

**DHS Cannot Determine  
the Total Cost,  
Effectiveness, and  
Value of Its Joint Task  
Forces**





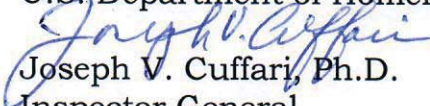
## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / [www.oig.dhs.gov](http://www.oig.dhs.gov)

September 30, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

FROM:   
Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.  
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *DHS Cannot Determine the Total Cost, Effectiveness, and Value of Its Joint Task Forces*

Attached for your action is our final report, *DHS Cannot Determine the Total Cost, Effectiveness, and Value of Its Joint Task Forces*. We incorporated the formal comments provided by your office.

The report contains seven recommendations aimed at improving management and oversight of the DHS Joint Task Forces. Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider the recommendations open and unresolved. As prescribed by the Department of Homeland Security Directive 077-01, *Follow-Up and Resolutions for the Office of Inspector General Report Recommendations*, within 90 days of the date of this memorandum, please provide our office with a written response that includes your (1) agreement or disagreement, (2) corrective action plan, and (3) target completion date for each recommendation. Also, please include responsible parties and any other supporting documentation necessary to inform us about the current status of the recommendations. Until your response is received and evaluated, the recommendations will be considered open and unresolved. Please send your response or closure request to [OIGAuditsFollowup@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:OIGAuditsFollowup@oig.dhs.gov).

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 Sondra McCauley, Assistant Inspector General for Audits, or Don Bumgardner, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 981-6000.

Attachment



# DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

## *DHS Cannot Determine the Total Cost, Effectiveness, and Value of Its Joint Task Forces*

September 30, 2020

### Why We Did This Audit

This audit is a legislative mandate established by Public Law 114-328, which authorized DHS to establish and operate JTFs that conduct joint operations using Department resources to secure the Nation's land and maritime borders. Our objective was to determine whether DHS has effectively managed and coordinated its JTF resources to accomplish the JTFs' intended mission.

### What We Recommend

We made seven recommendations to improve DHS' management and oversight of its JTFs and ensure compliance with legislative requirements.

#### **For Further Information:**

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 981-6000, or email us at [DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov)

### What We Found

The Department of Homeland Security has not effectively managed and coordinated its Joint Task Forces (JTF) to accomplish the JTFs' intended mission. Specifically, we found DHS did not:

- maintain oversight authority over the JTFs, as Secretaries and senior leadership changed;
- implement and update policies and procedures;
- identify optimal JTF staffing levels and resources; and
- establish a process to capture associated costs with the JTFs.

DHS also did not fully comply with Public Law 114-328 requirements to: submit an annual cost and impact report to Congress; establish outcome-based performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF and annually report the results to Congress; and establish and maintain a joint duty training program.

This occurred because DHS did not designate a department-level office to manage and oversee the JTFs and help fulfill the public law requirements. Therefore, the JTFs did not receive the necessary leadership and guidance to accomplish their intended mission. Without department-level JTF management and oversight, DHS is unable to determine the total cost, effectiveness, and value of JTFs and cannot ensure resources allocated to JTFs are used effectively and efficiently.

### Agency Response

DHS provided a management response, but declined to comment, since the Acting Secretary is currently reviewing the status and future of the JTFs.



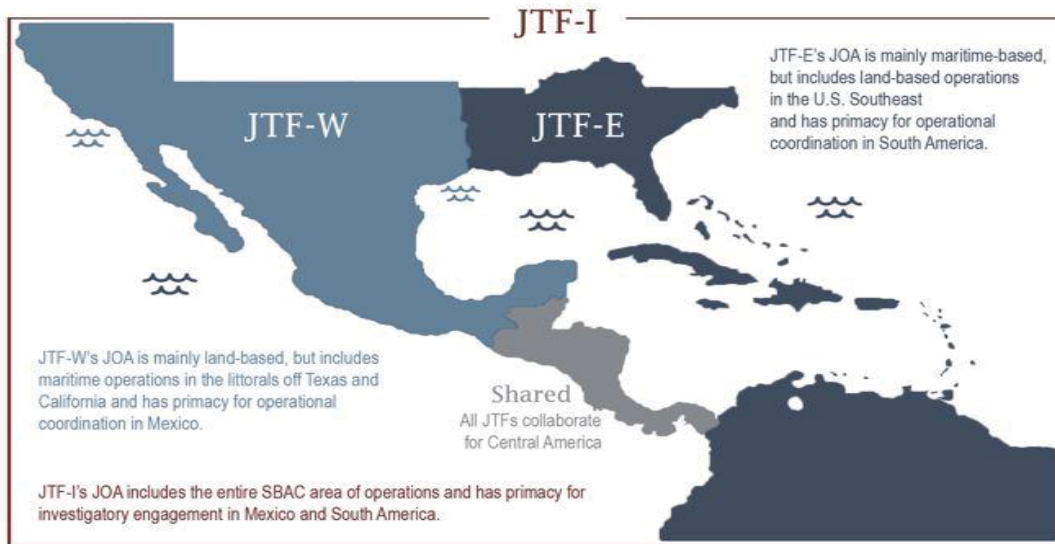
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**Background**

