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Report to Congressional Requesters

April 2008

HOMELAND DEFENSE

U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues

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April 2008

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-08-251, a report to congressional requesters

HOMELAND DEFENSE

U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues

Why GAO Did This Study

It has been 5 years since the Department of Defense (DOD) established U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to conduct homeland defense and civil support missions in the United States. Planning operations in the United States poses unique challenges for traditional military planning. GAO was asked to assess (1) the status of NORTHCOM's plans and the challenges it faces in planning and conducting operations, (2) the number, experience, and training of planning personnel, and (3) the extent to which NORTHCOM coordinates with other federal agencies. To do this, GAO reviewed available NORTHCOM plans, compared them to joint operational planning criteria, compared planning staff with those at other commands, and reviewed documentation and mechanisms for interagency coordination.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making several recommendations to DOD to direct NORTHCOM to take actions to address the challenges it faces in its planning and interagency coordination efforts. GAO is also recommending that DOD develop metrics by which to measure readiness for civil support missions. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations and suggested ongoing and future efforts to satisfy the intent of the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-251. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

NORTHCOM has completed—or is in the process of revising—all of the major plans it is required to prepare for its homeland defense and civil support missions, but it faces a number of challenges in planning for and conducting these missions. NORTHCOM has completed its nine required plans. However, NORTHCOM does not know whether supporting plans that must be developed by other DOD organizations to assist NORTHCOM are complete because it has only recently begun to develop a process to track and assess these plans. NORTHCOM faces challenges in three key planning areas. First, NORTHCOM has difficulty identifying requirements for capabilities it may need in part because NORTHCOM does not have more detailed information from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or the states on the specific requirements needed from the military in the event of a disaster. Second, NORTHCOM has few regularly allocated forces and few capabilities allocated to its plans. DOD could allocate forces to NORTHCOM and assign specific forces to the command's plans, but this would not guarantee that those forces would not have to be deployed elsewhere. However, it would provide DOD and the NORTHCOM commander with a better basis on which to assess the risk that the command would be unable to successfully execute one or more of its missions. Third, NORTHCOM has difficulty monitoring the readiness of military units for its civil support mission because its plans do not specify mission tasks against which units can be assessed. NORTHCOM has undertaken mitigation efforts to address each challenge, and new national planning guidance may further assist NORTHCOM and DOD in addressing the challenges. Nevertheless, NORTHCOM and DOD can take additional actions to reduce the risk from these gaps and reduce the risk due to the overall uncertainty that stems from the nature of its mission.

NORTHCOM has an adequate number of planning personnel, and the command is pursuing opportunities to expand the experience and training for staff needed to perform the command's planning function. NORTHCOM's planning staff is filled at over 96 percent of its authorized positions. NORTHCOM's military planning staff receives the same planning training and education as planners in other combatant commands. To draw upon experience in planning and conducting domestic operations, NORTHCOM has integrated National Guard and U.S. Coast Guard personnel into its headquarters staff. NORTHCOM has also developed a curriculum for required mission-related training courses.

Although NORTHCOM has taken actions to improve coordination of its homeland defense and civil support plans and operations with federal agencies, it lacks formalized guidance and procedures—such as memorandums of understanding or charters—to help ensure that interagency coordination efforts or agreements that are reached can be fully relied on. This is important because responding to a major disaster in the United States—natural or man-made—is a shared responsibility of many government agencies with states often requiring federal assistance from DHS and DOD.

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Abbreviations

CBRNE	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive
CCMRF	CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force
CONPLAN	concept plan
DCO	defense coordinating officer
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
IMPT	Incident Management Planning Team
JIACG	Joint Interagency Coordination Group
OPLAN	operations plan
NGB	National Guard Bureau
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command

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Congressional Requesters

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Department of Defense (DOD) recognized the need for a more integrated military response to an attack on the homeland. In response, DOD established the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM)[1] in October 2002 to provide command and control of DOD homeland defense efforts and to coordinate defense support of civil authorities. These two activities are among DOD's contribution to homeland security. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the lead federal agency for homeland security, which is a national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur.[2] DOD contributes to homeland security through its military missions overseas and homeland defense and civil support operations. DOD is the lead federal agency for homeland defense, which it defines as the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical defense infrastructure against external threats and aggression against the United States.[3] This involves strictly military actions, such as air defense. Civil support is DOD support to US civil authorities—such as DHS or other agency—for domestic emergencies and for designated law enforcement and other activities.[4]

NORTHCOM differs from the other combatant commands—such as the U.S. European Command and U.S. Central Command—in that, in addition to Canada and Mexico, its area of responsibility includes all 49 states on the North American continent and the District of Columbia. This poses a unique challenge for military planning and coordination in a U.S. domestic context and with respect to 49 separate and individual state governments. NORTHCOM also has to coordinate with numerous federal agencies that

[1]The command is combined with the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). DOD often refers to this command as NORAD-NORTHCOM.

[2]Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support* (Washington, D.C.: June 2005).

[3]Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5.

[4]Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support* (Sep. 14, 2007), vii.

also have a role in planning for and responding to a wide variety of incidents in the homeland as reflected in the *National Response Framework*.[5]

Since NORTHCOM was established in October 2002,[6] we have periodically evaluated and reported on issues related to its ability to carry out its missions. In our first report in July 2003, we reported that at the time it was too early to assess the adequacy of NORTHCOM's planning for operations in the homeland but that there was a need for an assessment of the DOD force structure necessary to conduct homeland defense and civil support missions.[7] Reports since then have consistently shown the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities among responder agencies, the need for state and local involvement in the development of response plans, and the need to ensure response capabilities are developed and ready.[8] Many of these issues were highlighted in 2005, when despite a massive deployment of resources and support from both military and civil agencies in response to Hurricane Katrina, confusion arose as to what responsibilities the military had and what capabilities it would provide in planning and responding to a catastrophic event.

[5]The *National Response Framework*—formerly called the *National Response Plan*—is a national level guide to how local, state, and federal governments respond to incidents resulting from all kinds of hazards. The framework is based on the principal of tiered response, starting from local communities and working up to include support from the other levels of government and the private sector. Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework* (Washington, D.C.: January 2008).

[6]The command was created in April 2002 as part of a revised Unified Command Plan, which outlines the areas of responsibility for the combatant commands. It became officially operational on October 1, 2002.

[7]GAO, *Homeland Defense: DOD Needs to Assess the Structure of U.S. Forces for Domestic Military Missions*, GAO-03-670 (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2003).

[8]GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: DOD Combatant Commands' Preparedness Efforts Could Benefit from More Clearly Defined Roles, Resources, and Risk Mitigation*, GAO-07-696 (Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2007); *Reserve Forces: Actions Needed to Identify National Guard Domestic Equipment Requirements and Readiness*, GAO-07-60 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 26, 2007); *Chemical and Biological Defense: Management Actions Are Needed to Close the Gap between Army Chemical Unit Preparedness and Stated National Priorities*, GAO-07-143 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 19, 2007); *Catastrophic Disasters: Enhanced Leadership, Capabilities, and Accountability Controls Will Improve the Effectiveness of the Nation's Preparedness, Response, and Recovery System*, GAO-06-618 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 6, 2006); and *Hurricane Katrina: Better Plans and Exercises Needed to Guide the Military's Response to Catastrophic Natural Disasters*, GAO-06-643 (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2006).

Homeland defense and civil support operations are major responsibilities of NORTHCOM. DOD is the lead federal agency for homeland defense operations, and NORTHCOM is to command federal military forces conducting homeland defense operations in the United States. For civil support operations, although disaster preparedness and response is primarily the responsibility of the civilian government and its agencies, NORTHCOM must be prepared to assist when requested or when an incident overwhelms local, state, tribal, and other federal authorities.[9] DOD is not the lead federal agency for civil support missions (unless designated so by the President) and operates in support of civil authorities only when directed to do so by the President or the Secretary of Defense. NORTHCOM would command only the federal military[10] portion of such operations and would do so in direct support of another federal agency, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).[11]

In planning for both homeland defense and civil support missions, NORTHCOM relies on other DOD organizations and commands to prepare plans that will support NORTHCOM in its missions. These organizations include NORTHCOM's subordinate commands, such as Joint Task Force Alaska and Joint Force Headquarters National Capitol Region; component commands, such as Army Forces North, Air Forces North, and Marine Forces North; and supporting commands, such as Navy Fleet Forces Command, U.S. Transportation Command, and DOD agencies such as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency. Following the joint planning process,[12] NORTHCOM provides its subordinate commands with planning guidance, such as types of incidents to prepare for, and collectively these plans should help to facilitate an adequate response to an incident in the homeland. Moreover, the joint planning process calls for required capabilities to be identified and allocated to ensure mission success and for the readiness of those units providing the capabilities for assigned missions to be monitored.

[9]DOD refers to civil support operations conducted in accordance with the *National Response Framework* as Defense Support of Civil Authorities. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support* , GL-7.

[10]This does not include U.S. Coast Guard forces, which are under DHS.

[11]See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support* , vii.

[12]A number of DOD doctrine publications and other guidance govern the conduct of joint operational planning. The principal guidance is published in Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Dec. 26, 2006).

As requested, this report addresses the extent to which NORTHCOM (1) has prepared plans to conduct its homeland defense and civil support missions and the challenges it faces in planning for and conducting these operations, (2) has an adequate number of planning personnel with the relevant experience and training to perform the planning function for the command, and (3) coordinates the development of its plans and operations with federal agencies and other organizations. We prepared a separate report to address NORTHCOM's coordination with the National Guard Bureau (NGB) and the states.[13] As agreed with your staff, we will address matters related to NORTHCOM exercises and training as part of a follow-on effort.

To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM has prepared plans to execute its homeland defense and civil support missions, we reviewed NORTHCOM's available major plans and supporting plans, comparing them to established DOD joint operational planning criteria for completeness and adequacy. We also met with knowledgeable NORTHCOM officials to discuss the status of each of the plans NORTHCOM is required to prepare and the process by which the plans were developed and assessed. Although we reviewed the assumptions, constraints, and other portions of the plans for general adherence to DOD's joint operational planning criteria, we did not independently validate those elements. Therefore, we did not attempt to determine the extent to which NORTHCOM's plans are executable. To assess the challenges NORTHCOM faces in planning for and conducting homeland defense and civil support operations, we developed a methodology comparing a series of questions and topics for joint operational planning to the information related to the plans themselves. The methodology was based on DOD's standards for joint operational planning for identifying needed capabilities, allocating those capabilities to accomplish the mission, monitoring the readiness of military units to meet the capability requirements of their missions, and capturing and incorporating lessons learned into planning. We used the results of this analysis and our discussions with a broad range of DOD officials to determine what gaps, if any, exist in NORTHCOM's planning efforts stemming from these challenges. Although we reviewed all of NORTHCOM's plans according to these criteria, we concentrated on the two primary homeland defense and

[13] GAO, *Homeland Defense: U.S. Northern Command Has Ongoing Efforts to Improve Coordination with the States and National Guard Bureau but Additional Efforts Are Needed*, GAO-08-252 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 4, 2008).

civil support plans. To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM's planning personnel have relevant and adequate training and experience, we discussed staffing and training with a wide range of NORTHCOM and DOD officials and compared information on planning personnel at NORTHCOM with that of other combatant commands. We assessed the reliability of these data and found them to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM coordinates in planning for and conducting its missions, we reviewed the documentation and mechanisms for coordination with organizations outside NORTHCOM and interviewed officials from NORTHCOM's subordinate commands, DHS, the FEMA, and NGB. Additional information on our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

We conducted our review from May 2006 to April 2008 in accordance with 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 on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Appendix I contains further detail on our scope and methodology.

