investigations, it provided more than 3,500 hours of monthly analytical support to HOMECORT investigations and SBACP/JTF priorities.

According to a Coast Guard official, this type of coordination provided by JTF-Investigations previously did not exist. Before the JTFs, the Coast Guard was only aware of cases at an operational level, not at the network level such as those of transnational criminal organizations. JTF-Investigations is responsible for exposing the Coast Guard to more cases and targeting criminal networks more strategically.



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JTF-West

In FY 2016, JTF-West began Operation “All In” to disrupt human smuggling activities impacting the Southwest border. Operation “All In” was a series of short-term coordinated enforcement activities, lasting from 1 to 2 weeks, referred to as “pulses.” Over 90 days between May and August 2016, JTF-West conducted three “All In” pulses. Personnel from CBP, ICE, the Coast Guard, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and other Federal and local law enforcement partners provided resources and support for Operation “All In.”

“Before the JTF-West framework was in place, intelligence information was stuck in a silo within a DHS component and nothing ever came from it. However, when the JTF-West framework was established, it improved information sharing and integrated databases, allowing the intelligence to be used successfully to bring down a human smuggling network.” --Section Chief JTF-West

According to JTF-West officials, Operation “All In” identified and encountered 204 individuals with widespread ties to human smuggling networks. According to the JTF-West after action assessment of this operation, “JTF-West is now able to plan, coordinate and execute integrated counter network operations beyond traditional DHS component operational capabilities and the immediate border.” In addition, the goals of the JTF-West Strategic Communication Plan included demonstrating that DHS’ unified operations to target human and drug smuggling networks are the “new norm” for DHS enforcement operations. During our field visit, we discussed the collaboration efforts at JTF-West and saw where component personnel operated in a large open space and around a conference table that they referred to as the “unity table.”

According to DHS, due to the success of Operation “All In,” the Secretary approved the concept as an “open-ended, steady-state enforcement effort.”

JTF-East

In November 2016, JTF-East coordinated a surge of resources to Puerto Rico in support of the Caribbean Border Interagency Group’s Operation “Caribbean Guard.” The surge focused on enhancing unity of effort among DHS components toward a specific operational goal: Targeting special interest aliens and the transportation of contraband, including narcotics, weapons, and money. According to the JTF-East after action report, in developing the surge, JTF-East and regional partners created a consolidated, interagency resource request to address emerging threats. Using the Eastern Caribbean Regional Integrating Group as the primary conduit, JTF-East received and validated resource requests from the Coast Guard, ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations and Enforcement and Removal Operations, CBP’s Air and Marine Operations and U.S. Border Patrol, and other partners. This enabled JTF-East



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to facilitate broader discussions with components, garnering the reallocation of resources stationed outside of Puerto Rico to meet the operational requirements of this surge. The additional resources included a CBP aircraft, USNORTHCOM linguist support, and the extension of two Maritime Safety and Security Team deployments. JTF-East also initiated discussions with Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) to refine prioritization and processes for critical movement alerts to better leverage operational and intelligence support from JIATF-S.

According to JTF-East, over a 13-day period, this Operation achieved operational goals and resulted in 13 arrests, 70 migrants intercepted ashore, and 18 migrants interdicted at sea. It also resulted in the seizure of more than 500 kilograms of cocaine and 28 kilograms of marijuana, over \$77,000 in bulk cash, and two vessels. JTF East considers this success a foundation from which to build future joint operations. Nevertheless, we were unable to determine whether the success of this operation would have occurred without the JTF structure.

JTF Challenges and Congressional Action

Although the task forces are a step forward for DHS, they face challenges. We identified challenges including a need for dedicated funding and full staffing. The JTFs would also benefit from outcome-based performance measures so that the Secretary can objectively assess the JTFs effectiveness. The performance measures need to demonstrate that no single component could get the same results. DHS is in the process of identifying performance measures for the JTFs.

In December 2016, Congress passed the 2017 NDAA, which addresses some of the challenges we identified. It provides the Secretary with the authority to establish JTFs and requires DHS and its components to:

- establish outcome-based and other appropriate performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF; and
- provide sufficient resources and the authority necessary to carry out the missions and responsibilities of the JTFs.

Also according to the 2017 NDAA, each JTF will have a director appointed by the President.⁴ As of May 2017, no new directors have been appointed.

