



U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Accessible Version

June 30, 2026

Congressional Committees

Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DOD's Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation

In May 2025, the Secretary of Defense directed the Department of Defense's (DOD) Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) to eliminate any non-statutory or redundant functions and conduct a civilian reduction-in-force.¹ This letter formally transmits the attached briefing in response to a provision in Senate Report 119-39 to accompany the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 for us to review recent reorganization activities within DOT&E. In May 2026, we provided a briefing with our preliminary observations to staff of your committees in response to this provision. Our briefing examined (1) personnel adjustments and associated changes to DOT&E's organizational structure in response to the Secretary of Defense's May 2025 memorandum directing organizational changes and workforce reductions for DOT&E; (2) the extent to which the reorganization actions affect DOT&E's ability to provide oversight of major defense acquisition programs (MDAP) to meet statutory requirements; and (3) the extent to which the reorganization actions affect DOT&E's ability to provide oversight for additional programs on its oversight list, such as middle tier of acquisition (MTA) or classified programs.

To examine these topics, we

¹Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation*, (May 27, 2025).

- reviewed DOT&E data on its organizational structure and staffing before and after the May 2025 memorandum;
- reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense and DOD's Washington Headquarters Services about DOT&E's organizational structure and staffing before and after the May 2025 memorandum;²
- reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from DOT&E about the reorganization activities and their effects on the organization's test and evaluation oversight for DOD weapon system programs; and
- reviewed documentation from the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) about the analytical support that its contractor personnel and test and evaluation data management resources provide to DOT&E and how that contract support was affected by the recent DOT&E reorganization activities.³

We determined that the organizational and staffing data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of reporting DOT&E organizational changes.

In performing this work, we identified several key organizational, staffing, and infrastructure considerations based on our findings. These include

- whether explicit requirements are needed to ensure that DOT&E provides, in some form, oversight for MTA programs as well as other non-MDAPs, such as classified programs;
- whether the existing authority of the DOT&E to determine staffing needs and the type of leadership positions within the organization is sufficient to support congressional expectations for the scope of oversight expected from DOT&E; and
- whether action is needed to facilitate the development of a DOD repository for digital T&E data—rather than relying on IDA's contractor-managed data repository—and provide DOT&E with additional secure workspace to support oversight of classified programs.

Since we briefed your committees' staff in May 2026, we have updated the slides in our enclosure to include additional details related to our preliminary findings. Specifically, the enclosed slides contain updated information about the different factors that contributed to DOT&E decisions to reduce the number of programs on its oversight list in 2025. The updates also include additional information on the effects of workforce reductions on DOT&E's oversight activities, and actions taken by DOT&E to restructure its oversight processes. In addition, we provided a draft of this report, including the enclosure, to DOD for comment. DOD provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate.

We conducted this performance audit from January to June 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

²DOD's Washington Headquarters Services—the designated support and service provider of, among other things, human resources for the Office of the Secretary of Defense—supported the department's efforts to implement a reduction-in-force for DOT&E as part of reorganization activities.

³IDA's Systems and Analyses Center is a federally funded research and development center that provides contracted analytical support to DOT&E.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees. In addition, the report is available at no charge on our website at <https://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at oakleys@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report were Sean Merrill, Assistant Director; Brian Smith, Analyst-in-Charge; Pete Anderson, Robin Harris, Scott Hepler, and John Rastler-Cross.

//SIGNED//

Shelby S. Oakley
Director, Contracting and National Security Acquisitions

Enclosure – 1

List of Committees

The Honorable Roger F. Wicker
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Chair
The Honorable Christopher Coons
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives



Briefing to Congressional Defense Committees

Reorganization of the Department of Defense's (DOD) Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E)

May 2026

Note: This enclosure was updated in June 2026 with additional information about the different factors that contributed to DOT&E decisions to reduce the number of programs on its oversight list in 2025, the effects of workforce reductions on DOT&E's oversight activities, and actions taken by DOT&E to restructure oversight processes. DOT&E also provided technical comments on a draft of this briefing, which we incorporated where appropriate.