Results in Brief

NORTHCOM has completed—or is in the process of revising—all of the major plans it is required to prepare for its homeland defense and civil support missions, but it faces a number of challenges in planning for and conducting these missions. NORTHCOM has completed the nine major plans required by the President, the Secretary of Defense, and other DOD guidance and is in the process of revising four plans, including its Homeland Defense plan.[14] However, it does not know whether supporting plans that must be developed by other DOD organizations to assist NORTHCOM are complete because it has only recently begun to develop a process to track and assess these plans. Further, although NORTHCOM's plans adhere to DOD standards, the challenges NORTHCOM faces in three key planning areas increase the risk to NORTHCOM's ability to execute its homeland defense and civil support plans. First, NORTHCOM has difficulty identifying requirements for capabilities it may need in part because NORTHCOM does not have more detailed information from DHS

[14]As part of DOD's new adaptive planning process, plans are being reviewed and revised more often in order to keep them relevant.

and the states on the specific requirements needed from the military in the event of a disaster. Second, NORTHCOM has few regularly assigned military forces (units, trained personnel, and equipment), and it has only one major plan with which specific forces and units are associated. NORTHCOM therefore faces uncertainty about which DOD forces or capabilities are available to it to respond to a mission requirement. Although DOD stresses that homeland defense is a major priority, it has routinely chosen not to assign forces to NORTHCOM. DOD could allocate forces to NORTHCOM and assign specific forces to the command's plans, but this would not guarantee that those forces would not have to be deployed elsewhere. However, it would provide DOD and the NORTHCOM Commander with a better basis to assess the risk that the command would be unable to successfully execute one or more of its missions. Third, NORTHCOM has difficulty monitoring the readiness of military units for its civil support mission because, in addition to having few forces associated with plans, most of NORTHCOM's plans do not specify tasks against which units can be assessed in DOD's existing readiness system.[15] NORTHCOM has begun risk mitigation efforts for these challenges, and new national planning guidance and requirements may further assist NORTHCOM and DOD in addressing the challenges.[16] However, there are additional actions that NORTHCOM and DOD could take—independently or as part of newly required planning efforts—that would reduce the overall risk to NORTHCOM's ability to execute its missions. We are recommending that (1) NORTHCOM track the status and assess the suitability of all supporting plans, (2) DOD assign forces to NORTHCOM and require NORTHCOM to develop dedicated force deployment lists for each of its major plans, and (3) NORTHCOM develop mission tasks for its civil support plans. DOD generally agreed with the intent of our recommendations and discussed steps it is taking or planning to take to ensure that NORTHCOM reviews supporting plans, assign certain

[15]DOD refers to these tasks as mission essential tasks. Monitoring the readiness of military forces is ultimately the responsibility of the military services that train and equip the units in question. Department of Defense Directive 5100.1, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components*, § 6.4 (Aug. 1, 2002) (certified current as of Nov. 21, 2003). Nonetheless, monitoring unit readiness is also a means by which joint commanders assure themselves that the military units that will respond to their mission are indeed prepared.

[16]See White House, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, *National Preparedness* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2003); White House, HSPD-8 Annex 1, *National Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 2007); and Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*.

specialized forces to NORTHCOM, and develop metrics against which military units can be measured for readiness for the civil support mission.

NORTHCOM has an adequate number of planning personnel, and they are pursuing opportunities to expand the experience and training for staff needed to perform the command's planning function. Because of the need to plan for and conduct operations within the United States, NORTHCOM presents a challenge to most planners who have functioned solely in a military planning environment. NORTHCOM has over 96 percent of its authorized planning positions, which is higher than the percentages for the other combatant commands, except U.S. Central Command. The military officers who serve as NORTHCOM planners receive the same basic planning training and education as planners in other combatant commands. NORTHCOM has also integrated 36 National Guard and 22 U.S. Coast Guard personnel—who have experience working in the state environment—into most of the directorates that conducts some form of operational planning. This improves the command's ability to plan for and coordinate with non-DOD entities to accomplish its domestic missions. NORTHCOM also supplements military planning training and education with mission-specific training that provides planners with the skills they need to properly plan its missions. NORTHCOM has also developed a curriculum for its staff and monitors this training to ensure the completion of curriculum courses in a timely manner. Expanding the knowledge base of military staff at NORTHCOM should help improve the level of homeland defense and civil support knowledge in planners throughout DOD. At some point, this may allow NORTHCOM to require homeland defense and civil support training, education, and experience requirements for military personnel wishing to transfer to the command in a planning position and for civilian employees the command may hire.

Although NORTHCOM has taken actions to improve the coordination of its homeland defense and civil support plans and operations with federal agencies, it lacks formalized procedures—such as memorandums of understanding or charters—to ensure that agreements or arrangements made between the command and agency representatives can be relied on for planning purposes. NORTHCOM has improved interagency coordination through such efforts as establishing a headquarters directorate focused solely on coordination and integrating representatives from 40 agencies into the command's headquarters. However, we found that federal agency representatives at NORTHCOM have varying degrees of authority from their respective headquarters to agree on coordination efforts. Moreover, several agency representatives told us that as they rotate out of NORTHCOM, previously made agreements with these

representatives may change as new representatives rotate in. As a result, NORTHCOM may base its plans or responses on information that is not fully vetted and risks the possibility of planning with invalid information or responding to an incident with inadequate resources. Among other actions it has taken to improve coordination, the command participates in an interagency incident management planning team. However, officials from several agencies on the team expressed concern that their agreements with NORTHCOM may not be completely viable because there was no formal process to obtain their headquarters' concurrence with their agreements made with NORTHCOM. As we have reported, key practices that can enhance and sustain interagency coordination efforts include formalizing interagency agreements on such things as roles and responsibilities through a memorandum of understanding, a charter, or some other formal planning document between partner agencies.[17] This is important because responding to a major disaster in the United States—natural or man-made—is a shared responsibility of many government agencies with states often requiring federal assistance from DHS and DOD. Without effective interagency coordination and planning, there is a risk that NORTHCOM'S, DOD's, and other federal agencies' response to an incident may be fragmented and uncoordinated, such as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.[18] The new integrated planning system required by national planning guidance issued by the President and DHS may help address the gaps we identified. Therefore, in conjunction with the development of the integrated planning system, we are recommending that NORTHCOM, in consultation with its federal interagency partners, develop clear guidance and procedures for interagency planning coordination efforts. DOD agreed with this recommendation and stated that it has begun to incorporate such direction into its major planning documents.

[17]GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

[18]White House, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* (Feb. 23, 2006); House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina* (Feb. 15, 2006); Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared* (May 2006); and GAO, *Hurricane Katrina: Better Plans and Exercises Needed to Guide the Military's Response to Catastrophic Natural Disasters*, GAO-06-808T (Washington, D.C.: May 25, 2006).

Background

As with other joint combatant commands, NORTHCOM's organization includes subordinate commands that report directly to NORTHCOM; component commands, which are military service commands that assist NORTHCOM operations; and other supporting commands and DOD agencies. Each of these has a significant role in planning for NORTHCOM's missions. NORTHCOM planning efforts are guided by DOD policies and procedures on joint planning that specify what should be included in the plans as well as what organizations are required to submit plans in order for the command to complete its planning process.

NORTHCOM Mission and Organization

NORTHCOM is the military command responsible for the planning, organizing, and executing DOD's homeland defense mission within its area of responsibility—the continental United States (including Alaska) and territorial waters—and civil support missions within the United States[19] (see fig. 1). Homeland defense is the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical defense infrastructure against external attacks and aggression. DOD is the lead federal agency for homeland defense operations, such as air defense.[20] Other federal agencies would act in support of DOD in those circumstances. NORTHCOM's homeland defense mission incorporates air and space defense, land defense, and maritime defense against external threats. One example of how the homeland defense mission is conducted is Operation Noble Eagle, the ongoing effort to protect against an air attack, such as those that occurred on September 11, 2001.

[19]Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 8.

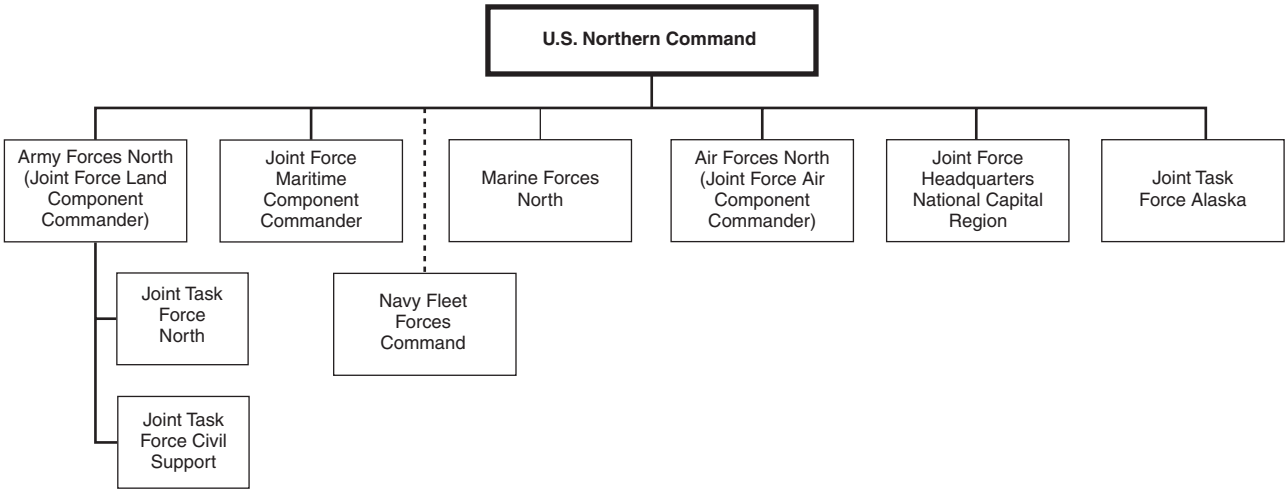
[20]Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5. Homeland defense is considered DOD's portion of the broader area of homeland security. DHS is the lead federal agency responsible for homeland security, which is a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur. Homeland Security Council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2007), 3 and Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support*, 5.

Figure 1: NORTHCOM's Area of Responsibility

Sources: GAO analysis; Map Resources (map).

NORTHCOM consists of a combatant command headquarters, a series of smaller subordinate commands focused on particular missions or regions, and component commands of the military services, which support NORTHCOM's planning and operations and command the land, maritime, and air portions of a NORTHCOM joint operation. The NORTHCOM Commander also commands the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), a bi-national U.S. and Canadian organization charged with air and maritime warning and airspace control. Figure 2 shows NORTHCOM's structure.

Figure 2: NORTHCOM Organization



------ The Navy's Fleet Forces Command is not a direct component command of NORTHCOM, but it provides day-to-day support to NORTHCOM operations.

Source: GAO analysis of NORTHCOM information.

Civil support is DOD support to US civil authorities—such as DHS or other agency—for domestic emergencies and for designated law enforcement and other activities.[21] DOD is not a lead federal agency for such missions and thus operates in support of civil authorities only when directed to do so by the President or the Secretary of Defense. NORTHCOM would command only the federal military portion of such operations and would do so in direct support of another federal agency, such as FEMA.[22]

Response to disasters or other catastrophic events in the United States is guided by the *National Response Framework*, which involves a stepped series of response, beginning with local authorities, state authorities, and outside assistance from other states. Only when these capabilities are exeeded would federal assistance become involved. It is at this point that DOD may be asked to provide assistance.[23] NORTHCOM would command that DOD assistance. For civil support operations, there are three primary situations in which DOD takes part in a federal response to a domestic

[21]Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support*, vii and Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*.

[22]See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support*, vii.

[23]See Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*.

incident. Federal assistance, including assistance from DOD, can be provided (1) at the direction of the President, (2) at the request of another federal agency, such as DHS or FEMA.[24] Federal assistance, including assistance from DOD, can be provided (1) at the direction of the President, (2) at the request of another federal agency, such as DHs or FEMA, or (3) in response to a request from local authorities when time is of the essence.

The Joint Operation Planning Process

Guidance for developing plans, such as NORTHCOM's homeland defense and civil support plans, is provided by DOD's joint operation planning process.[25] This process establishes objectives, assesses threats, identifies capabilities needed to achieve the objectives in a given environment, and ensures that capabilities (and the military forces to deliver those capabilities) are allocated to ensure mission success. Joint operation planning and execution procedures also include assessing and monitoring the readiness of those units providing the capabilities for the missions they are assigned. Overall, the purpose of joint operation planning is to reduce the risks inherent in military operations.

Joint operations plans themselves can take several forms, from the more detailed to the more general. Examples of more detailed operations plans include those prepared by several combatant commands for the kinds of military operations dictated by a specific foreign threat or scenario, such as the need to oppose a landward invasion of the territory of a U.S. ally by a hostile nation. Such operations plans (OPLAN) are meant to cover contingencies that are critical to U.S. national security and require detailed planning in order to reduce risk to potential operations. These plans are accompanied by detailed lists of military forces that would provide required capabilities in order to execute the plan. Other plans are prepared for less compelling but otherwise important national interest contingencies and for unspecific threats (e.g., disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, or peace operations fall under this category). These are

[24]See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Civil Support* and Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework* for a full description of these mechanisms and authorities.

[25]Among the DOD guidance for joint operation planning is Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operation Planning*, Joint Pub. 5-0 and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Manual 3122.01A, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume I*, *Planning Policies and Procedures* (Sept. 29, 2006); Manual 3122.03B, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES)Volume II*, *Planning Formats* (Feb. 28, 2006); and Manual 3122.02C, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume III*, *Crisis Action Time-Phased Force and Deployment Data Development and Deployment Execution* (Mar. 22, 2004) (current as of July 19, 2006).

referred to as concept plans (CONPLAN) and are much more general in nature but nonetheless are required to adhere to joint operational planning standards.[26] All of NORTHCOM's plans are currently categorized as CONPLANs.

Once a plan is drafted, it is reviewed several times by a number of DOD stakeholders, primarily from the Joint Planning and Execution Community, which consists of a broad range of military stakeholders, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the military services, the combatant commands, and the major DOD agencies. These stakeholders provide input into all phases of planning, from mission analysis to the final detailed plan.

In the last several years, DOD has begun to use what it refers to as an adaptive planning process, whereby major plans are reviewed much more often than in the past. All plans are now reviewed by DOD stakeholders every 6 months.