On April 22, 2014, then-Secretary Jeh C. Johnson, announced the Unity of Effort initiative to improve cohesiveness in the Department of Homeland Security and empower its components to execute operations effectively. In 2015, the Department developed the Plan for Securing the U.S. Southern Border and Approaches Campaign (SBAC) to unify border security efforts department-wide. To support the Unity of Effort and SBAC, DHS established three joint task forces (JTF) — JTF-East, JTF-West, and JTF-Investigations — to enforce immigration laws, prevent illegal entries, interrupt transnational criminal organizations, and minimize the terrorism threat to our Nation.

The SBAC plan outlines a framework for JTFs to conduct joint operations and investigations and coordinate Secretary-approved operational priorities within designated joint operating areas (JOA), supported by the components to achieve SBAC objectives. JTF-East and JTF-West are regionally based and responsible for coverage of the southern land and maritime borders. JTF-Investigations is a functionally based task force that provides investigatory support to JTF-East and JTF-West. Figure 1 shows the JOAs for each JTF.

**Figure 1. Map of JTFs and Joint Operating Areas**



Source: DHS JTF-Investigations Fact Sheet

The SBAC plan also identifies U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as the supported operational component for JTF-West; United States Coast Guard (the Coast Guard) for JTF-East; and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for JTF-Investigations.



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Congress viewed JTFs as a mechanism for maturing the Department. Accordingly, on December 23, 2016, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* (Public Law 114-328)<sup>1</sup> (hereafter referred to as the public law) authorized DHS to establish and operate JTFs using Department personnel and capabilities to secure land and maritime borders.

The public law requires the Secretary to:

- submit each year a report to Congress on the total funding, personnel, and other resources that each component allocated to JTFs and a description of the degree the resources drawn from each component impact the component's primary mission – 6 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 348(b)(6)(F);
- establish outcome-based performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF and annually report the results to Congress – 6 U.S.C. § 348(b)(9)(A-C); and
- establish and maintain a joint duty training program to enhance coordination within the Department, promote workforce professional development, and improve joint operations – 6 U.S.C. § 348(b)(10)(A-C).

These requirements outline a roadmap for DHS to obtain information on JTFs and report to Congress the effectiveness of JTFs.

Congress passed the public law during a prior DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit of DHS JTFs in 2017.<sup>2</sup> Because the JTFs were relatively new and had not established performance metrics to gauge effectiveness, OIG could not provide an assessment at that time. The public law required OIG to conduct two reviews and report to Congress no later than January 31, 2018 and 2021. These reviews were to include an assessment of the effectiveness of the structure of each JTF and recommendations for enhancements to such structure to strengthen the effectiveness of each JTF. Because we had just completed work in this area at the time the public law was passed, per agreement with congressional staff, we are using the current audit to fulfill the January 31, 2018 reporting requirement to determine compliance with the public law. The public law contains a sunset clause in which the section related to JTFs expires, effective September 30, 2022.

On February 25, 2020, DHS' Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (PLCY) and Office of Operations Coordination (OPS) submitted a memo, *Way Forward*

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<sup>1</sup> Public Law 114-328 was subsequently codified as 6 U.S.C. § 348.

<sup>2</sup> *DHS' Joint Task Forces*, OIG-17-100, August 10, 2017.



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*Options for DHS Joint Task Forces*, seeking a decision from the Acting Secretary on the future of JTFs. The memo outlines several options, along with narratives sharing perspectives from the components and JTFs. As of September 21, 2020, the decision memo was pending approval from the Acting Secretary.

