

Why GAO Did This Study

Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have faced significant risks of mission failure and loss of life due to rapidly changing enemy threats. In response, the Department of Defense (DOD) established urgent operational needs processes to rapidly develop, modify, and field new capabilities, such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) technology, and counter-improvised explosive devices (IED) systems. However, GAO, the Defense Science Board, and others have raised concerns about the effectiveness, efficiency, and oversight of DOD's various urgent needs processes. GAO conducted this review to determine (1) what various entities exist within DOD for responding to urgent operational needs, and the extent to which there is fragmentation, overlap, or duplication; (2) the extent to which DOD has a comprehensive approach for managing and overseeing its urgent needs activities; and (3) the extent to which DOD has evaluated the potential for consolidations. To conduct this review, GAO examined DOD's urgent needs processes and collected and analyzed data from urgent needs entities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop comprehensive guidance that, among other things, defines roles, responsibilities, and authorities across the department and designates a focal point to lead urgent needs efforts. GAO also recommends that DOD evaluate potential options for consolidation. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-11-273](#) or key components. For more information, contact William M. Solis, (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

DOD's Urgent Needs Processes Need a More Comprehensive Approach and Evaluation for Potential Consolidation

What GAO Found

Over the past two decades, the fulfillment of urgent needs has evolved as a set of complex processes within the Joint Staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, each of the military services, and the combatant commands to rapidly develop, equip, and field solutions and critical capabilities to the warfighter. GAO identified at least 31 entities that manage urgent needs and expedite the development of solutions to address them. Moreover, GAO found that some overlap exists. For example, there are numerous points of entry for the warfighter to submit a request for an urgently needed capability, including through the Joint Staff and each military service. Additionally, several entities have focused on developing solutions for the same subject areas, such as counter-IED and ISR capabilities, potentially resulting in duplication of efforts. For example, both the Army and the Marine Corps had their own separate efforts to develop counter-IED mine rollers.

DOD has taken steps to improve its fulfillment of urgent needs, but the department does not have a comprehensive approach to manage and oversee the breadth of its activities to address capability gaps identified by warfighters in-theater. Steps DOD has taken include developing policy to guide joint urgent need efforts and working to establish a senior oversight council to help synchronize DOD's efforts. Federal internal control standards require detailed policies, procedures, and practices to help program managers achieve desired results through effective stewardship of public resources. However, DOD does not have a comprehensive, DOD-wide policy that establishes a baseline and provides a common approach for how all joint and military service urgent needs are to be addressed. Moreover, DOD lacks visibility over the full range of its urgent needs efforts. For example, DOD cannot readily identify the cost of its departmentwide urgent needs efforts, which is at least \$76.9 billion based on GAO's analysis. Additionally, DOD does not have a senior-level focal point to lead the department's efforts to fulfill validated urgent needs requirements. Without DOD-wide guidance and a focal point to lead its efforts, DOD risks having duplicative, overlapping, and fragmented efforts, which can result in avoidable costs.

DOD also has not comprehensively evaluated opportunities for consolidation across the department. GAO's Business Process Reengineering Assessment Guide establishes that such a comprehensive analysis of alternative processes should be performed, to include a performance-based, risk-adjusted analysis of benefits and costs for each alternative. In an effort to examine various ways the department might improve its fulfillment of urgent needs, GAO identified and analyzed several potential consolidation options, ranging from consolidation of all DOD urgent needs entities to more limited consolidation of key functions. Until DOD comprehensively evaluates its strategic direction on urgent needs, it will be unaware of opportunities for consolidation as well as opportunities for increased efficiencies in its fulfillment of urgent needs.