NORTHCOM Planning Process for Homeland Defense and Civil Support

Part of NORTHCOM's responsibility is to create plans to address its role in various potential threats to the homeland, whether from potential enemy attack or a natural disaster. Because the potential threats are so broad, whether they involve terrorist attacks or potential natural disasters, the plans NORTHCOM was required to develop by DOD usually take the form of CONPLANs. Among the specific areas for which NORTHCOM prepares plans are chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) consequence management; pandemic influenza; and nuclear accident response.

The specific contingencies for which NORTHCOM should plan are directed by the President and the Secretary of Defense. NORTHCOM follows several sets of strategies and guidance when planning for homeland defense and civil support. Homeland defense planning follows DOD guidance, such as the *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, the *Unified Command Plan*, and *Contingency Planning Guidance*. Civil support planning requires additional guidance. In addition to the military guidance, because DOD is not the lead federal agency for civil support missions involving domestic emergencies, natural disasters, and similar events, it also follows the guidance prepared by the Homeland Security Council and DHS in order to frame its civil support planning,

[26]Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*.

including the *National Response Framework*. To further guide planning efforts for all hazards, the Homeland Security Council and DHS—along with the federal interagency, and state and local homeland security agencies—created the national planning scenarios. The scenarios provide parameters for 15 highly plausible terrorist attack and natural disaster situations, such as the detonation of a nuclear device by terrorists or a major earthquake. The scenarios focus on the consequences that federal, state, and local first responders will have to address and are intended to illustrate the scope and magnitude of large-scale, catastrophic events for which the nation needs to be prepared.

NORTHCOM prepares individual plans to cover its broad homeland defense and civil support missions as well as subsets of those missions. For example, while NORTHCOM has a major plan each for homeland defense and civil support, it also has plans for air defense and for CBRNE consequence management. NORTHCOM's plans provide its subordinate, component, and supporting commands and agencies with planning guidance, such as types of incidents to prepare for and what kinds of plans to prepare to support NORTHCOM's plans.

NORTHCOM Has Completed Major Plans but Faces Considerable Challenges That Increase the Overall Risk to Its Ability to Execute Its Plans

NORTHCOM has completed—or is in the process of revising—all of its major plans. However, NORTHCOM does not regularly track or assess the required supporting plans from other DOD commands and agencies. This heightens the risk that NORTHCOM cannot properly assess whether the supporting organizations have adequately planned to assist the command when an event takes place. Further, although NORTHCOM plans adhere to military guidance in both content and structure, the command faces additional challenges in such areas as (1) identifying required civil support capabilities, (2) allocating capabilities (units, trained personnel, and equipment) to meet potential requirements, and (3) monitoring the readiness of forces delivering those capabilities. NORTHCOM and DOD have some risk mitigation efforts under way in each of these areas that partially address the challenges we found. However, it could take additional steps to reduce the remaining level of risk to its ability to effectively achieve its mission.

Major Plans Are Complete or Are Undergoing Revision

To date, NORTHCOM has completed nine major homeland defense and civil support plans required by the President, the Secretary of Defense, and DOD guidance, and is in the process of revising several of its plans in accordance with the DOD requirement to review plans every 6 months for potential revision,[27] including its homeland defense plan. NORTHCOM officials told us that they have placed priority on completing all of their major plans over the last 2 years. In addition, NORTHCOM's plans are now undergoing review and consideration for major revision more often than when the command was first established. Table 1 lists NORTHCOM's required major plans and the status of each with estimated completion and revision dates where applicable.

Table 1: Status of NORTHCOM's Plans

NORTHCOM plan	Status of draft or revision	Estimated completion/revision date
Defense Support of Civil Authorities	Plan complete. Plan currently undergoing revision.	Revision due March 2008 but postponed
Homeland Defense	Plan complete. Plan currently undergoing major revisions to delineate air, land, and maritime domains; NORTHCOM also coordinated with an interagency planning team for interagency coordination annex.	Revision due March 2008
Pandemic Influenza	Global plan complete and approved; regional plan completed and approved in January 2008.	Complete
CBRNE Consequence Management	Plan complete. Plan currently undergoing revision.	Revision due April 2008
Civil Disturbance	Plan complete. Plan undergoing its first revision.	Revision due February 2008
National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness	Plan complete. Its first revision is upcoming, but NORTHCOM officials do not anticipate major changes.	Complete
Noncombatant Evacuation Operations	Plan completed.	Complete
Aerospace Defense	Plan complete. Long-established NORAD plan.	Complete
Nuclear Weapon Accident Response	Plan complete.	Complete

Source: NORTHCOM.

Notes: One additional plan dealing with Caribbean mass migration was previously considered by NORTHCOM, but U.S. Southern Command has assumed responsibility for this plan because a major portion of its area of responsibility includes the majority of the Caribbean Sea, including the islands in the sea and Central and South America. NORTHCOM officials told us that their responsibility for mass migration issues once people arrive in the United States is covered in the civil support plan, in support of DHS as the lead agency. Some of these changes were caused by DOD's decision in 2006 to shift some land and ocean areas in the Caribbean (including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) from NORTHCOM's to U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility.

[27]Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Instruction 3141.01C, *Responsibilities for the Management and Review of Contingency Plans* (Sept. 12, 2006).

NORTHCOM has also anticipated that DOD will require a 10th plan—Strategic Communications—and has fully drafted a plan in advance of this guidance.

NORTHCOM Plans Adhere to Military Guidance

Although the majority of our review was focused on the two major homeland defense and civil support plans, we also reviewed each of the other plans and compared them to DOD's established joint planning standards for concept plans as well as NORTHCOM's own concept of operations for how it should plan for and conduct its missions. We found that the plans met DOD's standards for completeness in accordance with DOD's joint planning doctrine and adhered to NORTHCOM's overall concept of operations. For example, the plans include the required concept, objectives, assumptions, and constraints sections that frame the rest of the plan. We also reviewed the assumptions listed in the plans for potential contradictions between one or more plans and found none. We did not, however, independently validate the assumptions in the plans. Some assumptions—such as assuming that adequate DOD forces would be available to execute a plan—seemed broad and had the potential to affect the entire plan if the assumption was proved invalid during a crisis. However, NORTHCOM planning officials told us that some broad assumptions are always necessary in order to even begin planning. They said that once a plan needs to be executed, the assumptions are reviewed again and the plan altered to account for an assumption that was determined to be invalid. We also found that NORTHCOM's civil support plan adheres closely to the *National Response Framework* concept in that NORTHCOM is to provide support for civil authorities upon request by a lead federal agency.

NORTHCOM Plans Incorporate National Planning Scenarios

We also found that NORTHCOM's plans incorporate 14 of the 15 national planning scenarios developed by the Homeland Security Council in order to guide federal agencies' general planning and exercises. The one scenario not incorporated into NORTHCOM's plans is the cyber attack planning scenario, which falls under U.S. Strategic Command's area of responsibility.[28] Table 2 summarizes each of the 15 planning scenarios and indicates where NORTHCOM planners have taken these scenarios into consideration in their plans.

[28]U.S. Strategic Command is a unified command with worldwide responsibilities for such functions as space operations; strategic deterrence; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and global command and control.

Table 2: Homeland Security Council's National Planning Scenarios Incorporated into NORTHCOM Plans

Planning scenario	Planning scenario description	Primary corresponding NORTHCOM plans
Nuclear detonation	Terrorists detonate a 10-kiloton nuclear device in a large city	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Defense Support of Civil Authorities • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror[a]
Biological attack	Terrorists spray anthrax spores in a city using a concealed spray device	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Biological disease outbreak—pandemic influenza	Natural outbreak of pandemic influenza that begins in China and spreads to other countries	• Global and Regional Pandemic Influenza
Biological attack—plague	Terrorists release pneumonic plague into three areas of a large city	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Chemical attack—blister agent	Terrorists spray a combination of blister agents into a crowded football stadium	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Chemical attack—toxic industrial chemicals	Terrorists use grenades and explosive devices at petroleum facilities	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Chemical attack—nerve agent	Terrorists spray Sarin into the ventilation system of three commercial buildings in a city	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Chemical attack—chlorine tank explosion	Terrorists use explosives to release a large quantity of chlorine gas	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Natural disaster—major earthquake	A 7.2 magnitude earthquake occurs in a major metropolitan area	• Defense Support of Civil Authorities •
Natural disaster—major hurricane	Category 5 hurricane strikes a major city	• Defense Support of Civil Authorities •
Radiological attack— radiological dispersal device	Terrorists detonate "dirty bombs" in three cities in proximity to each other	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Explosives attack—bombing using improvised explosive devise	Terrorists detonate improvised explosive device in a sports arena, and use suicide bombers in a public transit concourse and in a parking facility	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Biological attack—food contamination	Terrorists contaminate food with anthrax in processing facilities	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror

Planning scenario	Planning scenario description	Primary corresponding NORTHCOM plans
Biological attack—Foreign Animal Disease	Terrorists infect livestock at specific locations	• CBRNE Consequence Management • Homeland Defense • Regional War on Terror
Cyber attack	Terrorists conduct cyber attacks on U.S. financial infrastructure	• NORTHCOM does not plan against civilian computer system attacks. This is addressed in U.S. Strategic Command's plans

Source: NORTHCOM.

Note: The scenarios appear in the same order they were published by the Homeland Security Council. They are not in any order of probability or impact.

[a]NORTHCOM's Regional War on Terror plan is a supporting plan for U.S. Special Operations Command's main plan.

Limited Progress in Tracking and Reviewing Supporting Plans Increases Risk to the Planning Process

Because NORTHCOM officials have spent considerable time and effort in completing or revising their major plans, they have not focused adequately on the supporting plans that have been—or are to be—developed by other organizations within DOD to assist NORTHCOM. Like all CONPLANs, NORTHCOM's plans require supporting plans from NORTHCOM's subordinate and component commands as well as other DOD agencies to assist the responsible command—NORTHCOM—when an event occurs. Because NORTHCOM's major plans are less detailed and focused than the operational plans of other combatant commands, these supporting plans are critical for providing the operational level detail that is otherwise lacking in the major plans. Supporting plans must also adhere to the same joint doctrine standards as the broader plans and should contain objectives, assumptions and constraints, and sections on such areas as command and control, task organization, intelligence, and logistics.[29] Although there is no explicit DOD requirement that NORTHCOM systematically review and track supporting plans, DOD guidance on joint operation planning indicates that "in the absence of Joint Staff instructions to the contrary, the supported commander will review and approve supporting plans."[30] Regardless of whether there is an explicit requirement, we believe it is prudent to perform these reviews to reduce the risk that

[29]Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Manual 3122.01A, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume I*, *Planning Policies and Procedures*, C-3 and Manual 3122.03B, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume II*, *Planning Formats*, and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, I-25.

[30]Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Manual 3122.01A, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume I*, *Planning Policies and Procedures*, C-25, D-9; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, I-25.

supporting agencies have not adequately planned to support NORTHCOM when needed following a natural or man-made disaster.

The number of supporting plans required varies with the type of major plan. For example, NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan required supporting plans from 25 commands and agencies, whereas the civil support plan required supporting plans from only 6 commands and agencies. Of the 6 supporting plans required by the civil support concept plan, NORTHCOM officials had 4 in their possession when we reviewed the plans at NORTHCOM headquarters. Similarly, of the 25 supporting plans required by NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan, NORTHCOM also had only 3 at the time we reviewed plans. Some of the other 22 organizations expected to develop supporting plans for homeland defense are the Defense Information Systems Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and Defense Contract Management Agency. With the exception of supporting plans by NORTHCOM's subordinate commands—such as Joint Task Force Alaska and Joint Task Force Civil Support—and the component commands[31] whose plans they could provide copies of, NORTHCOM officials could not report to us how many of the other supporting plans are completed. As we report separately, NORTHCOM officials were uncertain about the status and completeness of the supporting plans that the homeland defense CONPLAN required NGB to coordinate with the states and forward to the command.[32]

We reviewed all the supporting plans NORTHCOM was able to locate for the Homeland Defense, Defense Support to Civil Authorities, and CBRNE Consequence Management plans, as well as several others we saw during visits to other commands and DOD organizations. We found that in general the supporting plans met the intent and objectives of the major strategic-level plans and had compatible assumptions. We did not, however, review the supporting plans to the degree NORTHCOM officials would have to in order to satisfy themselves that the plans meet the command's needs, nor did we independently validate the assumptions in the supporting plans. NORTHCOM officials acknowledged that because they had devoted most of their effort to completing and revising the major plans, until recently

[31]Component commands are generally the military service commands that directly support the combatant commands.

[32]NGB forwarded these plans to NORTHCOM but received no indication that they had been reviewed and assessed. See GAO-08-252.

they had not devoted enough attention to the supporting plans. NORTHCOM officials told us that they are developing a process to track the status of subordinate commands' supporting plans. In fact, the officials provided us an update on the status of these supporting plans. But this did not include other DOD agencies, such as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Defense Information Support Agency, that are also supposed to be developing supporting plans for some of NORTHCOM's concept plans. Additionally, NORTHCOM officials told us that they were planning to start reviewing supporting plans in a manner similar to how DOD stakeholders[33] review major plans. As long as this approach encompasses all supporting plans, it could provide NORTHCOM planning and operations officials with a much more detailed analysis of the extent to which supporting plans meet their needs as well as help them identify potential planning gaps. Without knowledge about the completeness of supporting plans and the extent to which these plans address NORTHCOM's objectives, NORTHCOM officials face increased uncertainty about the extent of planning and preparedness of other DOD agencies if and when these agencies are called to respond.

