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INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND RECONNAISSANCE

DOD Needs a Strategic, Risk-Based Approach to Enhance Its Maritime Domain Awareness

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-11-621, a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Maritime security threats to the United States are broad, including the naval forces of potential adversary nations, terrorism, and piracy. The attacks on the USS *Cole* in 2000, in Mumbai in 2008, and on the *Maersk Alabama* in 2009 highlight these very real threats. The Department of Defense (DOD) considers maritime domain awareness—that is, identifying threats and providing commanders with sufficient awareness to make timely decisions—a means for facilitating effective action in the maritime domain and critical to its homeland defense mission. GAO was asked to examine the extent to which DOD has developed a strategy to manage its maritime domain awareness efforts and uses a risk-based approach. GAO analyzed national and DOD documents; interviewed DOD and interagency maritime domain awareness officials; and conducted site visits to select facilities engaged in maritime related activities. This report is a public version of a previous, sensitive report.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) develop and implement a strategy with objectives, roles, and responsibilities for maritime domain awareness, aligns with DOD's corporate process, identifies capability resourcing responsibilities, and includes performance measures; and (2) perform a comprehensive risk-based analysis, including prioritized capability gaps and future investments. DOD agreed with the recommendations.

View GAO-11-621 or key components. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DOD has identified numerous maritime capability gaps and developed documents that articulate a broad strategy for maritime domain awareness. However, DOD does not have a departmentwide strategy that adequately defines roles and responsibilities for addressing gaps, aligns objectives with national strategy, and includes measures to guide the implementation of maritime domain awareness efforts, and to assess and manage risk associated with capability gaps. GAO has previously reported that it is standard practice to have a strategy that lays out goals and objectives, suggests actions for addressing those objectives, allocates resources, identifies roles and responsibilities, and measures performance against objectives. DOD and its components have developed a number of documents that incorporate some of these key elements of an overall strategy for maritime domain awareness such as a definition of the problem. However, collectively they do not have several key elements a strategy should contain. For example, neither DOD's *Maritime Domain Awareness Joint Integrating Concept* nor the DOD's Executive Agent *Assessment of U.S. Defense Components Annual Maritime Domain Awareness Plans* fully address organizational roles and responsibilities and resources, investments, performance measures, and risk management.

Additionally, DOD leverages numerous capabilities to collect, fuse, and share maritime information to respond to global maritime challenges. DOD components have identified and started prioritizing capability gaps; however, DOD does not have a departmentwide risk assessment to address high priority capability gaps. DOD combatant commands and components prioritize maritime domain awareness differently based upon their respective missions and these component-level views may not provide a full view of the risks associated with these gaps at a departmentwide level. Prior GAO work has emphasized the importance of using a comprehensive risk assessment process. A strategy that includes a comprehensive, risk-based approach to managing maritime domain awareness may provide better information to decision makers about the potential implications of policy and resourcing decisions both within DOD and across the interagency. In the absence of a departmentwide strategy, DOD may not be effectively managing its maritime domain awareness efforts.

This report is a publicly releasable version of a previously issued, sensitive report.