UNCREWED MARITIME SYSTEMS

Navy Should Improve Its Approach to Maximize Early Investments

What GAO Found

Other nations are investing in new weapons and technologies designed to disrupt U.S. naval advantages. Consequently, the U.S. Navy is reexamining its maritime strategy to respond to increased competition at sea. Based on the results of its analyses, the Navy determined that surface and undersea vehicles without crew on board—known as uncrewed maritime systems—are necessary to meet future threats (see figure). While the Navy’s shipbuilding plan outlines spending more than $4 billion on uncrewed systems over the next 5 years, its plan does not account for the full costs to develop and operate these systems.

Once conceived, the Navy must build these vehicles with the information technology and the artificial intelligence capabilities needed to replace crews. While the Navy has established strategic objectives for these efforts, it has not established a management approach that orients its individual uncrewed maritime efforts toward achieving these objectives. As such, the Navy is not measuring its progress, such as building the robust information technology needed to operate the vehicles. GAO has previously found that portfolio management—a disciplined process that ensures new investments are aligned with an organization’s strategic needs within available resources—enables agencies to implement strategic objectives and manage investments collectively. However, if it continues with its current approach, the Navy is less likely to achieve its objectives. In addition, the Navy has yet to:

- establish criteria to evaluate prototypes and
- develop improved schedules for prototype efforts.

With detailed planning, prototyping has the potential to further technology development and reduce acquisition risk before the Navy makes significant investments. Since uncrewed systems are key to the Navy’s future, optimizing the prototyping phase of this effort is necessary to efficiently gaining information to support future decisions.