## Results of Audit

### **DHS Has Not Effectively Managed and Coordinated Department Resources Allocated to JTFs**

DHS has not effectively managed and coordinated Department resources for JTFs. Specifically, DHS has not maintained oversight authority through changes in leadership, implemented and updated policies and procedures, identified optimal JTF staffing levels and resources, and established a process to capture total allocated costs associated with JTFs. In addition, DHS has not fully complied with public law requirements to report to Congress on JTFs' cost and impact, establish outcome-based performance metrics, and establish and maintain a joint duty training (JDT) program. This occurred because DHS did not designate a department-level office to manage and oversee the JTFs and fulfill the public law requirements. Therefore, the JTFs did not receive the necessary leadership and guidance to accomplish their intended mission. As a result, DHS is unable to determine the total cost, effectiveness, and value of JTFs and cannot ensure resources allocated to JTFs are used effectively and efficiently.

### **Changes in Senior Leadership and Secretary Turnover Diminished JTFs' Oversight and Communication**

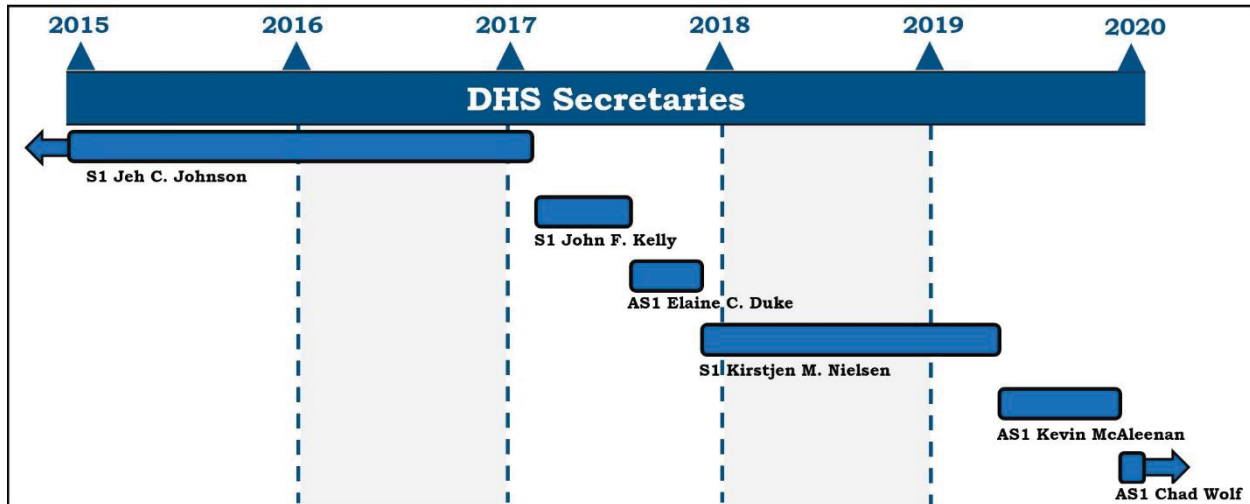
DHS did not implement control activities, such as establishing a management structure, assigning responsibilities, and delegating authorities for the JTFs. The SBAC plan identified a department-wide architecture for JTF operations that required the Secretary of Homeland Security to provide direct guidance and oversight to both the component heads and the JTF Directors. In alignment with this structure, the Secretary and senior leadership participated in regularly scheduled monthly meetings with the JTF Directors and components. Yet, when changes in senior leadership occurred, direct Secretarial oversight and communication with JTFs diminished, rendering the structure ineffective. Moreover, turnover at the highest level of DHS contributed to inadequate oversight and guidance to JTFs. Since Secretary Johnson's departure in 2017, DHS has experienced significant turnover in its



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senior leadership. Figure 2 shows the timeline for turnover in the DHS Secretary position from 2015 to 2020.

**Figure 2. DHS Secretary Turnover, 2015–2020**



Source: Prepared by DHS OIG using information obtained from DHS Connect

In our Major Management and Performance Challenges reports in 2016, 2017, and 2019, we noted DHS challenges with leadership focus, establishment and enforcement of internal controls, and fostering Unity of Effort.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in testimony to Congress,<sup>4</sup> former DHS Inspector General John Roth asserted that leadership changes, along with significant DHS vacancies, severely hampered DHS' ability to address organizational issues and sustain long-term planning efforts, such as Unity of Effort.

