GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-19-570, a report to congressional committees

August 2019

FUTURE WARFARE

Army Is Preparing for Cyber and Electronic Warfare Threats, but Needs to Fully Assess the Staffing, Equipping, and Training of New Organizations

Why GAO Did This Study

The rise of great-power competitors, such as China and Russia, prompted the Army to transform the way it plans to fight. The Army is developing a new warfighting concept to guide how its forces will engage jointly with other services in multiple domains, especially in cyber and space.

The House Armed Services Committee included a provision in House Report 115-200 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 for GAO to review the Army's implementation of the concept. Among its objectives, this report addresses (1) how the Army is changing its doctrine, organizations, and training in order to execute multi-domain operations; and (2) the extent to which the Army has established new cyber and electronic warfare units, including any challenges faced by these units, and whether the Army assessed risks associated with its plan to establish these units.

GAO reviewed Army concepts, doctrine, force design, and training documents concerning multi-domain operations. GAO also interviewed Army and Department of Defense officials.

What GAO Recommends

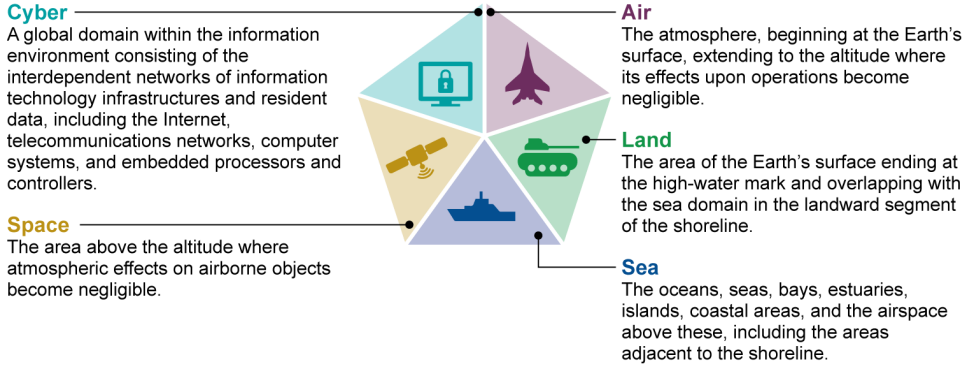
GAO is making three recommendations, including that the Army comprehensively assess the risk of staffing, equipping, and training the cyber and electronic warfare units that it has activated at an accelerated pace, and to do so for new organizations it plans to activate in an accelerated manner for multi-domain operations. The Army concurred with one recommendation and partially concurred with two recommendations. GAO clarified the recommendations, as discussed in the report.

View GAO-19-570.For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Army is changing aspects of its doctrine, organizations, and training to develop a force that can effectively engage great-power competitors—Russia and China—through multi-domain operations by 2028. Multi-domain operations present adversaries with multiple challenges across multiple domains (land, air, sea, cyber, and space) in contested environments. To this end, the Army is revising its doctrine to guide how the force and specific units will function. The Army is also reorganizing its force by creating new units to conduct missions in multiple domains and by updating the responsibilities of key Army formations, such as Army divisions. Also, the Army is training its combat forces for multi-domain operations in part by increasing the focus on cyber operations.

The Five Warfighting Domains Envisioned by the Army Operating Concept



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-19-570

The Army is establishing new cyber and electronic warfare units for multi-domain operations, but did not fully assess the risk of activating some units at an accelerated pace and is experiencing staffing, equipping, and training challenges. For example, the Army activated a cyber battalion in December 2018, and as of March 2019, this unit was understaffed by more than 80 percent. Army guidance directs the Army staff to conduct assessments on new units to determine whether the Army can staff, equip, and train these organizations. However, Army leadership believed the threats justify developing these units at an accelerated pace. Consequently, the Army did not assess the staffing, equipping, and training risk before activating one unit, and only conducted an initial risk assessment before activating a second unit. As a result, senior Army leaders may not know what other challenges could arise, such as sustainment, as the units grow in capability. Army officials told GAO that as these units evolve, it is uncertain when more comprehensive risk assessments would take place. The Army has previously accelerated the activations of other units when it saw fit to do so, and is considering creating other new units for multi-domain operations. If the Army does not assess risks for units activated at an accelerated pace, those units may be unable to effectively conduct multi-domain operations.