For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley, oakleys@gao.gov.

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Source of Work & Audit Objectives

- Senate Report 119-39 to accompany the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 includes a provision for GAO to review DOT&E's reorganization activities and brief the congressional defense committees.
- Our review examines:
 - 1) Personnel adjustments and associated changes to DOT&E's organizational structure in response to the Secretary of Defense's May 2025 reorganization memorandum.
 - 2) The extent to which reorganization actions affect DOT&E's ability to provide oversight of major defense acquisition programs (MDAP) to meet statutory requirements.
 - 3) The extent to which reorganization actions affect DOT&E's ability to provide oversight for additional programs on its oversight list, such as middle tier of acquisition (MTA) or classified programs.

Scope and Methodology

- To assess organizational and staffing changes, we collected and reviewed DOT&E data on its organizational structure and staffing before the May 2025 memorandum from the Secretary of Defense directing organizational changes and data reflecting DOT&E changes in response to the memorandum. We also interviewed DOT&E leadership, Action Officers, and operations officials to discuss reorganization activities and results.
- To understand the activities leading to the May 2025 memorandum and the process subsequently used to execute DOT&E reorganization, we collected and reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from DOT&E, the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and DOD's Washington Headquarters Services.

Scope and Methodology

- To assess the effects of recent organizational changes on DOT&E's ability to provide oversight of MDAPs, MTAs, and other programs, we collected and reviewed DOT&E data on its list of programs receiving its oversight. We also interviewed DOT&E officials about the effects of staffing and other organizational changes on the breadth and depth of their oversight of DOD weapon system programs.
- We also collected and reviewed information from the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) about the effects of DOT&E's reorganization. IDA manages a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) that provides contracted personnel and data management capabilities to support DOT&E's oversight activities.

Background: DOT&E Statutory Authority

Section 139 of Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.)

- DOT&E is responsible for overseeing and providing guidance on all operational testing and evaluation (OT&E) within DOD, as well as monitoring and reviewing live fire testing and evaluation under 10 U.S.C. § 4172.
- DOT&E provides guidance on OT&E for MDAPs, including ensuring that safety concerns are communicated in a timely manner to the program manager. MDAPs are programs with estimated total expenditures greater than \$1 billion for research, development, test and evaluation, or \$4.5 billion for procurement, in fiscal year 2024 constant dollars, or those programs designated as such by the Secretary of Defense.
- *“(k) The Director shall have sufficient professional staff of military and civilian personnel to carry out the duties and responsibilities prescribed by law, and the Secretary of Defense shall ensure that the amount requested for the Office of the Director for each fiscal year is sufficient to enable the Director to fulfill the duties and responsibilities assigned by this section.”*

Background: DOT&E Statutory Authority (cont.)

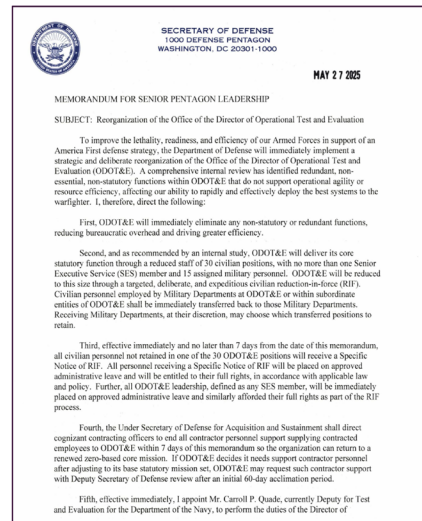
Section 4171 of Title 10, U.S.C.

- Operational testing of an MDAP may not be conducted until DOT&E approves the adequacy of the plans for OT&E to be conducted in connection with that program.
- DOT&E must submit a report to the congressional defense committees and specified DOD offices on the results of OT&E conducted on each MDAP. The report must state the Director's opinion on the adequacy of OT&E performed and whether the system tested is effective and suitable for use in combat based on test results.
- MDAPs may not move beyond low-rate initial production until OT&E is completed.