NORTHCOM Has Difficulty Determining Required Capabilities for Its Civil Support Mission Because It Lacks Information on States

According to the strategic vision contained in NORTHCOM's concept of operations, NORTHCOM should facilitate the synchronization of national, state, and local assets and capabilities to defend the nation and support civilian authorities.[34] One of the fundamental elements of operational planning is determining the capabilities requirements for the mission to be performed. Because NORTHCOM's plans are broader CONPLANs rather than more detailed OPLANs, they are not focused on specific scenarios and discrete sets of required capabilities needed to accomplish objectives. Without an understanding of the capabilities necessary for DOD to conduct an operation, it is more difficult to plan in advance for the types, numbers, and timing of capabilities (trained personnel and equipment) to actually conduct an operation. For NORTHCOM's homeland defense mission, the required capabilities are based on an assessment of threats and a number of factors that NORTHCOM and other DOD commands and organizations assess. For NORTHCOM's civil support mission, the requirements the command faces are established by the needs of the

[33]As mentioned in the background section of this report, the Joint Planning and Execution Community is composed of the DOD stakeholders for reviewing and contributing to joint operation plans.

[34]U.S. Northern Command, *Concept of Operations* (June 13, 2005), 3-11.

federal, state, and local agencies and organizations that DOD would be supporting in an actual event.

Given the diverse environment that NORTHCOM is responsible for within its area of responsibility, its civil support role varies by area, incident, and other factors, which makes NORTHCOM's ability to know its capability requirements for any given civil support operation uncertain. Further, NORTHCOM officials told us that they do not have access to enough detail about from DHS or from the states in order to know what capabilities exist at the state level and the extent to which there are capability gaps. DHS has reported on the weaknesses in state and federal emergency plans both in terms of the adequacy of the plans themselves and the lack of information on required capabilities.[35] As we report in a separate letter, NORTHCOM has also not systematically reviewed state emergency plans in order to obtain detailed information about the specific challenges it may face in conducting homeland defense or civil support operations. Coordination between NORTHCOM, DHS, NGB, and the states is therefore important for emergency planning, particularly for civil support operations.

NORTHCOM officials told us that understanding National Guard capabilities is also problematic. For example, as we have reported, neither DOD nor the states have fully determined the National Guard's requirements for civil support operations in the United States.[36] The National Guard serves as a critical portion of the response to a disaster, whether in its normal role under the direct command of a state governor or as part of a federal response once the President has made a determination to federalize the Guard. In either case, uncertainty about the National Guard's civil support capabilities increases the risk to the adequacy of NORTHCOM's and DOD's overall civil support planning effort.

In 2006, Congress required that DOD develop and maintain a database that includes the types of emergency response capabilities DOD may be able to provide in support of the *National Response Framework*'s emergency

[35]Department of Homeland Security, *Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report* (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2006).

[36]GAO, *Reserve Forces: Actions Needed to Identify National Guard Domestic Equipment Requirements and Readiness*, GAO-07-60 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 26, 2007).

support functions[37] and the types of emergency response capabilities each state's National Guard may be able to provide in response to a domestic natural or man-made disaster.[38] DOD is also required to identify in this database the specific units that are able to provide these capabilities.[39] Also, in 2006, Congress required FEMA to accelerate the completion of an inventory of federal response capabilities and to develop a list of organizations and functions within DOD that may be used to provide support to civil authorities during natural or man-made disasters.[40] FEMA is still developing this list, and DOD is still developing the required database. In January 2008, Congress required DOD to work with DHS to determine the military-unique capabilities DOD needs to provide for civil support operations and to prepare a plan to provide funds and resources to maintain existing military-unique civil support capabilities or any additional capabilities required for homeland defense and civil support missions.[41] In addition to descriptions of the emergency support functions, the annexes to the previous *National Response Plan*[42]—such as the catastrophic incident annex—contain information about agency roles and responsibilities as well as descriptions of capabilities. These annexes are being revised as part of the new *National Response Framework*.

Until these efforts are completed and are coordinated with similar information from the states, there remains a gap in knowledge about what capabilities exist at all levels for responding to natural and man-made disasters. This, in turn, limits NORTHCOM's ability to fully identify the civil support requirements for DOD forces.

[37]Emergency support functions are how the federal government and many state governments organize much of their resources and capabilities. The 15 emergency support functions are transportation; communications; public works and engineering; firefighting; emergency management; mass care, emergency assistance, housing, and human services; logistics management and resource support; public health and medical services; search and rescue; oil and hazardous materials response; agriculture and natural resources; energy; public safety; long-term community recovery; and external affairs. Each function has a federal agency coordinator. See Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*.

[38]Pub. L. No. 109-364, § 1406 (2006).

[39]Pub. L. No. 109-364, § 1406(2) (2006).

[40]Pub. L. No. 109-295, § 651 (2006).

[41]Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 1815 (2008).

[42]Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Plan* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 2004).

NORTHCOM and DOD have taken some steps to mitigate the uncertainty in civil support requirements. NORTHCOM officials reported to us that through analyzing past disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, and potential disasters—such as those represented by the national planning scenarios—they can reasonably determine the types of capabilities necessary to support civil authorities. NORTHCOM officials said that this allows them to anticipate the needs of states and local authorities in the event of a disaster to some extent but that they can only "lean forward" so far without infringing on the intent of the *National Response Framework* or the prerogatives of the state governments. NORTHCOM and the Joint Staff are also assessing NORTHCOM's major plans (including Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities) in order to determine where the potential gaps in required capabilities may be and what specific military capabilities are potentially required to address them. This may better inform capabilities requirements and resource decisions.

NORTHCOM has also worked with FEMA and DOD officials to develop prescripted mission assignments, which are descriptions of a set of capabilities civil authorities might need from DOD in an emergency and are written in such a way as to provide a common understanding of a capability. NORTHCOM officials told us that the intent was to avoid requests for specific DOD equipment that may or may not be suitable or available to meet the request and to base requests on capabilities a requesting agency needs that could potentially be addressed by a broader range of DOD assets. For example, FEMA might request the capability to move by air 40 metric tons rather than requesting a specific aircraft. This enables DOD to apply a wide range of resources for solving a problem and reduces confusion associated with varying requirements and terminology across agencies. These mission assignments are designed to leverage DOD's areas of expertise and capabilities where civil agencies typically fall short. Appendix II shows the 25 prescriptive mission assignments that NORTHCOM and DOD have worked out with FEMA.

These mitigation efforts help reduce the uncertainty NORTHCOM faces in determining requirements for civil support planning. But only a broader effort by NORTHCOM, DOD, DHS, and the states to comprehensively assess capabilities and capability gaps will help all stakeholders understand the true extent of requirements in order to plan for natural and man-made disasters in the United States.

Few Capabilities Are Allocated to Execute NORTHCOM's Plans

One of the major challenges NORTHCOM faces in planning for and conducting both homeland defense and civil support operations is ensuring that it has adequate capabilities assigned to conduct those missions as required. The major combatant commands, such as U.S. European Command and U.S. Pacific Command, normally have forces allocated to their operational control on a regular basis to meet their general capabilities requirements and to perform other missions, such as demonstrations of military presence in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives. Further, the OPLANs prepared by combatant commands normally have lists that detail which military units will respond to the plan, if needed, and the timing of that deployment. DOD refers to this information as time-phased force deployment data. The combination of regularly assigned forces and force deployment lists associated with the more detailed operations plans provides combatant commanders with a reasonable level of assurance that sufficient forces will be available to execute a plan if necessary and allows the commander to monitor the readiness of the units assigned to the respective area of responsibility or specific plan.

Since NORTHCOM was established in October 2002, DOD has routinely considered the regular assignment of forces to the combatant commands in what DOD refers to as a "Forces For Unified Commands" document. However, despite the priority placed on homeland defense in the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and other DOD strategic guidance, DOD has only routinely assigned air defense and supporting forces to NORTHCOM. A contributing factor may be that the pace and scope of ongoing operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the world has severely limited the number and types of units available to respond to missions in the homeland. The assignment of forces to combatant commands provides commanders with a means to know which specific military forces are committed to that area of responsibility and, conversely, allows commanders to perform risk assessments if those forces must be committed elsewhere.

In addition to lacking regularly assigned forces, NORTHCOM officials told us that their plans usually do not have lists that detail the military units that will be used because the plans are meant to cover a less-specific and broader range of threats, rather than specific scenarios. Only one NORTHCOM plan—the CBRNE Consequence Management plan—had a force deployment list at the time of our review of the plans. NORTHCOM has since developed force deployment lists as part of the revised homeland defense plan but not for the civil support plan. NORTHCOM officials told us that they created the CBRNE consequence management

list in order to stress the importance of providing forces to the CBRNE mission. The force deployment list lays out the capabilities for what DOD calls the CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force (CCMRF), which is intended to be a series of separate units totaling roughly 15,000 personnel to provide initial response assistance to civil authorities in the event of a major CBRNE incident in the country. We reported previously on the lack of adequate training, equipment, and availability of active and reserve chemical and biological units and the potential difficulty DOD faced in meeting NORTHCOM's CBRNE requirements.[43] Despite being the only set of capabilities dedicated to a NORTHCOM civil support plan, the CCMRF has never been fully manned and equipped by DOD because many of the units that would make up the force have been deployed to their wartime missions or because of other availability or sourcing issues. DOD and National Guard officials are currently negotiating a plan whereby Guard units may provide the majority of CCMRF capabilities for a certain period until the Active Army can resume responsibility. However, lack of agreement between DOD and National Guard Bureau stakeholders on sources of funding and command and control issues continues to delay the effort.[44]

While a force deployment list does not guarantee that the appropriate units, trained personnel, and equipment will be available to execute a military plan, such a list provides a known set of capabilities against which to measure readiness and assess risk if all or part of the forces on the list are unavailable. None of NORTHCOM's other civil support plans have force deployment lists, which limits NORTHCOM's ability to know which military units may respond to its homeland defense or civil support missions if the need arises.

To help mitigate the uncertainties caused by the lack of forces being assigned to execute NORTHCOM's plans, NORTHCOM and DOD have developed a series of standing "execute orders" in the homeland defense and civil support areas. These orders identify the general types and numbers of forces necessary to execute missions in such areas as air and

[43]GAO-07-143.

[44]The CCMRF was designed to provide federal military assistance to a lead federal agency in the event of a CBRNE attack. The National Guard units that would fulfill this mission may be in a nonfederalized state active duty status, which means they remain under the command of their respective governors. Because of the state of negotiations, there remains the issue of whether the units would be federalized and placed under NORTHCOM if needed.

maritime homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities. One example is the domestic air defense order associated with Operation Noble Eagle. Additionally, during periods of heightened specific threats, such as the yearly hurricane season, NORTHCOM and the Joint Staff have prepared temporary execute orders that detail more specific military forces that can be called upon to meet an emerging NORTHCOM need to support civil authorities. The execute orders serve as the gateway to the "request for forces" process whereby NORTHCOM requests forces from U.S. Joint Forces Command,[45] through the Joint Staff, and Joint Forces Command assigns specific military forces from the services to meet the specific requirement, if possible. The orders also allow NORTHCOM to place units on notice to prepare to deploy for a short time in advance of their actual assignment to NORTHCOM.

According to Joint Forces Command and NORTHCOM officials, about 40,000 military personnel are associated with all of NORTHCOM's execute orders and the CBRNE Consequence Management plan. However, with the exception of the dedicated homeland defense orders—such as Operation Noble Eagle—the CCMRF deployment list and civil support execute orders have very few units actually sourced to them.[46] This means an increased level of uncertainty about whether the appropriate number of properly trained personnel and the correct equipment will be available when a plan needs to be executed. NORTHCOM officials are concerned about the high number of unsourced units and the corresponding level of uncertainty about the availability of appropriate military forces to meet their homeland defense and civil support needs. It should be noted, however, that we found no instances where Joint Forces Command could not meet NORTHCOM's operational needs for an actual homeland defense

[45]Joint Forces Command is the force provider for NORTHCOM and the other combatant commands. The commands transmit their force requirements (forces needed to execute their planned operations) to Joint Forces Command (through the Joint Staff), and it determines which mix of trained military service units (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) will provide the requested forces. See White House, *Unified Command Plan* (Washington, D.C.: May 5, 2006), and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, p. I-10. In addition, any other combatant command to which forces have been assigned by DOD, such as U.S. Pacific Command, could also be directed to provide forces to NORTHCOM.

[46]Joint Forces Command officials explained to us that sourced units are those that Joint Forces Command has actually identified as specific units for meeting specific requirements. Unsourced units are units for which Joint Forces Command has not identified a specific unit in advance but will attempt to do so when the order or plan is executed.

or civil support mission. Fortunately, NORTHCOM's homeland defense and civil support operations have mostly been manageable and not large-scale events. For example, in addition to Operation Noble Eagle, which NORTHCOM carries out every day, the command conducts anticipated and unanticipated operations in support of civil authorities, such as the response to the Minneapolis bridge collapse and Hurricane Dean in August 2007 and in response to the California wildfires in October 2007.

