GAO Highlights

MISSILE DEFENSE

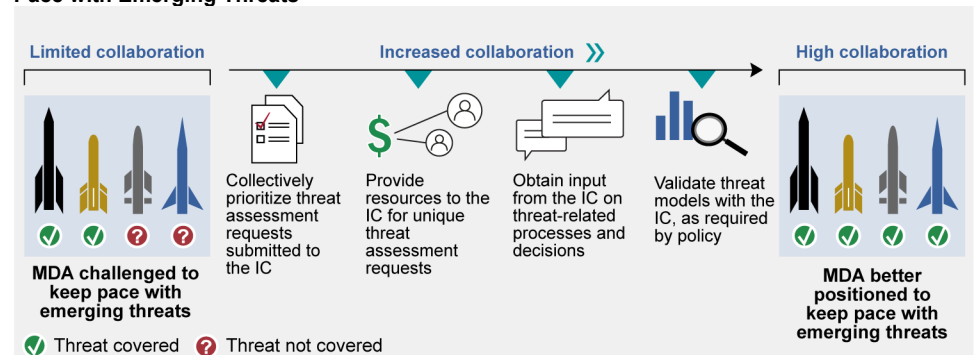## Further Collaboration with the Intelligence Community Would Help MDA Keep Pace with Emerging Threats

Why GAO Did This Study

MDA is developing missile defense capabilities to defend the United States, deployed forces, and regional allies from missile attacks. However, missile threats continue to emerge, as adversaries continue to improve and expand their missile capabilities.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 included a provision that GAO annually assess and report on the extent to which MDA has achieved its acquisition goals and objectives, and include any other findings and recommendations. This report is a public version of a classified report GAO issued in May 2019, which addresses (1) the challenges MDA and the defense intelligence community face in meeting the agency's threat assessment needs and (2) the extent to which MDA engages the defense intelligence community on missile defense acquisitions. GAO reviewed MDA's threat-related acquisition processes and interviewed relevant officials from the defense intelligence community, MDA, test community, and warfighters. Information deemed classified by DOD has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to improve how MDA: prioritizes and resources its threat assessment needs; obtains input from the defense intelligence community on key threat-related processes and decisions for missile defense acquisitions; and validates its threat models. DOD concurred with all three recommendations, citing actions it is already taking. While DOD has taken some positive steps, GAO believes more action is warranted.

What GAO Found

The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is experiencing delays getting the threat assessments needed to inform its acquisition decisions. Officials from the defense intelligence community—intelligence organizations within the Department of Defense (DOD)—told GAO this is because they are currently overextended due to an increased demand for threat assessments from a recent upsurge in threat missile activity, as well as uncertainties related to their transition to new threat processes and products. The delays are exacerbated because MDA does not collectively prioritize the various types of threat assessment requests submitted to the defense intelligence community or provide resources for unique requests, as other major defense acquisition programs are generally required to do. Without timely threat assessments, MDA risks making acquisition decisions for weapon systems using irrelevant or outdated threat information, which could result in performance shortfalls.

MDA has increased its outreach to the defense intelligence community over the past few years, but opportunities remain for further engagement on key threat-related processes and decisions. Specifically, MDA provides the defense intelligence community with limited insight into how the agency uses threat assessments to inform its acquisition decisions. MDA is not required to obtain the defense intelligence community's input, and instead has discretion on the extent to which it engages the defense intelligence community. However, the defense intelligence community is uniquely positioned to assist MDA and its involvement is crucial for helping MDA keep pace with rapidly emerging threats. Moreover, this limited insight has, in part, prevented the defense intelligence community from validating the threat models MDA builds to test the performance of its weapon systems. Without validation, any flaws or bias in the threat models may go undetected, which can have significant implications on the performance of MDA's weapon systems. MDA and the defense intelligence community recently began discussing a more suitable level of involvement in the agency's acquisition processes and decisions.

Actions Needed for MDA to Improve Collaboration with the Intelligence Community and Keep Pace with Emerging Threats

IC = Intelligence Community, MDA = Missile Defense Agency

Source: GAO analysis of Missile Defense Agency and Intelligence Community data. | GAO-20-177

Note: the threat missile coverage depicted is notional and not representative of MDA's actual threat coverage.

United States Government Accountability Office