Note: MTA programs are not explicitly addressed in DOT&E's statutory responsibilities. DOT&E officials stated that non-MDAP programs, such as MTAs, are considered for inclusion on its oversight list if expected costs are equivalent to MDAPs.

Background: DOT&E Reorganization Memorandum

- Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum on May 27, 2025, directing DOT&E to immediately eliminate non-statutory or redundant functions within the organization.
- Memorandum further directed DOT&E to
 - Reduce staff to 30 civilian positions, with no more than one Senior Executive Service (SES) member and 15 assigned military personnel.
 - Implement a reduction-in-force (RIF) for all staff not retained in the 30 civilian positions and end all contractor personnel support within 7 days.



Source: DOD. | GAO-26-108859

Background: DOT&E Reorganization Memorandum (cont.)

- Memorandum also appointed the then-Deputy for Test and Evaluation (T&E) for the Navy to perform the duties of the Director of DOT&E, referred to as the Performing the Duties of (PTDO) Director, effective immediately.
- Memorandum stated that associated actions will save DOD \$300 million annually and improve the lethality and efficiency of the military departments.

ODOT&E. Mr. Quade will assume all duties of the Director, overseeing the transition and ensuring ODOT&E's statutory requirements remain effective and in compliance with statute. These actions will save more than \$300 million per year and reflect the Department's commitment to continued reform and reducing bureaucracy.

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Source: DOD. | GAO-26-108859



Timeline of Key Events Related to DOT&E Reorganization

2025

- Feb.** • Department of Defense (DOD) begins review of Fiscal Year 2026 defense budget to identify \$50 billion for realignment to other priorities.
- Mar.** • Secretary of Defense issues memorandum to reduce civilian positions across DOD to redistribute resources to DOD's core mission.
- Apr.** • Executive Order 14265 requires a review of all major defense acquisition programs (MDAP) within 90 days.
- May** • Department of Government Efficiency conducts review of Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) organization and personnel.
 - Secretary of Defense issues memorandum reducing DOT&E staff to 30 civilian positions.
 - All DOT&E Senior Executive Service (SES) members (Deputy Directors and Principal Deputy Director) immediately placed on administrative leave.
- June** • First reduction-in-force (RIF) notice issued with planned effective date of August 4, 2025.
 - DOT&E personnel records updated to support RIF process.
 - DOT&E places General Schedule personnel who were not retained on administrative leave.
 - Secretary of Defense directs end of contractor support for DOT&E within 7 days.
 - DOT&E stops work on contract for Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) support. This action prevents DOT&E personnel from accessing IDA-managed test and evaluation data repository for defense programs.