### DHS Did Not Implement and Update Policies and Procedures for JTFs

DHS did not implement and update policies and procedures to ensure clear, consistent guidance and direction to the JTFs. For example:

- DHS did not update the 2015 SBAC plan to align with public law requirements.
- DHS did not implement fiscal year 2019 and 2020 operational priorities for JTFs.

<sup>3</sup> Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security (OIG-17-08, OIG-18-11, and OIG-20-02).

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of John Roth, former Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security, before the Committee on Homeland Security, United States House of Representatives, May 1, 2019.



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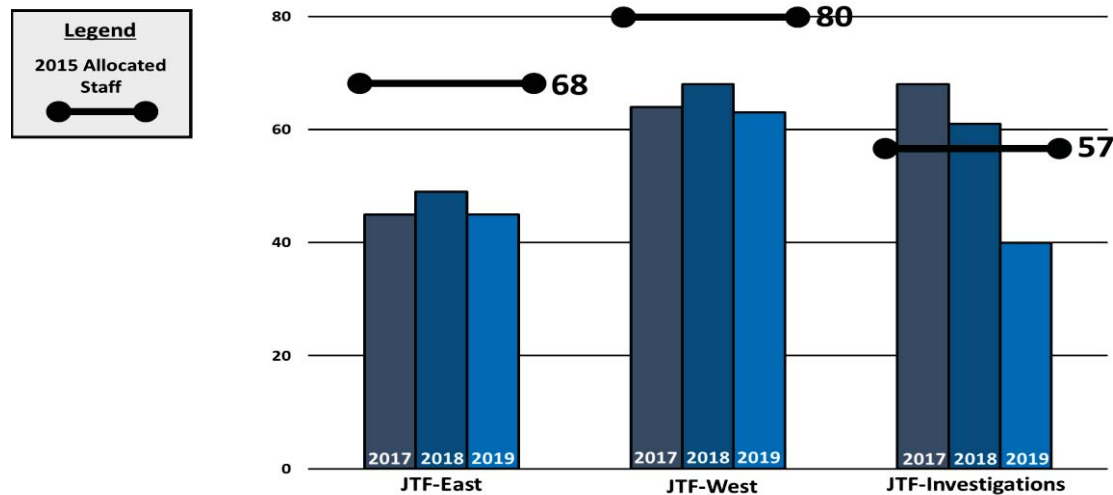
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- DHS did not approve Directive 033-02 *Department Joint Task Forces*, which sets forth the delegated authority, policy, and responsibilities for managing JTFs.
- DHS issued but did not implement Directive 211-03 *Department Force Management Process*, which establishes policy and responsibilities to allocate personnel and equipment to components and JTFs for Secretary-approved joint operations.

### DHS Did Not Identify Optimal JTF Staffing Levels and Resources

The Secretary did not issue DHS Force Allocation Memos for FYs 2018 and 2019, which would have identified needed resources for the JTFs, including staffing. The FY 2015 DHS Force Allocation Memo identified the initial baseline allocation of staff for JTFs. JTF-Investigations was the only JTF to reach its baseline staffing level identified in FY 2015 DHS Force Allocation memo. However, during 2019, JTF-Investigations fell below that level. Although JTF Directors requested additional staff in multiple DHS senior leadership meetings, additional staff was not approved. Figure 3 shows the total staff assigned to each JTF for 2017–2019 compared to the initial staff levels targeted in the FY 2015 DHS Force Allocation Memo.

**Figure 3. JTF Staff Target vs. Actual for 2017–2019**



Source: Prepared by DHS OIG using information provided by the DHS JTFs

The 2015 memo also called for a force management process (FMP) to ensure the availability of resources and capabilities from the components for DHS-wide joint operations, including those conducted by JTFs. In 2016, DHS developed the Interim DHS FMP as a structured way for components and JTFs to identify DHS capabilities needed to conduct and coordinate joint operations.