NORTHCOM officials told us that the execute order process has provided them some limited measure of assurance that adequate military forces will be available for their homeland defense and civil support plans. However, the absence of regularly assigned forces in NORTHCOM's area of responsibility and the lack of units specifically identified to execute NORTHCOM's plans may increase the level of risk to homeland defense or civil support operations in terms of the availability of a sufficient number of personnel with the appropriate level of training and equipment for conducting the domestic mission.

NORTHCOM's Ability to Monitor the Readiness of Forces to Respond to Civil Support Missions Is Hampered

NORTHCOM has difficulty monitoring the readiness of individual military units because in part, few requirements or units that may respond to a request for civil support have been identified. In contrast, through its planning process for homeland defense, NORTHCOM has determined the forces it needs for this mission and, through the services, monitors the readiness of these forces. DOD normally measures the readiness of military units by (1) assigning them to conduct missions associated with specific plans and (2) using lists of mission-essential tasks that correlate to the actual mission they would perform. The degree to which units have the numbers of trained personnel and the equipment necessary to accomplish those mission-essential tasks serves as the overall measure of a unit's readiness.

According to NORTHCOM, Joint Forces Command, Joint Staff, and U.S. Army Forces Command officials, DOD generally assumes that a unit capable of performing its military mission is also capable of performing a civil support mission, but this may not always be true. Neither NORTHCOM nor the military services have developed mission-essential tasks for civil support missions. We have reported on the mismatch between assessments of readiness based solely on wartime missions and the requirements of domestic civil support missions. Whereas homeland defense missions in and around the United States would be similar to traditional wartime missions, those same mission tasks do not necessarily provide a complete picture of readiness for a domestic civil support

mission.[47] As a result, DOD does not have a direct method to measure the readiness of units for the civil support mission.

DOD officials told us that it is often possible for a unit to be considered not ready for its wartime mission but be able to execute a civil support mission. For example, a U.S. Army air defense unit whose surface-to-air missile launchers are still overseas or undergoing depot repair is not considered ready to conduct its wartime mission. However, to the extent that personnel, trucks, and other equipment were still with the unit, it may be ready to conduct a civil support mission, such as delivering supplies to a disaster area. This is not captured in DOD's readiness system. Further, the lack of mission-essential tasks for the range of civil support missions leads to a potential gap in DOD's knowledge of whether sufficient trained personnel and equipment are available. For example, NORTHCOM's civil disturbance plan assumes that nonlethal equipment and methods would be necessary and that the forces required to conduct such operations have been trained in nonlethal methods. But without a set of mission tasks against which to measure unit readiness, there is no objective means of determining if military units can meet these tasks.

Because at the time of our review only one of NORTHCOM's major plans has actual units assigned to it (CBRNE Consequence Management), NORTHCOM officials were unable to monitor readiness of units that may be asked to respond to other plans, even if there were specific civil support-related mission tasks. We have work under way reviewing DOD's Readiness Reporting System, and we did not assess the accuracy of that system as part of this review. However, we asked NORTHCOM officials to show us the extent to which they could use DOD's readiness systems to monitor readiness for both its homeland defense and civil support missions.

For the ability to respond to potential CBRNE attacks, NORTHCOM has developed mission-essential tasks for the CCMRF. However, Joint Staff and National Guard officials told us that they estimated that the wartime military tasks of the units only met about 70 percent of the CCMRF's total

[47]GAO has reported in the past on DOD's focus on units' wartime combat missions as opposed to domestic civil support missions. See GAO, *Homeland Defense: DOD Needs to Assess the Structure of U.S. Forces for Domestic Military Missions*, GAO-03-670 (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2003), and *Chemical and Biological Defense: Management Actions Are Needed to Close the Gap between Army Chemical Unit Preparedness and Stated National Priorities*, GAO-07-143 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 19, 2007).

mission, which further indicates the mismatch between wartime tasks a unit may face in comparison to tasks it may face in a domestic, non-wartime environment. Joint Task Force Civil Support, NORTHCOM's subordinate command for CBRNE consequence management, routinely uses the CCMRF's mission-essential tasks, the existing DOD readiness system, and direct interaction with Joint Forces Command and Army officials to monitor the readiness of CCMRF forces on a routine basis. Even with this effort, NORTHCOM and Joint Task Force Civil Support officials told us that it is difficult to track readiness because, as we indicated earlier, so few of the units are actually filled with the personnel and equipment necessary. Nonetheless, the fact that the CBRNE forces have mission tasks against which to measure readiness in the existing system provides a level of knowledge about the overall state of readiness to execute the CBRNE plan. This, in turn, provides the NORTHCOM Commander and DOD with a clearer picture of the risk they face in that area. Because no mission tasks exist for general civil support missions, NORTHCOM and DOD face greater uncertainty about their ability to execute these plans.

Mission-essential tasks are also critical guides for training military units for their missions and for conducting and evaluating exercises. NORTHCOM conducts two major exercises each year that include both homeland defense and civil support elements. The command also participates in other commands' live exercises as well as tabletop simulations of various homeland defense and civil support operations. Further, NORTHCOM has a system for incorporating lessons learned from training exercises into plans and future training exercises. The system has a good structure for submitting and processing lessons, including multiple layers of review to assess the validity of lessons and the assignment of individuals with the responsibility of managing and addressing lessons. NORTHCOM officials believe that the system is adequate, and they continue to seek ways to improve the process. Ensuring that appropriate mission-essential tasks are associated with each of the missions for which NORTHCOM is responsible would further help NORTHCOM officials evaluate exercises and actual operations and incorporate lessons learned into future exercises and plan revisions. The command would also be in a better position to conduct meaningful analysis to identify recurring lessons and understand the causes of various systemic issues. This, in turn, would allow NORTHCOM and DOD to identify those areas where increased effort—and possibly resources—may be required.

To mitigate the uncertainties in readiness for civil support operations, NORTHCOM has worked with Joint Forces Command and the military

services in advance of some potential incidents, such as hurricanes and wildfires, to gain a better understanding of what units were likely to be assigned, if necessary. This interaction has allowed NORTHCOM and other DOD stakeholders to directly monitor the personnel and equipment status of military units to determine if they would be prepared to adequately respond to a civil support mission. For the remainder of NORTHCOM's potential civil support missions, NORTHCOM still lacks an objective means to determine if the units that will be conducting civil support operations in fact have the capabilities needed to fully conduct these missions.

New National Planning Requirements May Help NORTHCOM Address Planning Challenges

In December 2007, the President issued an annex to the 2003 Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 that establishes a standard and comprehensive approach to national planning for homeland security.[48] Included in the new instructions is a requirement that the federal government more closely integrate federal, state, local, and tribal plans with respect to capability assessments. This may further assist NORTHCOM in more accurately determining its capability requirements for civil support missions.

Among the new requirements was also a series of cascading plans at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. For example, all relevant federal agencies are now required to prepare more detailed OPLANs with respect to their specific homeland security missions. Thus far, NORTHCOM has been required only to prepare less detailed CONPLANs. The definition for OPLANs in the new guidance includes a requirement that such a plan "identifies detailed resource, personnel and asset allocations."[49] This is similar to the level of detail DOD requires in its OPLANs, including the force deployment lists we discussed.

If these comprehensive national planning processes are pursued by DOD, in coordination with DHS, NORTHCOM may be able to further address some of the challenges and gaps we highlight.

[48]White House, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, *National Preparedness* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2003), and White House, HSPD-8 Annex 1, *National Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 2007). The January 2008 *National Response Framework* also incorporates the recent national planning requirements.

[49]White House, HSPD-8 Annex 1, *National Planning*, 2.

NORTHCOM's Planning Personnel Have Adequate Staff Level and Are Expanding Experience and Training

NORTHCOM has an adequate number of planning personnel, and the command is pursuing opportunities to expand the experience and training for staff needed to perform the command's planning function. While the unique characteristics associated with a domestic military command present challenges, NORTHCOM officials address these circumstances by integrating National Guard and Coast Guard personnel with NORTHCOM staff. NORTHCOM, independently and with other organizations, is also developing educational opportunities that address the challenges associated with the interagency and state/federal environment that planners face.

NORTHCOM Planning Positions Staffed at High Levels

We compared the numbers and general qualifications of NORTHCOM's planning staff with those of other combatant commands as a way of gaining a rough understanding of what NORTHCOM's staff looks like in comparison to commands that have been established for a longer period of time. NORTHCOM's planning staff is assigned at over 96 percent of the command's authorized staffing level. These staff members include all headquarters staff who have some form of planning function and not just the staff of the plans directorates or those personnel with specific designations as planners. As shown in table 3, with the exception of the U.S. Central Command, NORTHCOM also has a greater number of staff it considers to be planners and was staffed at a higher percentage of its authorization than all other combatant commands responding to our information requests.

Table 3: Staffing Level of Planning Personnel, by Combatant Command

Combatant command	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level	Percentage of authorization
U.S. Central Command	189	184	97.4
U.S. Northern Command	171	165	96.5
U.S. European Command	144	128	88.9
U.S. Southern Command	93	74	79.6
U.S. Pacific Command	123	110	89.4

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information.

Note: These numbers are only general comparisons of personnel who have planning functions at the commands and are not meant to reflect specific personnel or budget-related categories.

We did not independently validate NORTHCOM's requirements for planning personnel. However, NORTHCOM officials said that they believe they have an adequate number of planning personnel. Further, NORTHCOM has been conducting an ongoing assessment of its overall

manpower needs and is evaluating the extent to which changes in requirements for personnel may be needed.

NORTHCOM officials stated that partially because of the need to support other operations, such as ongoing military operations overseas, the command attempts to maximize the use of civilian staff in its workforce to maintain continuity and consistency. Civilian staff provides an institutional knowledge base and experience level that compliments the capabilities of military officers who rotate through the command's directorates. Over one-half of the command's planning staff is civilian or contractor personnel. As shown in table 4, two other commands in our review, U.S. Central Command and U.S. Pacific Command, also rely heavily on civilian or contract personnel.

Table 4: Military, Civilian, and Contractor Planners, by Combatant Command

	Military personnel		Civilian personnel		Contractor personnel	
Combatant command	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total
U.S. Central Command	73	39.7	20	10.9	91	49.5
U.S. Northern Command	70	42.4	52	31.5	43	26.1
U.S. Southern Command	61	82.4	13	17.6	[a]	[a]
U.S. European Command	110	85.9	8	6.3	10	7.8
U.S. Pacific Command	53	48.2	7	6.4	50	45.5

Source: GAO analysis of DOD information.

[a]U.S. Southern Command did not provide information on contractor personnel.

The military personnel who serve as NORTHCOM planners receive basic planning-related training similar to that of planners in other combatant commands. DOD and the services provide educational opportunities for members of the U.S. Armed Forces, international officers, and federal government civilians. These opportunities provide a broad body of knowledge that enables students to develop expertise in the art and science of war. Many of NORTHCOM's military planners have completed some of these courses. A number of these courses are also offered to civilian planning personnel.

NORTHCOM's Staff Includes National Guard and Coast Guard Personnel

To accomplish its homeland defense and civil support missions, NORTHCOM must plan for and interact with other federal, state, and territorial government agencies in addition to Canada and Mexico. The need to plan for and conduct operations (1) within the United States and (2) in support of other federal agencies, 49 state governments, and Canada and Mexico presents a challenge to most planners who have functioned solely in a military environment.

NORTHCOM has sought to address this challenge by integrating personnel from the National Guard and U.S. Coast Guard into NORTHCOM's headquarters staff. These personnel have experience working in the state environment and are incorporated into most, if not all, of the NORTHCOM directorates that conduct some form of operational planning. Thirty-six National Guard and 22 U.S. Coast Guard personnel are stationed at NORTHCOM. These personnel provide command planners and operations personnel with co-workers who have experience planning for and conducting operations with other federal and state agencies.

In January 2008, Congress required the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the military and civilian positions, job descriptions, and assignments at NORTHCOM. The goal is to determine the feasibility of increasing the number of reserve component military personnel or civilian staff with experience in homeland defense and civil support at NORTHCOM.[50]

NORTHCOM Has Efforts Under Way to Train DOD Planners for Domestic Operations

Having an adequate number of properly trained personnel to ensure that missions are successfully planned is a decisive factor in the success of any mission. NORTHCOM officials have been attempting to establish and maintain a cadre of personnel in the active military with knowledge and experience in NORTHCOM planning, homeland defense, civil support, and interagency planning and coordination that go beyond the basic level training the military provides in joint planning. These efforts extend from the level of basic orientation training all the way to programs at the graduate level.

NORTHCOM planners are required to complete an orientation course that serves as a "crosswalk" between DOD's homeland defense and civil support plans and the plans of their agency partners. The orientation

[50]Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 1821 (2008).

course also provides students with a better understanding of DOD policy regarding the protection of the homeland. DOD officials told us that additional such planning courses are now offered at other DOD schools, such as the Army's Command and General Staff College and School of Advanced Military Studies.