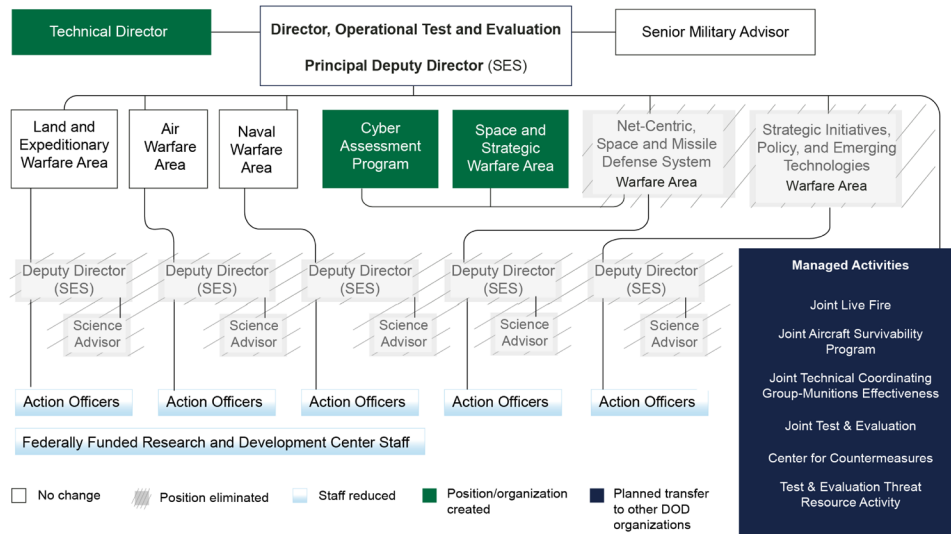
- June** • Second notice of RIF issued with new effective date of August 11, 2025.
- July** • Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs provides notice of DOT&E RIF to Congress.
 - Third notice of RIF issued with new effective date of August 23, 2025, to comply with 45-day congressional notification requirement.
 - IDA stop work order ends, resuming DOT&E access to IDA data repository and IDA support for DOT&E Action Officers.
- Aug.** • Fourth notice of RIF issued with new effective date of September 20, 2025.
- Sept.** • Performing the Duties of Director authorizes a return of 15 civilian positions (bringing the total civilian staff to 45) based in part on analysis of staffing needs.
 - Fifth notice of RIF issued with new effective date of October 18, 2025.
- Oct.** • Sixth notice of RIF issued with new effective date of November 15, 2025.
- Nov.** • Public Law 119-37 pauses RIF activity across the federal government until January 30, 2026.

2026

- Feb.** • Public Law 119-75 extends RIF pause across the federal government to February 13, 2026. The law's explanatory statement from January 2026 directs the Secretary of Defense to provide a report on the impact of the reorganization of DOT&E on operational test and evaluation activities.
- Mar.** • DOT&E recalls eight remaining DOT&E personnel subject to RIF from administrative leave.
 - New Director of DOT&E office sworn in.

Source: GAO analysis of Executive Order 14265 and DOD information. | GAO-26-108859

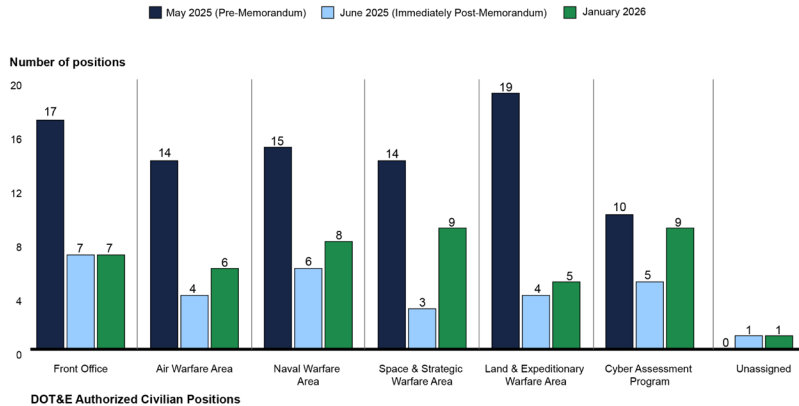
DOT&E Made Several Organizational Changes in Response to May 2025 Memorandum



Source: GAO analysis of DOT&E information. | GAO-26-108859

NOTE: While DOT&E still has Deputy Directors, they are no longer positions held by Senior Executive Service (SES) members.

DOT&E Civilian Staff Has Decreased Significantly Due to May 2025 Memorandum



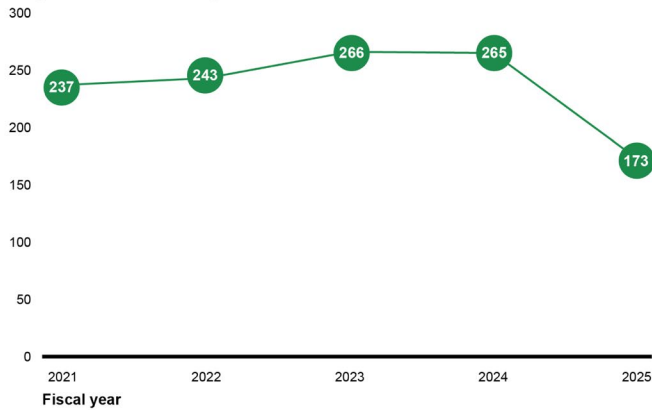
Source: GAO analysis of DOT&E data. | GAO-26-108859

