

Why GAO Did This Study

With the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD has had to accelerate efforts to field capabilities addressing urgent warfighter needs, including joint needs affecting more than one service. GAO was asked to assess (1) how quickly capabilities responding to joint urgent operational needs have been developed and fielded and (2) what key practices enabled executing organizations to overcome challenges. To do this, GAO studied a sample of joint urgent operational needs including all urgent needs over \$100 million approved from April 2008 through December 2010 and a random selection of smaller urgent needs. GAO analyzed data on key events and issues in the development and fielding of solutions and met with service and DOD officials responsible for validating, assigning, and executing joint urgent needs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD reduce the time spent on identifying and contracting for off-the-shelf solutions, devise methods for providing early funding to research laboratories and engineering centers, require that initiative decision memorandums be prepared for all initiatives, and require acquisition organizations to communicate with the Central Command and other combatant commands about plans for fielding capabilities. DOD concurred with these recommendations.

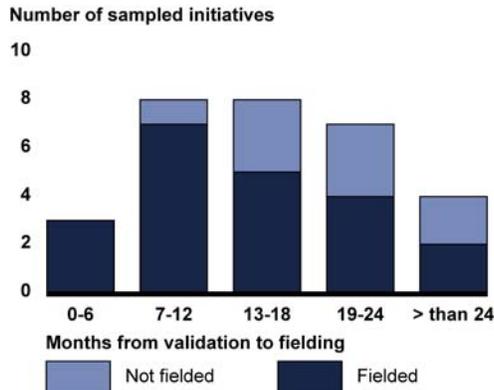
URGENT WARFIGHTER NEEDS

Opportunities Exist to Expedite Development and Fielding of Joint Capabilities

What GAO Found

A majority of the initiatives GAO reviewed (26 of 30) met, or expected to meet, the Department of Defense's (DOD) expectation for fielding a capability in response to joint urgent operational needs within 2 years (see figure). However, performance in meeting schedule estimates varied, and more than half of the initiatives experienced schedule delays.

Time to Field Sampled Initiatives



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data.

Initiatives leveraged three types of solutions: (1) off-the-shelf products, (2) modifications of off-the-shelf items to add capabilities, and (3) products requiring technology development. Off-the-shelf solutions should be fielded the quickest because existing products are being bought. However, while off-the-shelf solutions were fielded quickly once a contract was awarded, it took longer than the two other types to identify, fund, and contract for off-the-shelf solutions. In addition to the program offices that manage traditional acquisition programs, initiatives were also managed by research laboratories and engineering centers, such as the Army Research Laboratory or the Naval Surface Warfare Center. Program offices fielded solutions faster, in part, because program offices are experienced in the full range of acquisition activities. Also, laboratories and engineering centers depended on funding provided by other organizations and delays in receiving this funding affected the start of some initiatives.

Acquisition organizations employed various practices to overcome challenges affecting fielding of capabilities within short time frames. For example, although these practices could affect the prices paid, shorter times were associated with using existing contracts, awarding contracts without agreeing on contract terms (prices), or awarding contracts without competition. U.S. Central Command officials stated that they were not aware of all initiatives underway or the expected schedule for fielding capabilities and this could affect planning activities. In some cases, initiative decision memorandums were prepared that documented schedule estimates but such memorandums are not required for all initiatives. Also, some organizations were proactive in communicating with U.S. Central Command and this facilitated a clearer understanding of requirements and plans for fielding initiatives, but regular communication is not required.