

Highlights of [GAO-12-536](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The global use of UAVs has increased significantly over time, raising concerns about their proliferation. MTCR and Wassenaar are the multilateral regimes that address UAV proliferation. MTCR seeks to limit the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction delivery systems, while Wassenaar seeks to limit the spread of certain conventional weapons and sensitive technologies with both civilian and military uses. This report is an unclassified version of a classified report issued in February 2012. GAO was asked to address (1) global trends in the use of UAV technology, (2) U.S. national security considerations concerning UAV proliferation, (3) multilateral and bilateral tools to control UAV proliferation, and (4) coordination of U.S. efforts to limit the spread of UAV technology. To conduct this review, GAO analyzed intelligence, licensing, and end-use monitoring data, and interviewed U.S. and foreign officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State improve its export licensing database to better identify authorized UAV exports, that relevant agencies improve mechanisms for sharing information relevant to the export licensing process, and that State and DOD harmonize their UAV end-use monitoring approaches. The agencies generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-12-536](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

July 2012

NONPROLIFERATION

Agencies Could Improve Information Sharing and End-Use Monitoring on Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Exports

What GAO Found

Since 2005, the number of countries that acquired an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) system nearly doubled from about 40 to more than 75. In addition, countries of proliferation concern developed and fielded increasingly more sophisticated systems. Recent trends in new UAV capabilities, including armed and miniature UAVs, increased the number of military applications for this technology. A number of new civilian and commercial applications, such as law enforcement and environmental monitoring, are available for UAVs, but these applications are limited by regulatory restrictions on civilian airspace.

The United States likely faces increasing risks as countries of concern and terrorist organizations seek to acquire UAV technology. Foreign countries' and terrorists' acquisition of UAVs could provide them with increased abilities to gather intelligence on and conduct attacks against U.S. interests. For instance, some foreign countries likely have already used UAVs to gather information on U.S. military activities overseas. Alternatively, the U.S. government has determined that selected transfers of UAV technology support its national security interests by providing allies with key capabilities and by helping retain a strong industrial base for UAV production. For instance, the United Kingdom and Italy have used UAVs purchased from the United States to collect data on Taliban activity in Afghanistan.

The United States has engaged in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy to address UAV proliferation concerns. The United States principally engaged the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to address multilateral UAV proliferation concerns. Since 2005, the United States proposed certain significant changes to address how MTCR controls UAVs, but members could not reach a consensus for these changes. Also, while the Wassenaar Arrangement (Wassenaar) controls the export of some key dual-use UAV components, it does not control other dual-use technologies that are commonly used in UAVs. The Department of State (State) has also used diplomatic cables to address the proliferation of UAV-related technologies bilaterally. State provided to GAO about 70 cables that it sent from January 2005 to September 2011 addressing UAV-related concerns to about 20 governments and the MTCR. Over 75 percent of these cables focused on efforts by a small number of countries of concern to obtain UAV technology.

U.S. agencies coordinate in several ways to control the spread of UAV technology, but could improve their UAV-related information sharing. For instance, an interagency group reviews many license applications to export UAV technology. However, there is not a formal mechanism to ensure that licensing agencies have relevant and timely intelligence information when making licensing decisions. Also, State's licensing database cannot provide aggregate data on military UAV exports State has authorized, which may impair the U.S. government's ability to oversee the release of sensitive UAV technology. The Department of Defense (DOD) and State each conduct end-use monitoring of some UAV exports, but differences in the agencies' programs may result in similar types of items being subject to different levels of oversight.