

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2002, the military services have introduced seven new camouflage uniforms with varying patterns and colors—two desert, two woodland, and three universal. In addition, the Army is developing new uniform options and estimates it may cost up to \$4 billion over 5 years to replace its current uniform and associated protective gear. GAO was asked to review the services' development of new camouflage uniforms. This report addresses: 1) the extent to which DOD guidance provides a consistent decision process to ensure new camouflage uniforms meet operational requirements and 2) the extent to which the services have used a joint approach to develop criteria, ensure equivalent protection and manage costs. To do this, GAO reviewed DOD, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and GAO acquisition guidance and key practices, statutory requirements and policies, interviewed defense officials, and collected and analyzed records about uniform development.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD take four actions to improve the development of camouflage uniforms and enhance collaboration among the services: ensure that the services have and use clear policies and procedures and a knowledge-based approach, establish joint criteria, develop policy to ensure equivalent protection levels, and pursue partnerships where applicable to help reduce costs. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations and identified planned actions.

View [GAO-12-707](#).
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WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

DOD Should Improve Development of Camouflage Uniforms and Enhance Collaboration Among the Services

What GAO Found

The military services have a degree of discretion regarding whether and how to apply Department of Defense (DOD) acquisition guidance for their uniform development and they varied in their usage of that guidance. As a result, the services had fragmented procedures for managing their uniform development programs, and did not consistently develop effective camouflage uniforms. GAO identified two key elements that are essential for producing successful outcomes in acquisitions: 1) using clear policies and procedures that are implemented consistently, and 2) obtaining effective information to make decisions, such as credible, reliable, and timely data. The Marine Corps followed these two key elements to produce a successful outcome, and developed a uniform that met its requirements. By contrast, two other services, the Army and Air Force, did not follow the two key elements; both services developed uniforms that did not meet mission requirements and had to replace them. Without additional guidance from DOD on the use of clear policies and procedures and a knowledge-based approach, the services may lack assurance that they have a disciplined approach to set requirements and develop new uniforms that meet operational needs.

The military services' fragmented approach for acquiring uniforms has not ensured the development of joint criteria for new uniforms or achieved cost efficiency. DOD has not met a statutory requirement to establish joint criteria for future uniforms or taken steps to ensure that uniforms provide equivalent levels of performance and protection for service members, and the services have not pursued opportunities to seek to reduce clothing costs, such as by collaborating on uniform inventory costs. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 required the military departments to establish joint criteria for future ground combat uniforms. The departments asked the Joint Clothing and Textiles Governance Board to develop the joint criteria, but the task is incomplete. If the services do not use joint criteria to guide their activities, one or more service may develop uniforms without certainty that the uniforms include the newest technology, advanced materials or designs, and meet an acceptable level of performance. Further, DOD does not have a means to ensure that the services meet statutory policy permitting the development of service-unique uniforms as long as the uniforms, to the maximum extent practicable, provide service members the equivalent levels of performance and protection and minimize the risk to individuals operating in the joint battle space. Without a policy to ensure that services develop and field uniforms with equivalent performance and protection, the services could fall short of protecting all service members equally, potentially exposing a number to unnecessary risks. Finally, the services may have opportunities for partnerships to reduce inventory costs for new uniforms. The Army may be able to save about \$82 million if it can partner with another service. Under DOD guidance, the services are encouraged to actively seek to reduce costs. The Air Force has shown interest in the Army's current uniform development, but none of the services has agreed to partner with the Army on a new uniform. In the absence of a DOD requirement that the services collaborate to standardize the development and introduction of camouflage uniforms, the services may forego millions of dollars in potential cost savings.