⁴ An individual serving as a Director of a Joint Task Force of the Department of Homeland Security in existence on the day before the date of the enactment of the NDAA may serve as the Director of such Joint Task Force on and after such date of enactment until a Director of such Joint Task Force is appointed. All three current Directors were in service before the NDAA was enacted and therefore have not been appointed by the President.



Conclusion

DHS made progress in implementing the JTFs since their inception in 2014. According to JTF leaders, there has been increased operational effectiveness and efficiency, improved staff morale, and greater cooperation among components working together to promote information sharing and communication. While a lack of performance measures makes it difficult to quantify any increase in operational effectiveness, our field visits did anecdotally reveal greater cooperation among components to promote information sharing and communication.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

We have included a copy of DHS' management comments in their entirety in Appendix A. DHS also provided technical comments to our report. We made changes to incorporate these comments, as appropriate.

The Department noted our positive recognition of these efforts and that we observed a strong unity of effort and commitment among DHS leaders in working together to promote and support the JTFs. According to DHS, the JTFs have demonstrated initial success at coordinating operations in support of Departmental operational priorities, thereby improving security along the Southern Border and Approaches. This success indicates the potential for continued, positive operational impact as planning, execution, and coordination processes mature.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Public Law 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*. This is one of a series of audit, inspection, and special reports prepared as part of our oversight responsibilities to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the Department.

We conducted this review to determine whether DHS has made progress in implementing JTFs. To answer our objective, we performed the following:

- Reviewed and analyzed the *DHS Campaign Plan for Securing the U.S. Southern Border and Approaches*;
- Obtained and reviewed departmental policies, procedures, and guidance relevant to the JTF framework;
- Reviewed and analyzed the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* to determine the impact on the DHS JTFs;



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- Reviewed JTF-West, JTF-East, and JTF-Investigations Operational Plans and Priorities for FYs 2016–2017;
- Determined the FY 2016 operating costs for DHS JTF-West, JTF-East, and JTF-Investigations. The costs included overhead, facility, personnel costs, and equipment;
- Interviewed:
 - DHS officials in Washington, DC, from the Office of Policy, Southern Borders and Approaches Coordination Cell, and Office of Strategy, Plans, Analysis, and Risk group;
 - DHS component officials to discuss impacts of providing resources to support the DHS JTFs;
 - Deputy Director of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) Program to discuss best practices and challenges;
 - DHS advisors from Department of Defense U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command to obtain a better understanding of the Department of Defense’s (DOD) involvement in the planning and creation of the DHS JTFs, as well as DOD JTF Best Practices; and
- Conducted site-visits and interviewed JTF-Investigations in Washington, DC; JTF-West in San Antonio, Texas; and JTF-East in Portsmouth, Virginia. We also conducted site-visits to JTF-West corridors in San Diego, California; Tucson, Arizona; El Paso and Edinburg, Texas.

We conducted this review between September 2016 and April 2017 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to the *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

The Office of Audits major contributors to this report are: Christine Haynes, Director; Sean Pettersen, Director; Peter Christopher, Auditor-in-Charge; Darvy Khun, Program Analyst; Jeanne Garcia, Program Analyst; Mike Brunelle, Program Analyst; Ellen Gallagher, Communications Analyst; and Thomas Bobrowski, Independent Referencer.



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Department of Homeland Security

Appendix A
DHS Comments to the Draft Report


U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

July 20, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: John Roth
Inspector General

FROM: Jim H. Crumpacker, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office 

SUBJECT: Management's Response to OIG Draft Report "DHS's Joint Task Forces" (Project No. 16-086-AUD-DHS)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

In May 2014, the Department established a DHS-Wide, Inter-Component Campaign Plan focused on improving the Department's unity of effort and security for the Southern Border and Approaches to the United States. This campaign plan led to the establishment of three pilot Joint Task Forces (JTF) charged with coordinating cross-Component operations across air, land, and maritime domains. The JTFs allow DHS to better understand and counter adversary efforts inside the source zone, along legal and illegal transit zone pathways, and within the homeland.

The Department is pleased to note OIG's positive recognition of these efforts in the draft report. Specifically, the OIG noted that, "JTFs address the 'unity of effort' challenge that [OIG] identified in [OIG's] November 2016 report on the Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security." OIG also observed, "a strong 'unity of effort' and commitment among DHS leaders in working together to promote and support the JTFs."

These JTFs have demonstrated initial success at coordinating operations in support of Departmental operational priorities, thereby improving security along the Southern Border and Approaches. This success indicates the potential for continued, positive operational impact as our planning, execution, and coordination processes mature.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.



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Department of Homeland Security

Appendix B
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