

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-29](#), 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 identified problems with leadership, organization, investment, morale, policy, and procedures, as well as other shortcomings that adversely affected the nuclear deterrence mission. The reviews also made recommendations to address these problems. In 2015, DOD conducted a review focused on NC3 systems, which resulted in additional recommendations.

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 and the military services have (1) made progress in the implementation, tracking, and evaluation—including identifying and documenting risk—of the recommendations of the 2014 nuclear enterprise reviews and the 2015 NC3 report and (2) improved oversight of the defense nuclear enterprise and managed roles, responsibilities, and collaboration among various organizations. GAO reviewed relevant documents and interviewed agency officials from DOD and the military services.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes four recommendations for DOD to clarify roles, responsibilities, and methods of communication and collaboration for both the NDERG and NC3 oversight bodies. DOD concurred with all four recommendations and provided information about planned actions to implement them.

View [GAO-19-29](#). For more information, contact Joseph W. Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or kirschbaumj@gao.gov.

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DEFENSE NUCLEAR ENTERPRISE

DOD Continues to Address Challenges but Needs to Better Define Roles and Responsibilities and Approaches to Collaboration

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has made progress in implementing the recommendations from the 2014 nuclear enterprise reviews and a 2015 nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) review and has improved its tracking and evaluation of this progress. For example, since GAO last reported—in October 2017—an additional 74 of the 247 sub-recommendations from the 2014 reviews have been closed; 96 remain open. In January 2018, in response to a GAO recommendation, the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) issued guidance to aid the military services in identifying, assessing, and documenting risks associated with the 2014 recommendations, such as unintended consequences from their implementation. The guidance calls on them to update their risk assessments periodically as new data become available. The Air Force and Navy have begun to provide risk information in CAPE's and their own tracking tools. In July 2018, in response to a GAO recommendation, DOD's Chief Information Officer issued guidance to improve tracking and evaluation of progress in implementing the 2015 recommendations.

DOD and the military services have taken steps to improve oversight of the nuclear enterprise in response to the 2014 reviews but lack clear roles and responsibilities and methods for collaboration. The Secretary of Defense created the Nuclear Deterrent Enterprise Review Group (NDERG) in 2014 to ensure the long-term health of the nuclear enterprise by addressing resourcing, personnel, organizational, and enterprise policy issues. However, DOD guidance has not clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the NDERG or provided methods for the NDERG to communicate and collaborate with other nuclear oversight organizations, including those shown in the figure. Nor has NC3 oversight guidance been updated to reflect changes in roles and responsibilities and to include methods for communication and collaboration among NC3 oversight groups. In the absence of defined roles and responsibilities for the NDERG and NC3 oversight bodies and methods for how the NDERG and NC3 oversight groups are to communicate and collaborate, senior leaders may not be in a position to effectively manage resourcing and risk across the department.

Selected Nuclear Oversight Groups

Nuclear Weapons Council

Joint DOD and Department of Energy council established by statute that is responsible for managing aspects of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile and programs.

Security Incident Response Council

An interagency group that will have oversight of plans for responding to potential security incidents involving nuclear weapons.

DOD: Department of Defense

NC3: Nuclear command, control and communications

Source: GAO analysis of statutes and DOD information. | GAO-19-29

Council on Oversight of the National Leadership Command, Control, and Communications System

DOD council established by statute responsible for overseeing the command, control, and communications system used by U. S. leadership.

Nuclear Deterrent Enterprise Review Group

Organization established to ensure the long-term health of the nuclear enterprise.

Nuclear Posture Review Implementation group

Organized to track the implementation of the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review*.

