

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-106055](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The then President directed the establishment of U.S. Space Command in December 2018. The Department of Defense (DOD) views the advent of U.S. Space Command as a critical step to accelerate the nation's ability to defend its vital interests and deter adversaries in space. U.S. Space Command is responsible for planning and executing offensive and defensive space operations with the military services, other combatant commands, DOD agencies, and other partners.

GAO was asked to review the Air Force's process and methodology to select the permanent location for U.S. Space Command headquarters. This report (1) examines how the U.S. Space Command basing process compared with the established Air Force basing process and describes the steps the Air Force took to identify a headquarters location, and (2) evaluates the extent to which the Air Force's revised selection process for determining the U.S. Space Command headquarters conformed to GAO best practices for analyzing alternatives.

GAO reviewed documentation, interviewed knowledgeable officials, and assessed related information using GAO's best practices for a high-quality AOA process. This is a public version of a sensitive report issued in May 2022. Information that DOD has deemed sensitive has been omitted.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Air Force develop guidance for future strategic basing decisions that is consistent with GAO's AOA best practices, and determine the basing actions to which it should apply. The Air Force neither agreed nor disagreed.

View [GAO-22-106055](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth A. Field at (202) 512-2775 or [fielde1@gao.gov](mailto:fielde1@gao.gov).

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## U.S. SPACE COMMAND

### Air Force Should Develop Guidance for Strengthening Future Basing Decisions

## What GAO Found

From December 2018 through early March 2020, the Air Force largely followed its established strategic basing process to determine the preferred location for U.S. Space Command headquarters. From early March 2020 through January 2021, the Air Force implemented a revised, three-phased process at the direction of the then Secretary of Defense, culminating in the selection of Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama as the preferred location. The revised process followed some elements of the established basing process, but included different steps. For example, in its revised process, the Air Force solicited nominations from all 50 states instead of beginning with a set of candidates based on their respective ability to meet defined functional requirements.

GAO found that the Air Force's revised process fully or substantially met 7 of 21 Analysis of Alternatives (AOA) best practices it assessed. These best practices are grouped into four characteristics of a high-quality AOA process. GAO found that the revised process did not fully or substantially meet 3 of 4 characteristics.

#### Assessment of the Air Force's Revised Process for U.S. Space Command Basing against GAO's Four Characteristics of an Analysis of Alternatives (AOA) Process

##### Comprehensive

★★★★★ Substantially met (4.2 of 5.0)

The process fully met the best practices *define mission need* and *develop a list of alternatives* by defining mission need without a predetermined solution and considering a wide range of candidate locations. It partially met the best practice *develop life-cycle cost estimates* because Air Force estimates did not address all key costs.

##### Well-documented

★★★★★ Partially met (3.0 of 5.0)

The process fully met the best practice *describe alternatives* by describing candidate locations in detail sufficient for robust analysis. It minimally met the best practice *identify significant risks and mitigation strategies* because the Air Force did not document all risk assessments.

##### Credible

★★★☆☆ Minimally met (2.3 of 5.0)

The process substantially met the best practice *define selection criteria* by defining criteria based on mission need. It minimally met the best practices *perform independent review* and *include a confidence level or range for life-cycle cost estimates* because no independent entity reviewed the process and because cost estimates did not assess the risk of costs increasing or decreasing.

##### Unbiased

★★★★★ Partially met (3.0 of 5.0)

The process fully met the best practice *establish AOA team* by ensuring the team included members with a variety of relevant skill sets and knowledge, but partially met the best practice *weight selection criteria* because the Air Force did not document its rationale for weighting criteria.

Source: GAO analysis of Air Force and U.S. Space Command information. | GAO-22-106055

Note: Characteristic ratings are the average of individual best practice scores. For best practices, Not Met = 1, Minimally Met = 2, Partially Met = 3, Substantially Met = 4, and Fully Met = 5. For characteristics, Not Met = 1.0 to 1.4, Minimally Met = 1.5 to 2.4, Partially Met = 2.5 to 3.4, Substantially Met = 3.5 to 4.4, and Fully Met = 4.5 to 5.0.

Air Force officials told GAO they did not use the AOA best practices as a guide during the revised process because the practices were not required or relevant to basing decisions. However, GAO believes that the AOA best practices are relevant and, if effectively implemented, can help ensure such basing decisions are transparent and deliberate. Developing basing guidance consistent with these best practices, and determining the basing actions to which it should apply, would better position the Air Force to substantiate future basing decisions and help prevent bias, or the appearance of bias, from undermining their credibility.