Notes: DOT&E staff figures above include administrative staff in addition to warfare area staff. The figure does not include totals for military staff. In September 2025, the PTDO Director authorized the return of 15 civilian staff to DOT&E, bringing the total number of civilian positions to 45 (38 Action Officers). According to DOT&E, eight additional civilian staff who had been on administrative leave were called back to work in March 2026, while remaining part of the pending RIF action. As of April 2026, the new Director stated that four of those eight civilian staff remain employed by DOT&E pending further review.

- Total authorized civilian positions reduced from 126 (106 filled) to 30 in May 2025.
- Deputy Director SES members replaced by non-supervisory General Schedule (GS)-15 Action Officers who are now dual-hatted in Deputy Director roles.
- As of June 2026, DOT&E is conducting an analysis of its workforce and workload in response to congressional inquiry.

DOT&E Removed a Significant Number of Programs From Its Oversight List in Fiscal Year 2025

Programs on DOT&E Oversight List



Source: GAO presentation of DOT&E data. | GAO-26-108859

- More than 90 programs were removed from DOT&E's oversight list following the May 2025 memorandum. Removed programs include a mix of MDAPs and MTAs.
- Reasons for removal included completion of T&E activities; program cancellation; program mergers; and DOT&E determination that oversight was no longer necessary.



DOT&E Actions Taken to Restructure Oversight Processes

- Following the May 2025 memorandum, DOT&E leadership took several actions to streamline the organization's oversight processes. For example, the PTDO Director
 - Issued a memorandum in October 2025 that delegated approval authority for various test documents to Deputy Directors.
 - Issued guidance in January 2026 expanding reporting options for Action Officers to enhance reporting timeliness.
 - Dissolved the Strategic Initiatives, Policy, and Emerging Technologies division, which DOT&E officials described as an additional layer of review that often was at odds with the Action Officers overseeing individual programs and extended timelines for finalizing reports.

Reorganization Has Reduced DOT&E's Oversight Capacity

- Action Officers—the DOT&E staff responsible for assessing programs—stated that the significant workforce reductions have resulted in them being assigned more programs, programs in warfare areas for which they lack subject matter expertise, or both.
- Action Officers cited gaps in core expertise for critical oversight capabilities, such as for electronic warfare, due to workforce reductions and indicated being overwhelmed and overworked because of imbalance between staffing levels and workload.
- Action Officers also said that the losses in oversight depth and breadth caused by workforce reductions, and subsequent loss of subject matter expertise, increase the risk of weapon systems being delivered to the warfighters with undocumented shortfalls related to effectiveness, suitability, survivability, or lethality.
- The explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, directed DOT&E to report to the congressional defense committees within 60 days of the Act's enactment on the impacts of the DOT&E reorganization on operational test and evaluation activities. As of May 2026, DOT&E had yet to provide this report to the committees.

Infrastructure Constraints Resulting from Reorganization Hamper DOT&E Oversight

- IDA manages DOD's raw test and evaluation data. Action Officers told us that their work was hindered for roughly 2 months due to the lack of access to IDA's centralized test and evaluation data when work was stopped for the IDA contract in response to the May 2025 memorandum.
 - Among other challenges, the lack of data access created difficulties for Action Officers who were attempting to cover oversight responsibilities for their colleagues who were part of the DOT&E staff reductions.
- Consolidation of DOT&E's office space as part of the overall reorganization activities resulted in reductions to its secure workspaces. Specifically, the loss of half of the office's Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility workstations and conference rooms imposes challenges for conducting oversight work in classified settings. Action Officers noted greater reliance on the use of IDA workspace to help offset this loss.



