G A O
Accountability★Integrity★Reliability

Highlights

NATIONAL GUARD
Effective Management Processes Needed for Wide-Area Network

Why GAO Did This Study

The Fiscal Year 2002 Defense Authorization Act required GAO to review GuardNet, the National Guard's wide-area network, which is used to support various Defense applications and was used to support homeland security activities after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. GAO was asked to determine the current and potential requirements for GuardNet and the effectiveness of the processes for managing the network's requirements, configuration, and security.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making numerous recommendations aimed at (1) limiting network users' current exposure to risk; (2) understanding and evaluating the network's current requirements, configuration, and security posture; and (3) developing and implementing action plans to address current network weaknesses and risks. The Department of Defense generally agreed with our recommendations, stating that they were valued and timely.

What GAO Found

The National Guard does not fully know the current or potential requirements for GuardNet or how it is being used, because it has not fully documented requirements. Guard officials provided GAO with a list of applications that the network supports, but they would not attest to the list's completeness, and GuardNet users identified other applications.

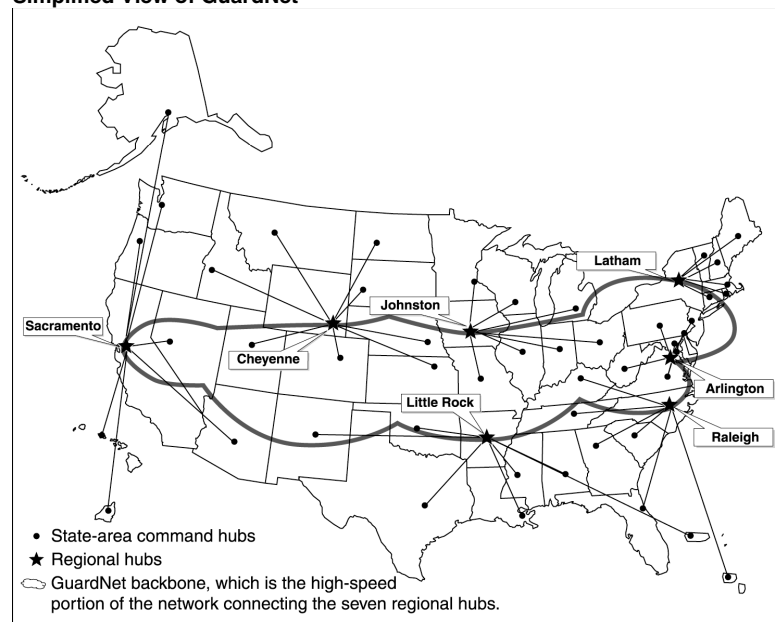The processes for managing GuardNet are not effective in three key areas:

Requirements. For example, the Guard has not developed a requirements management plan or clearly established users' roles in developing and changing requirements.

Configuration. For example, the Guard has not documented the network's configuration and is not controlling changes to configuration components.

Security. For example, the Guard has not implemented needed security controls, such as firewalls, to protect GuardNet and does not monitor controls on an ongoing basis to ensure that implemented controls are working as intended.

According to Guard officials, establishing these management processes has not been a priority. Without these basic processes, the Guard cannot ensure that GuardNet will perform as intended and provide its users with reliable and secure services. GuardNet is thus a dubious option for further support of critical mission areas such as homeland security.

Simplified View of GuardNet

- • State-area command hubs
- ★ Regional hubs
- GuardNet backbone, which is the high-speed portion of the network connecting the seven regional hubs.

Source: National Guard.