As recommended in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, NORTHCOM has taken steps to create training programs and partner with other agencies and private institutions. The goal is to develop educational opportunities for interagency and state/federal environment planners to inform them of other agencies' homeland security responsibilities to improve overall cooperation and coordination. For example, NORTHCOM has developed a course for DOD and interagency personnel that focuses on support to civil authorities. While the course does not directly address the detailed aspects of planning, it provides an overview of DOD and other agencies' responsibility for homeland security. Officials from the Joint Forces Staff College believe this is a valuable course and they are considering requiring students to complete it before they can take certain other courses at the college. In addition, NORTHCOM has developed a training curriculum for each of its planning personnel. NORTHCOM officials stated that each planner's progress in completing the curriculum is automatically tracked to ensure timely completion. Several of the courses in the curriculum must be completed within specific time periods.

To further expand the educational opportunities for its own staff as well as staff from agencies across the federal government, NORTHCOM has also partnered with the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs to develop the Center for Homeland Security, located on the campus of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, which provides research and educational capabilities to meet specific needs regarding protection of the homeland. One of the accomplishments of the center is the creation of several programs of study in homeland defense, including undergraduate and graduate certificates in homeland security and homeland defense. According to a senior official with the center, the four courses required for the graduate certificate can also be applied toward a master of business administration and a master of public affairs. The center, in cooperation with several of its partners, including NORTHCOM, is also in the process of developing other educational programs, such as a master of arts and a doctoral program in homeland security.

According to NORTHCOM officials, a cooperative effort among the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, the Naval Postgraduate School, and NORTHCOM helped found the Homeland Security/Defense

Education Consortium, which is a network of teaching and research institutions focused on promoting education, research, and cooperation related to and supporting the homeland security/defense mission. The consortium conducts two symposia annually, one at NORTHCOM and a second at a FEMA location. The Naval Postgraduate School also has a master's degree program through its Center for Homeland Defense and Security. This program, designed in cooperation with FEMA, includes strategy development, organizational, planning, and interagency coordination aspects. NORTHCOM personnel have started to take advantage of these programs on a case-by-case basis, but there are no command requirements for NORTHCOM staff to attend any of these courses or programs.

NORTHCOM's efforts to provide additional training and education for its staff should help the command expand its experience in planning and conducting operations with partners at the international, federal, and state levels. NORTHCOM officials have recognized the need for such education opportunities at all levels for their own staff as well as for other military and civilian personnel. At some point, NORTHCOM may be in a position to require certain prerequisites in this area for military or civilian staff who may be considered for assignment to the command.

NORTHCOM Has Taken Actions to Improve Interagency Coordination but Lacks a Formal Process to Ensure That Coordination Efforts Are Adopted

NORTHCOM has taken actions to improve the coordination of its homeland defense and civil support plans and operations with federal agencies. Such coordination is important for ensuring that proper planning in advance of an attack or a natural disaster and that such operations proceed as smoothly as possible if they need to be conducted. However, NORTHCOM lacks formal guidance to coordinate its planning effort with its agency partners. This results in uncertainty about which planning coordination efforts are continued or agreed to by higher authorities and an increased risk that interagency planning will not be done effectively.

NORTHCOM Has Taken Steps to Improve Coordination

We found several areas in which NORTHCOM has taken steps to improve coordination with other agencies and organizations, many resulting from the lessons learned following Hurricane Katrina. Coordination is important not just for interagency planning but also to ensure that NORTHCOM and its agency partners work together effectively when an incident actually occurs. For example, NORTHCOM created an Interagency Coordination Directorate in 2002 to assist in its collaboration efforts. Today, 40 agencies

and organizations are represented at NORTHCOM, including a senior executive official from DHS as well as officials from FEMA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The directorate is designed to help build effective relationships by facilitating, coordinating, and synchronizing information sharing across organizational boundaries. NORTHCOM and U.S. Southern Command are the only combatant commands with directorates dedicated solely to interagency coordination. Table 5 shows the agencies currently represented at NORTHCOM.

Table 5: Agencies and Organizations Represented at NORTHCOM

Department or agency of origin	Represented agency
DOD	Defense Threat Reduction Agency
	NGB
	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
	U.S. Special Operations Command
DHS	FEMA
	U.S. Coast Guard
	Customs and Border Protection
	Transportation Security Administration
	Federal Air Marshal Service
Other federal agencies	Department of State
	Department of Agriculture
	Department of the Interior
	Department of Health and Human Services
	U.S. Public Health Service
	Federal Bureau of Investigation
	Director of National Intelligence
	Central Intelligence Agency
	Environmental Protection Agency
	U.S. Geological Survey
	Federal Aviation Administration
	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Canada and Mexico	Canadian Forces Liaison Office
	Canadian Department of Public Safety and Royal Canadian Mounted Police
	Mexico Civil Response/Protection Organization
Other	Humanitarian International Services Group

Source: NORTHCOM.

The presence of agency representatives provides a regular opportunity for direct interaction between them and NORTHCOM staff. NORTHCOM and other agency officials with whom we spoke agreed that this level of regular contact is beneficial for coordinating plans in advance but also for the more immediate needs of coordination when an event actually occurs. Such agency representatives should therefore have the experience to provide an effective link to their parent agencies and possess the appropriate level of access to agency leadership in order to facilitate interagency decision-making. When a major incident occurs, the agency representatives, known as the Interagency Coordination Center, become a direct adjunct to the NORTHCOM Commander's battle staff, assisting the command in its immediate crisis planning and providing a direct link to their parent agencies.

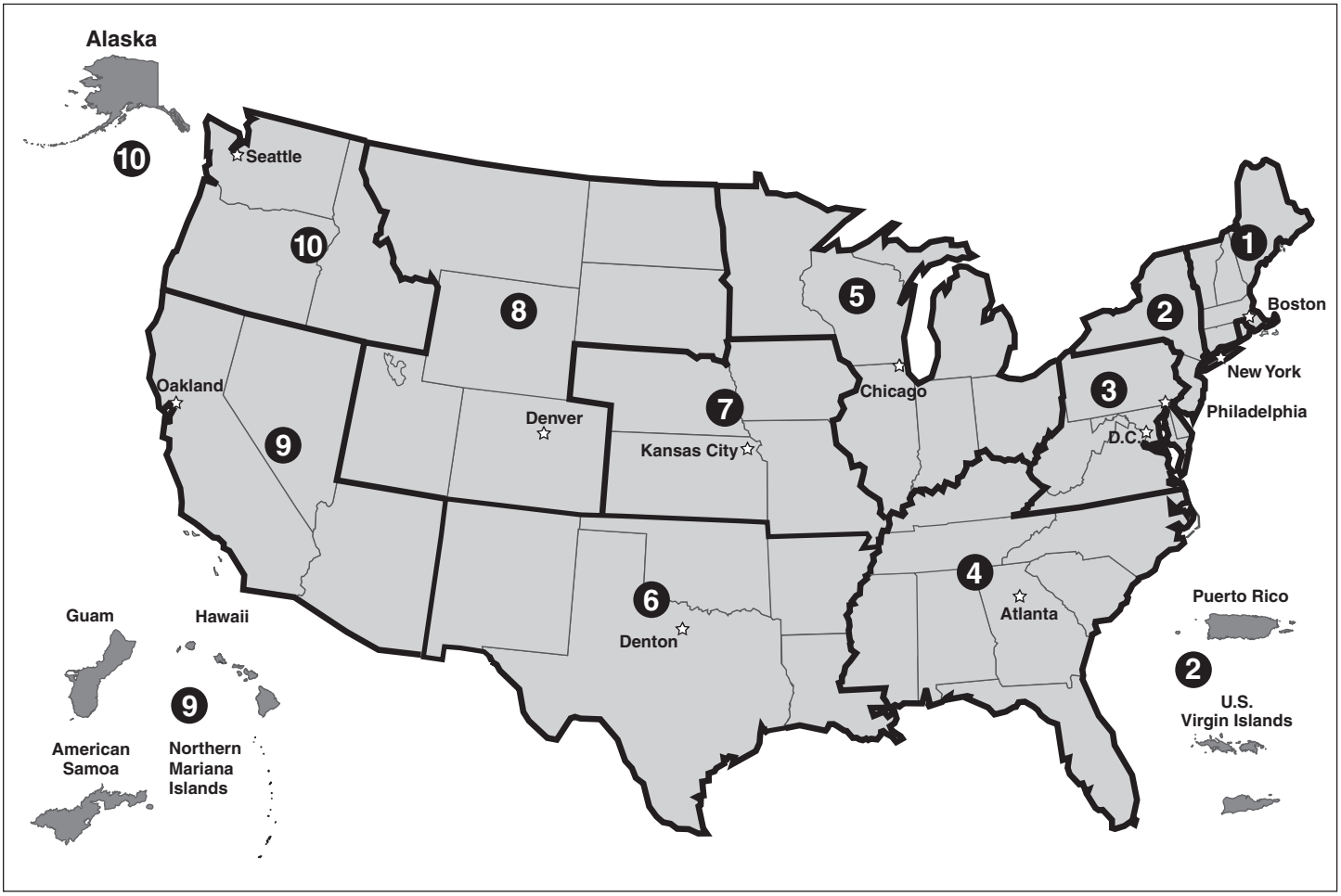
The Interagency Directorate also administers NORAD-NORTHCOM's Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), which is composed primarily of the 40 resident agency representatives who are experts in interagency planning and operations on the command's staff. The JIACG's role is to coordinate with civilian federal agency partners to facilitate interagency operational planning in contingency operations. All combatant commands are establishing JIACGs. The JIACG supports day-to-day planning and advises NORTHCOM planners regarding civilian agency operations, capabilities, and limitations. Further, the JIACG provides the command with day-to-day knowledge of the interagency situation and links directly with agency partners at the command and in other locations when an operation is necessary. The JIACG also conducts focused planning on specific issues. For example, the group met with officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services in August 2006 to coordinate federal efforts for responding to a potential influenza pandemic. The JIACG also formed a working group to integrate private sector capabilities and interests into NORTHCOM plans and operations as appropriate. Specifically, the group's objectives were to determine how to provide NORTHCOM with private sector information regarding facilities and operations, achieve coordination and cooperation with the private sector, and gain and maintain awareness of technological initiatives developed in the private sector. The JIACG also formed working groups for law enforcement issues, earthquakes, and prescripted mission assignments.

According to FEMA's Director, one of the most important interagency planning tools developed as a result of the lessons learned during Hurricane Katrina is the prescripted mission assignments discussed earlier.[51] NORTHCOM collaborated with FEMA and other agencies to identify the most likely tasks DOD would be asked to fulfill and drafted generic mission assignments for those tasks in terms of capability requirements rather than specific resources. Twenty-five prescripted mission assignments are included in NORTHCOM's standing Defense Support for Civil Authorities Execute Order.

These mission assignments also include defense coordinating officers (DCO) who are located in each of FEMA's 10 regional offices (see fig. 3). Officials from several agencies told us that locating the DCOs in the FEMA regions and assigning greater emphasis to the DCOs' missions has enhanced interagency coordination, particularly with states. The DCOs are senior military officers with joint experience and training on the *National Response Framework*, defense support to civil authorities, and DHS's National Incident Management System. They are responsible for assisting civil authorities, when requested by FEMA, by providing liaison support and capabilities requirements validation. DCOs serve as single points of contact for state, local, and other federal authorities that need DOD support. DCOs work closely with federal, state, and local officials to determine what unique DOD capabilities are necessary and can be used to help mitigate the effects of a natural or man-made disaster. For example, during the recent California wildfires, NORTHCOM's subordinate command, Army Forces North, deployed the Region IX DCO to support the Joint Field Office in Pasadena, California, and assess and coordinate defense support of civil authorities to FEMA. Based on the requirements identified by state and federal officials in consultation with the DCO, DOD and the National Guard deployed six aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System to California to assist in fighting the wildfires.

[51]The federal government uses prescripted mission assignments to assist in planning and to reduce the time it takes to deploy response resources. Prescripted mission assignments identify resources or capabilities of government organizations that are commonly called upon during response to an incident. Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Framework*, 29.

Figure 3: FEMA Regions



Sources: FEMA; Map Resources (maps).

NORTHCOM has also improved interagency coordination through its involvement in hurricane preparation with a wide range of state and federal partners, including state adjutants general, FEMA, NGB, and state and local emergency managers. NORTHCOM facilitates weekly hurricane teleconferences throughout the hurricane season, which lasts from June to November every year, to provide the opportunity for agencies to discuss potential storms; resources available in the affected area as well as through other sources, such as the Emergency Management Assistance

Compact (EMAC)[52] or FEMA; and potential needs or unique capabilities that DOD may be asked to provide. As a result of this frequent interaction, NORTHCOM, DHS, and state officials believe the command has begun to build more productive and effective relationships with the hurricane states and participating agencies. For example, in anticipation of Hurricane Dean being upgraded from a tropical storm in August 2007, at FEMA's request NORTHCOM deployed a DCO and supporting team to the Caribbean in preparation for landfall. The DCO was prepared to coordinate requests for military assistance and resources and provide direct support to federal, state, and local agencies responding to the incident.