Staffing Reductions Constrain DOT&E's Ability to Review Programs Outside Statutory Requirements

- DOT&E received \$10.6 million in fiscal year 2024 to enable increased oversight of MTA programs. As of February 2026, 15 of roughly 110 total MTA efforts were on DOT&E's oversight list.
- Action Officers cited concerns over the military departments potentially using the MTA pathway and other rapid prototyping efforts to avoid operational and live fire testing requirements, as specified in Sections 4171 and 4172 of Title 10, U.S.C.
- Action Officers also noted both temporary and permanent loss of personnel providing oversight for highly classified programs with limited access. They said that some Action Officers responsible for these programs eventually returned, but capability gaps remain.



Changes to Deputy Director Positions Have Impaired Oversight Activities

- DOT&E personnel told us about wide-ranging effects from the elimination of SES-member Deputy Directors
 - SES Deputy Directors put DOT&E on more equal standing (i.e., DOD 2-star rank equivalent) with leadership from DOD's weapon system acquisition community, which Action Officers said contributed to the military departments' view of DOT&E's relevance in decision-making for test and evaluation.
 - SES Deputy Directors previously provided for continuity of operations across changes in Administrations and Directors.
 - Action Officers stated that the loss of SES Deputy Directors has led to rerouting approvals to the Director level that previously were addressed by the Deputies.
 - The new Director noted efforts underway to replace SES positions with GS-15 Supervisory positions to alleviate some internal workload challenges, such as the current need for the Director to perform all performance appraisals for personnel.

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Changes to Deputy Director Positions Have Impaired Oversight Activities (cont.)

- From 2010 to 2025, DOT&E had four Senate-confirmed Directors. Their average length of tenure was about 2.5 years. During vacancies, this role has, on average, been filled for roughly a year by an acting director.
- In the absence of a Senate-confirmed Director, an SES-level Principal Deputy Director typically performs the duties of the Director, providing leadership continuity for operational and live fire test and evaluation planning, execution, and reporting of results.
- The Principal Deputy Director position was vacated in May 2025 when all SES members in DOT&E were put on administrative leave.
 - The new Director said that the Principal Deputy Director position was recently converted to a political appointment position and filled. The Director also noted that the position's conversion to a political appointment puts DOT&E on more equal standing with other DOD organizations.

Key Oversight Considerations

Organizational:

- Whether MTA programs, in some form, should be explicitly part of DOT&E's statutory requirements for oversight of programs.
- Whether action is needed to ensure other relevant non-MDAPs, such as certain classified programs, are explicitly part of DOT&E oversight requirements.

Staffing:

- Whether the existing statute stating the Director must have sufficient staff to carry out their duties is sufficient to support congressional expectations for the scope of oversight provided by DOT&E.
- Whether DOT&E should be required to have Deputy Director positions comprised of SES members to ensure organizational stability and continuity.

Infrastructure:

- Whether action is needed to facilitate infrastructure upgrades for DOT&E that enable the organization to develop and manage a DOD repository for digital test and evaluation data, rather than relying on contractor-managed data support, and provide additional secure space to conduct oversight for classified programs.



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Appendix

DOT&E Civilian Staff Has Decreased Significantly Due to May 2025 Memorandum

DOT&E Authorized Civilian Positions	Number of positions [May 2025]	Number of positions [June 2025]	Number of positions [January 2026]
Front Office	17	7	7
Air Warfare Area	14	4	6
Naval Warfare Area	15	6	8
Space & Strategic Warfare Area	14	3	9
Land & Expeditionary Warfare Area	19	4	5
Cyber Assessment Program	10	5	9
Unassigned	0	1	1

Source: GAO analysis of DOT&E data. | GAO-26-108859

DOT&E Removed a Significant Number of Programs From Its Oversight List in Fiscal Year 2025

Fiscal year	Programs on DOT&E Oversight List
2021	237
2022	243
2023	266
2024	265
2025	173

Source: GAO presentation of DOT&E data. | GAO-26-108859