

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-439](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Amid concerns about the ability of DOD's acquisition process to keep pace with evolving threats, Congress included numerous reforms in recent National Defense Authorization Acts that could help to streamline acquisition oversight and field capabilities faster.

GAO was asked to examine DOD's efforts to implement these reforms. This report addresses (1) the progress DOD has made implementing selected oversight reforms related to major defense acquisition programs; (2) how DOD has used middle-tier acquisition pathways; and (3) challenges DOD faces related to reform implementation. GAO reviewed five reforms: milestone decision authority designation; cost, fielding, and performance goals; independent technical risk assessments; restructuring of acquisition oversight offices; and middle-tier acquisition. GAO analyzed applicable statutes and implementing guidance, collected information from DOD about the number and types of middle-tier acquisition programs, reviewed relevant documentation, and interviewed DOD officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that DOD should identify the types of information needed to select and oversee middle-tier acquisition programs consistently, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the military departments for acquisition oversight. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations and described actions planned to address them.

View [GAO-19-439](#). For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at (202) 512-4841 or [oakleys@gao.gov](mailto:oakleys@gao.gov).

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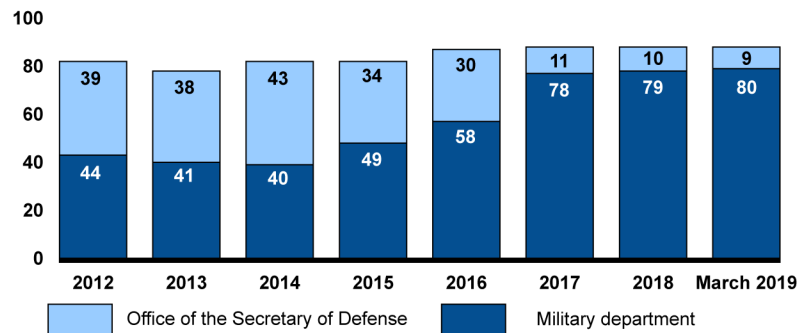
# DOD ACQUISITION REFORM

## Leadership Attention Needed to Effectively Implement Changes to Acquisition Oversight

### What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has made progress in implementing reforms to restructure the oversight of major defense acquisition programs. As a result of one of these reforms, decision-making authority for many programs shifted from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the military departments (see figure).

**Decision Authority Level for Major Defense Acquisition Programs from 2012 to 2019**  
Number of major defense acquisition programs



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-19-439

Questions remain about how some reforms GAO reviewed will be carried out. For example, no programs have been required to have cost and fielding goals set under DOD's new process yet, and DOD has formed a working group to determine when to delegate risk assessments to the military departments.

DOD also began using new pathways referred to as middle-tier acquisition to rapidly prototype and field new weapon systems. Middle-tier programs are expected to field capabilities within 2 to 5 years. As of March 2019, military departments were using this authority for 35 unclassified programs (see table).

**Number and Type of Unclassified Middle-Tier Acquisition Programs Started as of March 2019**

|              | Rapid Prototyping | Rapid Fielding |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Air Force    | 20                | 4              |
| Army         | 8                 | 0              |
| Navy         | 3                 | 0              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>31</b>         | <b>4</b>       |

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-19-439

DOD has yet to fully determine how it will oversee middle-tier acquisition programs, including what information should be required to ensure informed decisions about program selection and how to measure program performance. Without consistent oversight, DOD is not well positioned to ensure that these programs—some of which are multibillion dollar acquisitions—are likely to meet expectations for delivering prototypes or capability to the warfighter quickly.

DOD also continues to face implementation challenges, including one related to disagreements about oversight roles and responsibilities between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the military departments. Senior DOD leadership has not fully addressed these disagreements. As a result, DOD is at risk of not achieving an effective balance between oversight and accountability and efficient program management.