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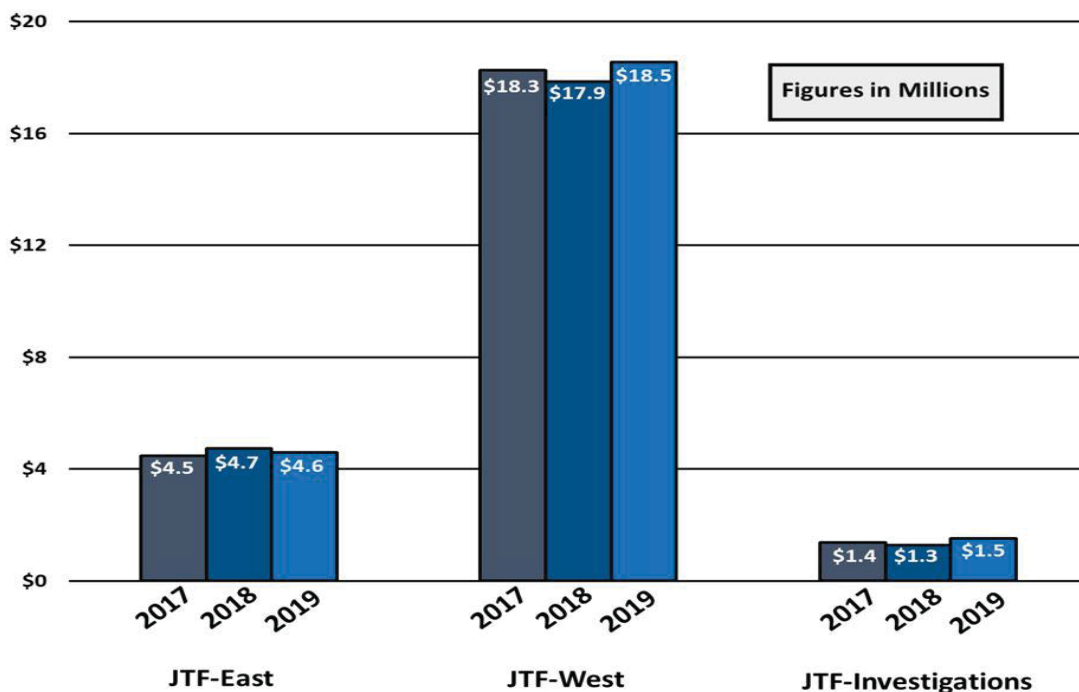
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Although the JTFs are aware of the FMP, they do not rely on the process to request resources. Instead, JTFs request resources directly from the components. However, without identifying component and JTF needs through the FMP, DHS does not have the visibility needed to ensure resources and capabilities are available to achieve the objectives of Secretary-approved joint operations.

### DHS Does Not Have a Process to Capture Total Allocated Costs Associated with JTFs

DHS is unable to determine the total costs associated with JTFs because it does not have a standardized process to capture this information. The JTFs do not receive direct congressionally appropriated funding or have a separate DHS budget. Instead, the components (CBP, ICE, and the Coast Guard) allocate resources to provide personnel and equipment to JTFs. We requested from the Management Directorate (MGMT) Office of Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) the total costs allocated by the components to JTFs for FYs 2017–2019. Figure 4 shows the information reported by MGMT OCFO.

**Figure 4. JTF Allocated Costs for FYs 2017–2019**



Source: Prepared by DHS OIG using information provided by DHS MGMT/OCFO

However, the data are incomplete and inconsistent. For example, ICE did not report personnel allocated to JTF-Investigations for all 3 years, and CBP did not report costs allocated to JTF-East and JTF-Investigations for FY 2019.



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According to MGMT OCFO, it could not validate data from the components. Additionally, it could not obtain JTF cost information directly from a financial management system because these costs were not a budgeted item.

### **DHS Did Not Fully Comply with Public Law Requirements**

DHS did not fully comply with three public law requirements. First, the Department did not submit annual reports to Congress identifying the total funding, personnel, and other resources each component allocated to JTFs. DHS also did not report a description of the impact to the components' primary mission. According to component representatives, they were not aware of this requirement.

Second, DHS did not establish outcome-based performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF or provide reports to Congress. Although the Department developed performance metrics to measure outputs and targets, these are not outcome-based and cannot fully evaluate the JTFs' effectiveness. On April 3, 2018, almost a year late, DHS submitted to Congress the *Performance Measures Identification for DHS Joint Task Forces* report. This report identified the metrics established to evaluate the effectiveness of each JTF. DHS acknowledged the metrics identified in the report were output-based, not outcome-based as required by law.

