

Action Needed to Improve Management and Oversight of Technology Investments

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A report to congressional committees.

For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at oakleys@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) seeks to outpace foreign adversaries' capabilities by quickly adopting innovative technologies. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSD(R&E)) helps DOD reach that goal.

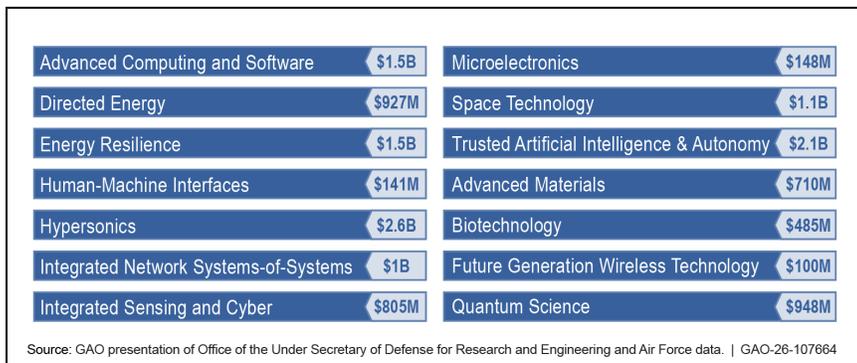
OUSD(R&E) is generally implementing processes and programs, consistent with its authorities to manage and oversee innovation-related investments. For example, it developed a National Defense Science & Technology Strategy in accordance with the 2022 National Defense Strategy. The military departments have department-focused strategies, but the extent to which those strategies are updated and aligned with DOD's strategy varies. Consequently, DOD risks the military departments pursuing technologies that do not match its vision.

Further, OUSD(R&E) faces several challenges ensuring that the military departments are well-positioned to quickly deliver technologies to the warfighter. For example, OUSD(R&E):

- has not, according to officials, issued guidance for the development of Critical Technology Area roadmaps, including identifying stakeholders who should be involved or identifying the content to include in those roadmaps.
- has not determined how the military departments should balance investments in critical technologies between the joint force and military department priorities. This is because it has not provided guidance to the military departments on the amount of investment in each critical technology area to align with corresponding roadmaps, despite military department investments in those critical technologies, as shown below.
- is limited in its ability to influence military departments' budgets to ensure they align with DOD-wide priorities through the annual budgeting process. This is because OUSD(R&E) does not have statutory authority to certify the military departments' budget. Having this authority would better position DOD to ensure priorities align.

Without addressing these challenges, OUSD(R&E) risks being unable to effectively execute its responsibilities to manage and oversee technology efforts.

Military Department Science and Technology Investments in Critical Technology Areas for Fiscal Year 2025



Why GAO Did This Study

DOD requested nearly \$180 billion in the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget for managing, overseeing, and improving technology. Members of Congress have raised questions about OUSD(R&E)'s ability to oversee this technology as a counter to the rising threat of adversaries such as China and Russia.

The House report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 includes a provision for GAO to review how OUSD(R&E) manages, oversees, and improves DOD's innovation investments and outcomes. This report evaluates (1) the extent to which OUSD(R&E) has taken steps to implement its authorities, and (2) the extent to which these authorities position it to effectively manage these investments.

GAO reviewed DOD documentation and data as well as selected legislative provisions. GAO also interviewed officials from OUSD(R&E) and the military departments.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Congress consider granting OUSD(R&E) budget certification authority. GAO is also making three recommendations to DOD, including that it direct each military department to develop science and technology strategies that align with OUSD(R&E)'s DOD-wide science and technology strategy to the maximum extent practicable; issue guidance for developing Critical Technology Area roadmaps; and provide guidance to the military departments on the amount of investment in each critical technology area needed to ensure alignment to the maximum extent practicable with corresponding roadmaps. DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.