In addition to efforts to coordinate with federal agencies and organizations, NORTHCOM recently began efforts to increase coordination with private sector businesses and nongovernmental organizations in planning for and responding to disasters to help NORTHCOM better focus resources and ensure that efforts are not duplicated. For example, during Hurricane Katrina, Wal-Mart was able to deliver bottled water to some locations more quickly than federal agencies could. Since many of NORTHCOM's coordination efforts with nongovernmental organizations are recent, it is too soon to determine how successful they will be.

NORTHCOM Lacks Formal Procedures to Ensure That Integrated Planning Will Be Fully Adopted

Despite the steps that NORTHCOM has taken to improve federal interagency coordination, we found that it lacks formalized procedures—such as memorandums of understanding or charters—to ensure that agreements or arrangements made between the command and agency representatives can be relied on for planning purposes. As we have reported in the past, key practices that can enhance and sustain interagency planning coordination efforts include—among others—establishing mutually reinforcing or joint strategies, agreeing on roles and responsibilities, and identifying and addressing needs by leveraging resources. We also reported that interagency coordination can be enhanced by articulating agreements in formal documents, such as a memorandum of understanding, interagency guidance, or interagency planning document, signed by senior officials in the respective agencies.[53] DOD's adaptive planning—that is, the joint capability to create and revise

[52]EMAC provides a means for states affected by disasters to access resources from other states, including emergency managers, National Guard assets, and first responders.

[53]GAO-06-15.

plans rapidly and systematically, as circumstances require—includes interagency coordination as a key part of the plan development process. Further, the nature of NORTHCOM's homeland defense and civil support missions requires interagency coordination and support throughout all levels of planning and operations. This is particularly important since so many government agencies share the responsibility to ensure an effective response to disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. It is therefore crucial that DOD—through NORTHCOM—plan and coordinate thoroughly with all relevant federal agencies.

NORTHCOM planners have achieved some success in coordinating NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan with an Incident Management Planning Team (IMPT), an interagency team created by DHS to provide contingency and crisis action incident management planning based on the 15 national planning scenarios.[54] However, the planners told us that their successful collaboration with the IMPT is largely because of the dedicated personalities involved. For example, NORTHCOM planners have informally instituted workshops and biweekly teleconferences with the IMPT core and on-call groups to review NORTHCOM's homeland defense plan, as well as to discuss the overarching objectives of homeland defense and security. NORTHCOM officials told us that the IMPT offers a unique avenue of coordination direct to various agency partners and has helped to break down institutional barriers by promoting more constructive relationships between the agencies involved. However, without a formal charter or memorandum of understanding that institutionalizes the structure for integrated interagency planning, there is a risk that these efforts to coordinate with agency partners will not continue when the current planning staff move to their next assignments. Further, these and other coordination efforts do not have mechanisms for obtaining parent agency approval of agreements reached, and it is unclear what will be done with the results of their efforts. Consequently, many otherwise valuable interagency efforts may not be sufficiently supported by one or more participating agencies, and key agency staff can be confused about which coordination mechanisms serve a particular function.

[54]The IMPT includes a core group of 15 full-time senior-level planners from 8 different agencies: DHS, DOD, the Department of Justice, the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the American Red Cross. In addition, the IMPT has an on-call group that is assembled during training or emergencies consisting of 33 officials representing 20 agencies.

As part of the new Homeland Security Presidential Directive annex on national planning, DHS is required to coordinate with the heads of other federal agencies and develop an integrated planning system. This planning system is required to

1. provide common processes for developing plans;

2. serve to implement phase one of DHS's Homeland Security Management System; and

3. include the following:

   - national planning doctrine and planning guidance, instruction, and process to ensure consistent planning across the federal government;
   - a mechanism that provides for concept development to identify and analyze the mission and potential courses of action;
   - a description of the process that allows for plan refinement and proper execution to reflect developments in risk, capabilities, or policies, as well as to incorporate lessons learned from exercises and actual events;
   - a description of the process that links regional, state, local, and tribal plans, planning cycles, and processes and allows these plans to inform the development of federal plans;
   - a process for fostering vertical and horizontal integration of federal, state, local, and tribal plans that allows for state, local, and tribal capability assessments to feed into federal plans; and
   - a guide for all-hazards planning, with comprehensive, practical guidance and instruction on fundamental planning principles that can be used at federal, state, local, and tribal levels to assist the planning process.[55]

Such an integrated planning system, if developed and institutionalized across the federal government in coordination with state and local governments, should further address the interagency coordination gaps we identified.

[55]See White House, HSPD-8 Annex 1, *National Planning* and *National Response Framework*.

Conclusions

After being in operation for over 5 years, NORTHCOM has begun to establish itself as a major combatant command and plan for its role in leading homeland defense operations and assisting civil authorities in the event of major disasters.

NORTHCOM has developed, refined, and is now revising a body of major homeland defense and civil support plans. Nonetheless, NORTHCOM's limited progress in adequately tracking and assessing the supporting plans necessary to carry out homeland defense and civil support operations introduces increased risk in the planning process. The review process NORTHCOM officials told us they are developing to track and assess supporting plans from other commands and agencies should help them close this gap, but only if their process is consistently applied and includes supporting plans from all commands, organizations, and agencies required to submit them. Further, the considerable challenges NORTHCOM faces in planning for and conducting homeland defense and civil support missions are exacerbated by decisions DOD and the command have made. DOD's decision not to assign regular forces to NORTHCOM, the decision not to associate specific military capabilities and units with NORTHCOM's plans, and the decision not to develop mission-essential tasks for civil support missions each introduce increased uncertainty into NORTHCOM's homeland defense and civil support planning efforts. When considering their compounding effects together, the risk to NORTHCOM's planning effort are increased even further. To some degree, NORTHCOM will always face challenges and risk in planning because it has to be prepared for a wide variety of incidents that can range from a regional flood to a catastrophic nuclear incident to a widespread terrorist attack. The capabilities allocation and other planning challenges we discuss can be further addressed, but there is no guarantee that this will compensate for the scarcity of units and equipment because of the pace of ongoing operations overseas. However, addressing the planning gaps we identified would permit NORTHCOM and DOD a much more accurate understanding of the risk associated with homeland defense and civil support operations in the United States. Such risk mitigation efforts have recently been required as part of the President's and DHS's national preparedness guidance on national planning, and these requirements provide an opportunity for DOD and NORTHCOM to address the gaps we identified.

NORTHCOM's federal interagency coordination efforts have helped address some of the uncertainty in the homeland defense and civil support planning process and have improved NORTHCOM's ability to coordinate in the event of actual incidents. This is important because responding to a major disaster in the United States—natural or man-made—is a shared

responsibility of many government agencies with states often requiring federal assistance from DHS and DOD. Without clear guidance and procedures on interagency roles and responsibilities across the federal government and an understanding about which interagency planning efforts or coordination mechanisms are authoritative, the multiple interagency efforts that have been ongoing might not meet their potential for integrating operational planning dealing with all threats to the homeland, natural or man-made. If the integrated planning system required by the President's new homeland security guidance is developed and institutionalized across the federal government in coordination with state and local governments, it should further assist NORTHCOM and DOD in addressing the interagency coordination gaps we identified.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To help NORTHCOM reduce the level of risk to its homeland defense and civil support planning efforts, in conjunction with the new national planning requirements of the *National Response Framework* and the national planning annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, we are making three recommendations:

- We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of NORTHCOM to complete the process to track the status of all supporting plans, coordinate the completion of those plans by other commands and agencies, and assess the suitability of those plans to meet the intent and objectives of NORTHCOM's major plans.

- Given the priority DOD places on homeland defense, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense assign forces to NORTHCOM—as is done for other combatant commands—as well as require NORTHCOM to develop dedicated time-phased force deployment data lists for each of its major plans.

- We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of NORTHCOM, in consultation and coordination with the services, to develop mission-essential tasks for its civil support plans. Individual units required for these missions should be identified, and these mission-essential tasks should be included as part of DOD's readiness assessment systems in order to permit consistent tracking of readiness for specific elements of NORTHCOM's plans.

To help NORTHCOM and DOD better integrate their operational planning practices into the interagency and national preparedness structure, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the

Commander of NORTHCOM and other appropriate federal agencies, develop clear guidance and procedures for interagency planning efforts, including appropriate memorandums of understanding and charters for interagency planning groups. This should be done in conjunction with the integrated planning system required in the national planning annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In comments on a draft of this report, DOD generally agreed with the intent of our recommendations and discussed steps it is taking and planning to take to address these recommendations. DOD also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated into the report where appropriate.

In response to our recommendation that NORTHCOM complete the process to track the status of supporting plans, coordinate the completion of those plans by other commands and agencies, and assess the suitability of those plans to meet the intent and objectives of NORTHCOM's major plans, DOD agreed with the need for these actions but stated that the existing guidance we noted in our report already provides sufficient direction. We agree that further formal guidance or direction may be unnecessary as long as NORTHCOM consistently pursues its effort to review supporting plans, including the supporting plans of all commands, agencies, and organizations required to prepare such plans. For example, some plans call for other DOD agencies and even non-DOD agencies to prepare supporting plans. In these cases, while NORTHCOM may not have the authority to compel compliance, it should nevertheless review these supporting plans for adequacy.

In response to our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense assign forces to NORTHCOM, DOD agreed that certain specialized forces, such as those trained and equipped for CBRNE consequence management, should be regularly assigned to NORTHCOM but said that it was not practical to attempt to assign general purpose forces to meet all possible civil support contingencies. DOD did not agree that all NORTHCOM plans should have force deployment lists because it would not provide the level of readiness tracking that we highlighted as being necessary in our report. We agree that it is not practical to assign forces to NORTHCOM in an attempt to cover all possible contingencies. Our concern was that the NORTHCOM Commander should have a similar level of flexibility and day-to-day readiness assurance that regularly assigned forces provide to other combatant commanders. Assigning some specialized forces to NORTHCOM would contribute to providing such flexibility and assurance.

DOD stated that it will work to develop civil support readiness metrics for general purpose forces rather than prepare specific force deployment lists for individual plans that were not already required to have them. We believe this effort would help institutionalize the importance of DOD's domestic mission and provide NORTHCOM and other DOD authorities a means of monitoring readiness to accomplish domestic missions.

With respect to our recommendation that DOD develop mission-essential tasks for NORTHCOM's civil support plans and identify the units required for these missions, DOD agreed with our assessment that NORTHCOM needs to track units' readiness to complete civil support missions but said that identifying units for all its civil support tasks would be impractical. DOD reiterated its proposal to develop civil support-specific metrics against which all general purpose forces could be measured. We believe that developing such metrics would meet the intent of our recommendation and would further institutionalize DOD's domestic mission throughout the force.

DOD agreed with our recommendation that clear guidance be developed for interagency planning efforts. DOD stated that it had begun to incorporate such direction in its major planning documents and would continue to expand on this guidance in the future. We believe DOD's efforts as part of the Integrated Planning System and on its own, if pursued consistently, should help better focus interagency planning to meet the range of natural and man-made threats.

DOD's written comments are reprinted in appendix III.

DHS also reviewed a draft of this report and provided technical comments, which we have incorporated where appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key staff members who contributed to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Requesters

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Tom Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Christopher Shays
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Kit Bond
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate

The Honorable Gene Taylor
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) has prepared plans to execute its homeland defense and civil support missions, we reviewed NORTHCOM's available major plans and supporting plans, comparing them to established Department of Defense (DOD) joint operational planning criteria for completeness and adequacy. We also met with knowledgeable NORTHCOM officials to discuss the status of each of the plans NORTHCOM is required to prepare and the process whereby the plans were developed and assessed. We did not independently validate the planning elements, such as the assumptions NORTHCOM used. We therefore did not attempt to state the extent to which the plans are executable. We compared the 15 national planning scenarios with NORTHCOM's plans and discussed the incorporation of the scenarios within those plans with NORTHCOM officials. To assess the challenges NORTHCOM faces in planning for and conducting homeland defense and civil support, we developed a methodology based on DOD's standards for joint operational planning. Although we included all of NORTHCOM's plans in our review, we concentrated on the two primary homeland defense and civil support plans as well as the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosive Consequence Management plan. The methodology involved a series of questions and topics to determine the extent to which NORTHCOM and DOD have considered the following as part of their planning for homeland defense and civil support:

- Identification of required capabilities
- Allocation of military capabilities to meet identified capability requirements
- Readiness of forces (trained personnel and equipment) to meet the missions for which they are assigned
- Conduct of exercises and evaluation of lessons learned that can be fed back into the planning process

We discussed this methodology with officials from the National Defense University, NORTHCOM, the Joint Staff, and the Joint Forces Staff College to ensure that it was a reasonable approach to evaluating joint operational planning.

