

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-296](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2014, the Secretary of Defense directed two reviews of DOD's nuclear enterprise. These reviews made recommendations to address problems with leadership, organization, investment, morale, policy, and procedures, as well as other shortcomings that adversely affected the nuclear deterrence mission. In 2015, DOD conducted a review focused on NC3 systems, which resulted in additional recommendations to improve NC3.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 includes a provision for GAO to review DOD's processes for addressing these recommendations. This report addresses the extent to which DOD has made progress in (1) the implementation and tracking of the recommendations from the 2014 and 2015 nuclear enterprise reviews and (2) addressing sustainment and maintenance-related challenges and planning for the continued sustainment and maintenance of existing defense nuclear enterprise systems. GAO reviewed documents and interviewed DOD officials. This is a public version of a classified report that GAO issued in October 2019. Information that DOD deemed classified has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations for DOD to update guidance to require DOD components to keep information on recommendations current and complete. In written comments on the classified report, DOD concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-20-296](#). For more information, contact Joseph W. Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or kirschbaumj@gao.gov.

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DEFENSE NUCLEAR ENTERPRISE

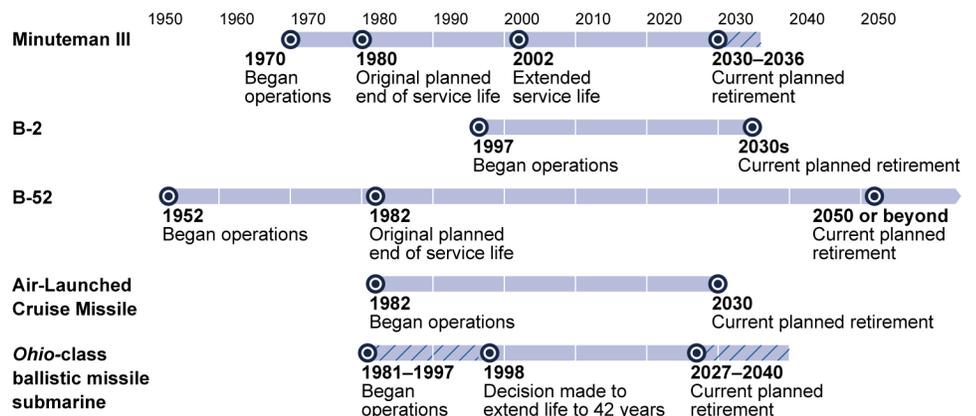
Systems Face Sustainment Challenges, and Actions Are Needed to Effectively Monitor Efforts to Improve the Enterprise

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) continues to make progress in implementing recommendations to improve the nuclear enterprise. These recommendations stemmed from DOD's 2014 internal and independent nuclear enterprise reviews, a U.S. Strategic Command 2014 memorandum, and an internal DOD 2015 report on nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3). Since GAO last reported—in November 2018—an additional five of the 247 sub-recommendations from the 2014 reviews have been closed; 91 remain open. In that time, DOD has also closed two more of the 13 recommendations from the 2015 review; six remain open. However, the key tracking tools DOD uses to provide visibility on the status of the recommendations do not provide current and complete information. For example, for those items that are behind schedule, many of the expected completion dates have not been updated to reflect when the items are now expected to be completed. The current DOD guidance for tracking the recommendations' status does not include a specific requirement to keep the information current in the tracking tools. Until DOD addresses these issues, it will not have a complete and accurate picture of when tasks are expected to be finished, whether progress is being made, whether efforts have stalled, or if there are other challenges. Ensuring that there is current and complete information regarding enduring recommendations would also help inform DOD's effort to monitor the health of the defense nuclear enterprise.

DOD and the military services are experiencing challenges related to sustainment and maintenance of nuclear weapon systems and have ongoing and planned initiatives intended to mitigate these challenges. All of the systems we reviewed have been operational since before 1998, making these systems at least 22 years old (see figure). The age of the systems has resulted in maintenance and supply issues. For example, the *Ohio*-class submarine has experienced the failure of parts that were not originally intended to be replaced. DOD and the services have ongoing and planned efforts to mitigate these challenges, such as improving maintenance processes and sources of supply.

Current Expected Operational Lives for Selected Nuclear Weapon Systems



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-20-296