

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106190](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD recognizes that intelligence oversight is critical in enabling its components that perform authorized intelligence functions to carry out those functions in a manner that protects the constitutional rights of U.S. persons. In 1982, following a period of improper activities—including for example the interception of communications of civil rights protesters—DOD established an independent oversight office headed by the SIOO to oversee all DOD intelligence and intelligence-related activities.

GAO was asked to review DOD's intelligence oversight office. This report, among other objectives, assesses the office's oversight activities and the extent to which DOD faces risks to the success of the office's oversight program.

GAO reviewed relevant documents, including DOD directives, inspection reports, and planned topic assessments. GAO developed and applied criteria for high-quality and credible reports to the office's intelligence topic assessments. GAO also visited 15 DOD components that conduct intelligence oversight and interviewed relevant officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to DOD: (1) improve the monitoring of inspection recommendations; (2) mitigate risks of not conducting inspections; and (3) improve its topic assessments by meeting all standards for high-quality and credible reports. DOD agreed with the first two recommendations and partially agreed with the third. GAO continues to believe it is valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-24-106190](#). For more information, contact Alissa H. Czyz at (202) 512-3058 or czyza@gao.gov.

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DOD INTELLIGENCE

Actions Needed to Strengthen Program Oversight and Manage Risks

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) Senior Intelligence Oversight Official (SIOO) and DOD's intelligence oversight office have conducted oversight of DOD intelligence activities through a variety of means (see figure). For example, inspections of DOD components over the last 5 years have identified over 100 findings and recommendations for improvement to these components' intelligence oversight programs.

Tools Used by the Department of Defense's (DOD) Intelligence Oversight Office

Inspections

Reviews component intelligence oversight programs

Assessments

Conducts assessments of high-risk DOD-wide intelligence topics

Reporting

Receives and reviews reports of intelligence incidents and reports to top DOD officials

Staff assistance visits

Conducts visits to components to provide advice and guidance

Training support

Provides information to support and presents at intelligence oversight courses offered by other DOD components

Administrative investigations

Investigates alleged violations of law, orders, regulations, or directives



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) documents and information from officials. | GAO-24-106190

However, GAO identified some risks that could adversely affect the future success of the DOD intelligence oversight office's oversight program:

- **Incomplete monitoring of recommendations.** The intelligence oversight office does not track the status of all recommendations it has made to DOD components. By improving its monitoring of prior recommendations, the office would know if components were addressing identified deficiencies.
- **Halting inspections.** In 2022, the office transitioned from conducting inspections of individual components to DOD-wide topic assessments. While assessments on intelligence topics such as DOD's counterdrug-funded analytical support may be warranted, the cessation of more specific inspections introduces risks—such as increased reliance on component oversight programs. Without taking steps to mitigate the risks of ceasing inspections, there may be fewer opportunities to identify improper activities.
- **Lack of criteria for topic assessments.** The office's process for its new topic assessments does not incorporate all 22 standards that GAO identified as necessary to develop high-quality and reliable products. For example, the office met most standards but somewhat met standards for quality control and assessing risk and independence of investigators. If the office meets all 22 standards, the office could increase confidence in the quality and credibility of the oversight information it provides to DOD leadership.

By addressing these risks, DOD would be better positioned to ensure its oversight of intelligence activities is effective.