We used the results of this analysis and our discussions with a broad range of DOD officials to determine what gaps, if any, exist in NORTHCOM's planning efforts stemming from these challenges. We also reviewed the structure of NORTHCOM's lessons learned process and collected information on the origin, analysis, and disposition of homeland defense and civil support lessons. As part of this effort, we observed a major

exercise (Ardent Sentry/Northern Edge) in the Indianapolis area in May 2007. During our review, the NORTHCOM Inspector General's Office was conducting an assessment of the command's lessons learned process, including oversight mechanisms and internal controls. Therefore, we did not conduct a deeper analysis of those elements.

To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM has adequate planning personnel with the relevant experience and training to perform the planning function for the command, we discussed personnel staffing and training with officials from NORTHCOM headquarters, NORTHCOM subordinate commands, and Joint Forces Staff College who were knowledgeable of training courses available to planning personnel. We discussed the extent to which NORTHCOM addresses planning challenges unique to the command in its planning staff structure. In addition, we compared basic information on planning personnel at NORTHCOM with that of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Southern Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Pacific Command in such areas as overall staffing levels; numbers of military, civilian, and contractor personnel on staff; and number of planning personnel who had received Joint Professional Military Education credit. Since our intention was to look at all the staff who have a direct relation to planning at the commands, and not just the staff of the plans directorates, we left it up to the commands to define who should be included. We did not validate the commands' requirements for specific numbers of planning personnel, and we did not independently validate the personnel data we received from the combatant commands. However, we assessed the data reliability measures the commands took to gather and maintain the data and determined that the information originated with the commands themselves and represented the best available source. We did not obtain the data from other sources, such as databases maintained by the military services' personnel centers. We found the data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

To determine the extent to which NORTHCOM coordinates with federal agencies and other organizations in planning for and conducting its missions, we met with officials from NORTHCOM's Interagency Coordination Directorate; reviewed the documentation and mechanisms for coordination with organizations outside NORTHCOM; and interviewed officials from NORTHCOM's subordinate commands, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the National Guard Bureau (NGB). We also surveyed the adjutants general from the 48 contiguous states, Alaska, and the District of Columbia and obtained information from NORTHCOM, DHS, and NGB on

NORTHCOM's coordination with the states. We are reporting separately on the results of that work.

In addressing our objectives, we reviewed plans and related documents, obtained information, and interviewed officials at the following locations:

- NORTHCOM Headquarters, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Joint Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia
- The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C.
- The Joint Staff, Washington, D.C.
- Joint Task Force-Civil Support, Fort Monroe, Virginia
- U.S. Army North, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas
- U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia
- U.S. Army Reserve Command, Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia
- Joint Force Headquarters National Capitol Region, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
- Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia
- NGB, Arlington, Virginia
- DHS, Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C.
- FEMA, Washington, D.C.

We conducted our review from May 2006 to April 2008 in accordance with 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 on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: NORHTCOM's 25 Prescripted Mission Assignments

Table 6 shows the 25 prescripted mission assignments that NORTHCOM and FEMA officials coordinated in order to facilitate the process for requesting DOD capabilities in the event of an emergency.

Table 6: Prescripted Mission Assignments

NORTHCOM Prescripted mission assignments	Capability providers
Defense coordinating officer/defense coordinating element	Army Forces North coordinated colonel and nine-person emergency preparedness liaison officer staff
Rotary wing lift (heavy)	Marine Corps CH-53E helicopter squadron, Navy MH-53 helicopter squadron, or Army CH-47 helicopter detachment
Rotary wing lift (medium)	Marine Corps CH-46 helicopter squadron, Army UH-60 helicopter detachment, or Navy MH-60 helicopter detachment
Tactical transportation	Army transportation company or light-medium truck company
Strategic transportation	U.S. Transportation Command provides strategic airlift and the Army's Surface Deployment and Distribution Command provides ground transportation (commercial trucks)
Communications - first responders	NORTHCOM or Army Forces North communications van
Communications - 25 user package	Army communications company (detachment) or Marine Corps communications battalion (detachment); and a satellite communications ground station (four-person team)
Communications - 75 user package	Army communications company (detachment) or Marine Corps communications battalion (detachment); and a satellite communications ground station (four-person team)
Emergency route clearance	Army or Marine Corps heavy equipment engineer battalion/company with infantry battalion/company in direct support or Air Force civil engineering squadron[a]
Aerial damage assessment	Marine Corps CH-46 squadron, Army CH-47/UH-60 helicopter detachment, Navy MH-60 helicopter detachment, or Air Force Global Hawk (unmanned aerial vehicle)
Prepare temporary housing sites	Air Force civil engineering squadron or Navy naval mobile construction battalion[a]
Mobilization centers	Army personnel support detachment[a]
Operational staging areas	U.S. Transportation Command Joint Task Force for port opening[a]
Fuel distribution points (ground)	Army bulk fuel unit or Marine Corps bulk fuel detachment[a]
Rotary wing medical evacuation	Army air ambulance squadron[a]
Temporary medical facilities	Air Force medical rapid response force[a]
Air component coordination element	Air Force/AFNORTH-coordinated eight-person detachment
Air fuel distribution points	Air Force air expeditionary force fuel detachment or Marine Corps forward arming and refueling point detachment[a]
Strategic patient movement (formerly contingency aeromedical staging facility)	U.S. Transportation Command coordinated joint patient movement team
Airborne command and control in support of emergency management authorities	U.S. Strategic Command command and control aircraft[a]
Mortuary affairs	Army mortuary affairs company

NORTHCOM Prescripted mission assignments	Capability providers
Full Motion video capability	Air Force Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle
Public affairs support	Military public affairs detachment-joint
Regional/state emergency preparedness liaison officer	Military-provided liaison officer
Air space control (ground)	U.S. Transportation Command coordinated Joint Task Force for port opening

Source: NORTHCOM.

[a]These are recommended units only and are not sourced, because NORTHCOM has never executed this mission assignment.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense

HOMELAND DEFENSE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2600 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-2600

MAR 2 6 2008

Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. D'Agostino:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report, "HOMELAND DEFENSE: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues," dated February 27, 2008 (GAO Code 350863/GAO-08-251).

Our responses to GAO's recommendations are attached. The DoD partially concurs with GAO's first three recommendations and fully concurs with the fourth recommendation.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the report.

Sincerely,

Paul McHale

Enclosure
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED MARCH 2008
GAO 08-251 / (350863)

"HOMELAND DEFENSE: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends, in conjunction with the new national planning requirements of the National Response Framework and the national planning annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of NORTHCOM to complete the process to track the status of all supporting plans, coordinate the completion of those plans by other commands and agencies, and assess the suitability of those plans to meet the intent and objectives of NORTHCOM's major plans.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially concur. DoD agrees with GAO's assessment that NORTHCOM's tracking, coordination, and suitability assessment of supporting plans is desirable. However, this direction is reflected in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff standing guidance in the *Joint Operation Execution and Planning System (JOPES)*, referenced by GAO, that commanders review their supporting plans.

During the period of GAO's report, NORTHCOM has been focused on writing its tasked plans for homeland defense and civil support missions. As noted in the draft report (page 6), NORTHCOM has already begun the effort to track, coordinate, and assess supporting plans. These efforts will continue, making additional direction from the Secretary of Defense unnecessary to complete this process or satisfy GAO's recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends, in conjunction with the new national planning requirements of the National Response Framework and the national planning annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, that the Secretary of Defense, assign forces to NORTHCOM—as is done for other combatant commands—as well as require NORTHCOM to develop dedicated time-phased force deployment data lists for each of its major plans.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially concur. To clarify DoD's response to GAO's recommendations, please see the term appendix at the end of our responses. The statement "as is done for other combatant commands," does not accurately reflect the process to assign, apportion, allocate, and/or attach forces for operational planning and execution. Forces are apportioned, not assigned, to Combatant Commands for contingency plans and are allocated during crisis action planning and attached by a Secretary of Defense-approved deployment order. GAO's recommendation lacks this definitional clarity. DoD concurs that NORTHCOM needs the ability to assess unit readiness for civil support missions. This requirement is especially critical for highly specialized forces trained and equipped for specific technical missions involving domestic consequence management in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high explosive (CBRNE) environments. Those forces ought to be allocated or assigned to NORTHCOM. On

the other hand, some civil support contingencies for which NORTHCOM plans, like a 10 kiloton nuclear detonation in a metropolitan area, could conceivably require several hundred thousand general utility forces. Such a vast number of forces cannot be assigned to NORTHCOM without dramatically increasing DoD's end strength or deviating from DoD's historical force structure. To keep NORTHCOM in a supporting rather than a leading role in the homeland, DoD will work to develop readiness metrics for civil support for those general utility forces but will wait to allocate and attach general utility forces to NORTHCOM until support operations are directed by the President or Secretary of Defense.

DoD does not concur with the recommendation that the Secretary produce additional guidance regarding development of time-phased force deployment data (TPFDDs). The Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) already provides NORTHCOM detailed guidance to develop TPFDDs for specified plans. And since TPFDDs usually identify units by type rather than by Unit Identification Codes (UICs) (e.g. "TICONDEROGA-class Cruiser instead of "USS LAKE ERIE" a specific Cruiser), TPFDDs would not provide the level of unit readiness tracking that GAO recommends.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends, in conjunction with the new national planning requirements of the National Response Framework and the national planning annex to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander of NORTHCOM, in consultation and coordination with the Services, to develop mission essential tasks for its civil support plans. Individual units required for these missions should be identified and these mission essential tasks should be included as part of DoD's readiness assessment systems in order to permit consistent tracking of readiness for specific elements of NORTHCOM's plans.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially concur. To properly respond, we must break the recommendation into its component parts: 1) that NORTHCOM develop mission essential tasks for its civil support plans; 2) that units be identified to complete these mission essential tasks; and 3) that the mission essential tasks be included in units' readiness assessment metrics.

NORTHCOM has developed mission essential tasks for its civil support plans and will continue to do so as supported entities identify other gaps and seams that NORTHCOM must augment.

Having NORTHCOM identify individual units for all of its civil support mission essential tasks is neither possible nor desirable. The tasks are not limited to specialized domestic consequence management tasks in CBRNE environments. The mission essential tasks for NORTHCOM's civil support plans could require anywhere from several hundred to several hundred thousand general utility forces. Thus DoD cannot predict the individual units that would be allocated to NORTHCOM for civil support missions. Assigning or apportioning a vast complement of forces to NORTHCOM is not the solution for the problem that GAO identifies—that NORTHCOM may not be ready when directed to accomplish civil support missions.

Instead, the solution centers on defining and instituting civil support readiness metrics across DoD's general utility forces. DoD concurs with GAO's assessment that NORTHCOM needs to track units' readiness to complete civil support missions—even "dual-use" general purpose

forces. Rather than identifying general utility forces by UIC for civil support readiness tracking, all general purpose forces should have civil support-specific readiness metrics. DoD could then produce a single readiness report for each dual-use unit that includes overseas combat and domestic civil support readiness. That information should be available to NORTHCOM for use in determining how ready forces are to carry out possible tasks.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Commander of NORTHCOM and other appropriate federal agencies develop clear guidance for interagency planning efforts, including appropriate memoranda of understanding and charters for interagency planning groups. This should be done in conjunction with the integrated planning system required in the national planning annex to the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8.

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. Better integration of DoD Components with interagency groups requires continuing clarification of roles and responsibilities. These are particularly critical for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the National Guard Bureau, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and NORTHCOM under the Integrated Planning System (IPS) and the National Response Framework (NRF). DoD has begun to incorporate such direction in its major planning documents, such as the Guidance for the Employment of the Force (GEF), and will continue to expand and clarify that guidance in the future.

GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED MARCH 2008
GAO 08-251 / (350863)

"HOMELAND DEFENSE: U.S. Northern Command Has Made Progress but Needs to Address Force Allocation, Readiness Tracking Gaps, and Other Issues"

TERMS APPENDIX

The following terms are from "Forces For Unified Commands FY 2006."

COCOM: Nontransferable command authority that cannot be delegated and normally is exercised through subordinate joint force commanders and Service and/or functional component commanders. It includes budget/PPBES input and assignment of subordinate commanders.

Assigned Forces: Those forces and resources that have been placed under COCOM of a unified commander…[they] are available for normal peacetime operations of that command.

Apportioned Forces: Those forces and resources assumed to be available for adaptive planning as of a specified date. They may include those assigned, those expected through mobilization, and those programmed.

Allocated Forces: Those forces and resources provided by the President or Secretary of Defense for crisis action planning or execution. The allocation of forces is accomplished through procedures established for crisis action planning.

Attach: The placement of units or personnel in an organization where such placement is relatively temporary.

*Note: A force is **assigned** in accordance with the guidance contained with the "Forces For" document. Forces are **allocated** for crisis action planning or execution through JOPES. Forces become **attached** when deployed via a Secretary of Defense-approved deployment order.*

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Davi M. D'Agostino, (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Lorelei St. James, Assistant Director; Steven D. Boyles; Yecenia C. Camarillo; Angela S. Jacobs; David F. Keefer; Joseph W. Kirschbaum; Joanne Landesman; Robert D. Malpass; Lonnie J. McAllister; Erin S. Noel; Pamela Valentine; and Jena R. Whitley made key contributions to this report.

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