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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

July 7, 2003

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman, Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

Subject: *Post-hearing Question From the May 8, 2003, Hearing on Barriers to Information Sharing at the Department of Homeland Security*

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As requested, this letter provides our response for the record to the question posed by Representative Michael Turner to GAO, in your letter of June 13, 2003.

The GAO recently released a report on the sharing of terrorist watch lists between federal, state, and local agencies (GAO-03-322).¹ The report discussed the importance of an enterprise architecture that served all agencies' needs. The report went on to discuss the role of database architectures as an integral component of the overall enterprise architecture. Specifically, the report pointed out the problems encountered unless data is consolidated as opposed to relying on decentralized databases. The report recommends that the agencies move to consolidate these watch lists.

While your report is specific to terrorist watch lists, I am interested in whether you believe that the Department of Homeland Security should also be consolidating other "stovepiped" databases in order to enable the correlation of relationships in that data that can point to developing threats. Can you comment on this?

Standardizing and consolidating stovepiped databases can offer significant benefits. In particular, it can help reduce or eliminate duplicative data capture and storage and enable faster data access and better data consistency, which can reduce costs as well as improve data reliability and sharing. Analyzing these benefits in relation to associated costs and risks, such as security and privacy, provides a basis for informed decisions about not only consolidation but also the appropriate level of consolidation. Effective development of enterprise architectures provides for performing such analysis.

¹U.S. General Accounting Office, *Information Technology: Terrorist Watch Lists Should Be Consolidated to Promote Better Integration and Sharing*, GAO-03-322 (Washington, D.C.: April 15, 2003).

In the case of federal watch lists, we identified indicators (such as the number and variability of the lists and the commonality of their purposes) of opportunities to consolidate and standardize. Consequently, we recommended that the Department of Homeland Security determine the extent of watch list consolidation needed to accomplish its mission and that such consolidation be done as part of the department's efforts to develop an enterprise architecture.

We believe this approach—analyzing information and data needs and solutions within the context of an enterprise architecture—is also necessary to determine the extent to which all existing systems of the department's 22 component agencies should be standardized and consolidated. In fact, during the subject hearing, the department's chief information officer testified that it plans to develop and use an enterprise architecture to guide its systems consolidation and integration. He stated that the department plans to issue the enterprise architecture by the fall of 2003.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact me at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov, or Gary Mountjoy, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-6367 or mountjoyg@gao.gov.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randolph C. Hite". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "Hite" at the end.

Randolph C. Hite
Director, Information Technology Architecture
and Systems Issues

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