



Highlights of [GAO-10-962T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Recognizing the limits of military power in today's security environment, the Department of Defense (DOD) is collaborating with other U.S. federal agencies to achieve its missions around the world. DOD's combatant commands, such as U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), play key roles in this effort. Both aim to build partner nation capacity and perform humanitarian assistance, while standing ready to perform a variety of military operations. Among its missions, SOUTHCOM supports U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in the Americas and Caribbean in disrupting illicit trafficking and narco-terrorism. As DOD's newest command, AFRICOM works with U.S. diplomacy and development agencies on activities such as maritime security and pandemic response efforts. Today GAO issued reports that the subcommittee requested on SOUTHCOM (GAO-10-801) and AFRICOM (GAO-10-794), which in part evaluated how each collaborates with U.S. interagency partners. This testimony summarizes that work and provides observations from ongoing work on U.S. counterpiracy efforts by focusing on 3 key areas essential for interagency collaboration.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations to the commands aimed at improving their capabilities to perform their missions through the development of plans and training. DOD agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-10-962T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact John H. Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or [pendletonj@gao.gov](mailto:pendletonj@gao.gov).

## NATIONAL SECURITY

### Interagency Collaboration Practices and Challenges at DOD's Southern and Africa Commands

#### What GAO Found

GAO's work has shown that developing overarching strategies, creating collaborative organizations, and building a workforce that understands how to fully engage partners are key areas where agencies can enhance interagency collaboration on national security issues. GAO found that DOD's SOUTHCOM and AFRICOM have demonstrated some practices that will help enhance and sustain collaboration, but areas for improvement remain.

- Overarching strategies:** SOUTHCOM and AFRICOM have sought input from several federal agencies in creating their theater campaign plans, which outline command priorities, and for other strategies and plans. However, AFRICOM has not completed plans that detail its activities by country and that align with embassy strategic plans to ensure U.S. government unity of effort in Africa. Also, GAO's preliminary work indicates that a U.S. action plan provides a framework for interagency collaboration to counter piracy in the Horn of Africa region, but the plan does not assign agencies their roles or responsibilities for the majority of tasks in the plan.
- Collaborative organizations:** Both commands have organizational structures that encourage interagency involvement in their missions. Each has a military deputy commander to oversee military operations and a civilian deputy to the commander from the State Department to oversee civil-military activities. Both commands also embed interagency officials within their organizations, but limited resources at other federal agencies have prevented interagency personnel from participating at the numbers desired. However, AFRICOM has struggled to fully leverage the expertise of embedded officials. Moreover, while SOUTHCOM's organizational structure was designed to facilitate interagency collaboration, the 2010 Haiti earthquake response revealed weaknesses in this structure that initially hindered its efforts to conduct a large-scale military operation.
- Well-trained workforce:** AFRICOM has emphasized the need to work closely with U.S. embassies to ensure that activities are consistent with U.S. foreign policy and to contribute to a unity of effort among interagency partners. In addition, the command has designated cultural awareness as a core competency for its staff. However, some AFRICOM staff have limited knowledge about working with U.S. embassies and about cultural issues in Africa, which has resulted in some cultural missteps. Further, limited training is available to enhance personnel expertise. While GAO's work on SOUTHCOM did not focus on training, personnel from the command also expressed the need for more opportunities to improve their understanding of working in an interagency environment.