**Outputs are defined as goods and services delivered by a program.**

**Outcomes are defined as the results of those products and services.**

Moreover, on April 12, 2018, DHS submitted to Congress the *DHS Joint Task Force Performance Metrics Annual Report for FY 2017*. This report included an assessment of JTF performance toward achieving five output-based performance goals. Although DHS stated it would “revise performance metrics to more accurately depict successes of the JTFs,” this did not occur. JTFs continued to report monthly activity to PLCY, including output-based performance metrics data. Further, PLCY did not compile this information and submit reports to Congress to meet public law reporting requirements for FYs 2018 and 2019. Though PLCY assumed the responsibility to establish and report performance metrics, the office struggled to develop outcome-based performance metrics. For example, it stated PLCY had difficulties capturing qualitative data that suggests a one-size-fits-all model does not work when developing JTF performance metrics. In addition, PLCY officials said the constant turnover in leadership hindered reporting requirements to Congress. Without establishing outcome-based performance metrics to assess JTF effectiveness, DHS cannot determine the value JTFs bring to the DHS mission.



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Third, DHS did not fully comply with the requirement to establish a JDT program. PLCY assumed responsibility and established the JDT program, which included the training elements identified in the public law. PLCY also conducted training from March to October 2018 at the JTF headquarters locations. However, the office has since discontinued the JDT program. PLCY officials stated they did not have sufficient staff to continue the program and ceased all joint duty training. As of October 2018, PLCY and MGMT were discussing future ownership of the JDT program, but responsibility remained unresolved.

### **DHS Has Not Established an Oversight Structure to Ensure JTFs Fulfill the Intended Mission**

DHS has not effectively managed and coordinated the resources allocated to JTFs or fully complied with public law requirements because it has not established a structure to manage and oversee the JTFs. Although the SBAC plan provided for direct Secretarial guidance and oversight of the JTFs, significant changes and turnover in DHS senior leadership rendered the structure ineffective, as previously discussed. Additionally, DHS did not delegate authority or assign responsibility to an individual or department-level office to address public law requirements. As a result, key public law requirements were not fully addressed.

While DHS did not comply with the public law requirements to report on JTF funding, personnel, performance, and training, JTF officials said the JTFs had successfully integrated Department assets and coordinated joint operations. JTF officials provided the following examples:

- JTF-Investigations developed the Homeland Criminal Organization Target process for dismantling transnational criminal organizations;
- JTF-East identified significant vulnerabilities in the U.S. mail system, including multiple weapons seizures and the largest drug seizure ever connected to the U.S. mail system; and
- JTF-West, in collaboration with CBP and the other JTFs, developed the Transnational Criminal Organization Prioritization Matrix. They also participated in the Operation Opioid Counter Strike initiative, which has resulted in significant criminal arrests and drug seizures.

Despite the reported successes, DHS must address the management oversight, resource allocation, and legislative non-compliance issues we identified to determine the total cost, effectiveness, and value of its JTFs. Otherwise, DHS



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cannot ensure the resources allocated to JTFs are used effectively and efficiently to fulfill the intended mission. With the Acting Secretary's pending decision regarding *Way Forward Options for DHS Joint Task Forces* memo, and the approaching sunset clause dated September 30, 2022, the future of DHS' JTFs is uncertain.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to manage and oversee JTFs.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to implement and update policies and procedures for JTFs.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to identify JTF staffing levels and implement a process for components and JTFs to request capabilities needed to conduct and coordinate joint operations.

**Recommendation 4:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to establish a process for identifying costs associated with JTFs.

**Recommendation 5:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to coordinate with the components to collect needed information, and prepare and submit total funding and impact reports to Congress, as the public law requires.

**Recommendation 6:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to develop outcome-based performance metrics for JTFs and submit performance metrics reports to Congress, evaluating the effectiveness of each JTF, as the public law requires.

**Recommendation 7:** We recommend the DHS Secretary designate a department-level office to develop and manage a joint duty-training program and provide training to JTF staff, as the public law requires.



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### Management Comments and OIG Analysis

We provided DHS with a draft of our report on July 20, 2020. We received technical comments from DHS on August 19, 2020, the same day DHS' management response was due, and incorporated them into our final report, as appropriate. On September 21, 2020, DHS provided a management response but declined to provide comment. DHS explained the Acting Secretary is currently reviewing the status and future of the JTFs pursuant to the "way ahead" memorandum, and expects to provide OIG with a follow-up response to our report by December 30, 2020.

### Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Public Law 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*. Our objective was to determine whether DHS has effectively managed and coordinated its JTF resources to accomplish the JTFs' intended mission.

The scope of the audit was the DHS JTFs associated with the DHS Campaign Plan for Securing the U.S. Southern Border and Approaches, and the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* (Public Law 114-328, subsequently codified as 6 U.S.C. § 348). Congress passed the public law during a prior 2017 OIG audit. However, OIG determined the JTFs could not be assessed at that time. Because we had just completed our prior work in this area at the time the public law was passed, per agreement with congressional staff, we are using the current audit to fulfill the January 31, 2018 reporting requirement to determine compliance with the public law.

Our methodology included interviews with DHS offices, components, and JTF officials involved with JTFs, as well as the Department of Defense. We reviewed and analyzed documentation to support actions taken to meet the requirements identified in the public law. We obtained an understanding of the internal controls significant within the context of our objective. We also conducted site visits and interviews at the following locations:

- JTF-Investigations in Washington, DC
- JTF-West in San Antonio, Texas, and JTF-West Corridor in Tucson, Arizona
- JTF-East in Portsmouth, Virginia
- Department of Defense, Deputy Directorate Joint Training, in Suffolk, Virginia



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We conducted this performance audit between March 2019 and March 2020 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives.

The Office of Audits major contributors to this report are Shelley Howes, Audit Director; John McPhail, Audit Manager; Megan McNulty, Auditor-in-Charge; Melissa Brown, Program Analyst; Sabrina Paul, Program Analyst; David Widman, Auditor; Kevin Dolloson, Communications Analyst; Kelly Herberger, Communications Analyst; and Carolyn Berry, Independent Referencer.



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**Appendix A**  
**Agency Comments to the Draft Report**

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



September 21, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.  
Inspector General

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

SUBJECT: Management Response to Draft Report: “DHS Cannot Determine the Total Cost, Effectiveness, and Value of Its Joint Task Forces” (Project No. 19-044-AUD-USCG, CBP, ICE)

**JIM H CRUMPACKER**  
Digitally signed by  
JIM H CRUMPACKER  
Date: 2020.09.21  
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Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide a response to this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) appreciates the work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

A continuing goal of the Department is the effective interdiction of illicit goods and people across land, sea, and air and to degrade transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). We work toward this goal while striving to facilitate the flow of lawful trade, travel, and commerce across our borders and in other areas of U.S. jurisdiction. As the OIG’s draft report discusses, DHS uses Joint Task Forces (JTFs) to integrate Department assets and coordinate joint operations to help successfully achieve these important outcomes.

DHS’s JTFs were created in 2015 to work with DHS Components in implementing the “Southern Border and Approaches Campaign Plan.” DHS’s initial vision for JTFs was broad—to conduct “integrated joint investigations and operations within their joint operations areas or functions, supported by DHS Operational Components, to enhance DHS unity of effort in securing the Southern Border and Approaches.”

In 2017, the Secretary directed the JTFs to focus their activity on reducing the influence of TCOs. During 2019, the Department conducted a review of the JTFs and formulated a “way ahead” memorandum for consideration of the Acting Secretary.



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The DHS Office of Operations Coordination has matured and assumed the cross-coordination roles that were envisioned in the original design of the JTFs without reliance upon them. The performance and successful integration of joint investigation and operations with the support of the DHS Operational Components has indicated that those individuals designated for the JTFs would be cost efficiently best used in their home agencies.

Because the Acting Secretary is currently reviewing the status and future of the JTFs pursuant to the “way ahead” memorandum, including potential adjustments to Department Headquarters oversight of JTF activities and other JTF-related programs, it is premature for the Department to formally agree or disagree with OIGs recommendations. In addition, DHS is unable to describe any specific actions taken, on-going, or planned (nor to provide any related estimated completion dates) for each of these recommendations until the Acting Secretary has made his decision. The Department expects to provide OIG with a follow-up response to this report by December 30, 2020.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and provide a response to this draft report. DHS previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual, and sensitivity concerns (including the possible inappropriate public disclosure of “Pre-Decisional/ Deliberative” information) under a separate cover for OIG’s consideration. 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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**Appendix B**  
**Report Distribution**

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