



Highlights of [GAO-09-175](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense's (DOD) use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) continues to increase. In 2000, DOD components had fewer than 50 unmanned aircraft in their inventory. By May 2008, they had more than 6,000. However, DOD faces challenges, such as UAS acquisition and the integration of UAS into joint combat operations. GAO has made a series of recommendations to address challenges, including the need for a UAS strategic plan. To improve upon the management and use of UAS, DOD has implemented several actions, such as establishing new task forces. GAO was asked to (1) identify key DOD efforts to improve the management and operational use of UAS and (2) assess the extent to which these efforts constitute an overarching organizational framework to guide and oversee UAS efforts. GAO reviewed DOD documents such as directives and memorandums, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOD designate a single entity accountable for integrating efforts related to UAS; define roles, responsibilities, and relationships among UAS-related entities; and develop a UAS strategic plan to align and integrate efforts and funding with long-term goals. DOD partially concurred with one recommendation and did not concur with two recommendations, citing actions it has already taken. GAO recognizes DOD's efforts to date, but continues to believe additional actions are needed.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-175](#). For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

Additional Actions Needed to Improve Management and Integration of DOD Efforts to Support Warfighter Needs

What GAO Found

Over the past several years, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, and the military services have undertaken several initiatives to improve the management of UAS programs and the operational use of these systems. Specifically, DOD has established new entities and refocused the mission of an existing organization. DOD has also initiated several studies to determine UAS needs and help inform future UAS acquisition decisions. In addition, DOD issued the *Unmanned Systems Roadmap 2007-2032* (Roadmap), which it characterizes as a comprehensive plan for the evolution and transition of unmanned systems technology, including UAS. Also, in select cases the military services are developing and fielding common UAS programs and proceeding to develop more common concepts of operations.

DOD has taken steps to improve the management and operational use of UAS, but its approach lacks key elements of an overarching organizational framework needed to fully integrate efforts, sustain progress, and resolve challenges. First, DOD has increased management attention on UAS and commenced at least seven separate initiatives since September 2006 to address challenges presented by the rapid integration of UAS into the military services' force structure, yet no single office or entity, supported by an implementation team, is accountable for integrating these key management efforts. Although these efforts are intended to complement one another, the priorities for each initiative have not been fully integrated with a DOD-wide approach to resolve UAS challenges and determine how UAS will meet the department's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance or other mission needs. Second, DOD has not defined the roles, responsibilities, and relationships among the various UAS-related organizations to provide for effective communication of efforts within DOD and among external stakeholders. For example, DOD has not clarified how it will coordinate the efforts of its task forces addressing UAS issues. Third, DOD has not developed a comprehensive and integrated strategic plan to align departmental and service efforts to improve the management and operational use of UAS with long-term implementation goals, priorities, time lines, and other departmental planning efforts. DOD issued the Roadmap in 2007 to guide the development of unmanned systems to meet joint warfighter needs, but the Roadmap lacks key elements of a sound strategic plan, such as a focus on how to accomplish DOD's goals and objectives for UAS, milestones to track progress, identification of performance gaps, and clear linkages between proposed UAS investments and long-term planning goals. GAO's prior work has shown that a framework that includes an accountable implementation team, an established communications strategy, and a comprehensive and integrated strategic plan can serve as a basis for organizations that seek to transform their cultures in response to governance challenges and to sustain progress over time. In the absence of an approach that establishes clear accountability and a strategic plan to guide UAS development and investment decisions, DOD will continue to be challenged to fully integrate departmental and service efforts to resolve problems in the management and operational use of UAS.