GAO found that DOD has taken steps to address the commands’ ballistic missile defense needs, but it has not yet established an effective process to identify, prioritize, and address these needs, or to provide a DOD-wide perspective on which priorities are the most important. The U.S. Strategic Command and the Missile Defense Agency created the Warfighter Involvement Process in 2005. Although the process is still evolving, the Missile Defense Agency has addressed some command capability needs. However, even as it moves forward with the process, U.S. Strategic Command and the Missile Defense Agency have not yet overcome three interrelated limitations to its effectiveness.

- First, U.S. Strategic Command and the Missile Defense Agency have not put into place the approved and complete guidance needed to implement the Warfighter Involvement Process, which would clearly define each organization’s respective roles and responsibilities for identifying, prioritizing, and addressing the commands’ capability needs. This has left the commands without an agreed-upon mechanism for influencing agency investments.

- Second, the Missile Defense Agency has lacked clear information about how to best address the commands’ needs, and until recently has not clearly communicated how it has adjusted its investments in response to these needs. Without such information, the commands have not been able to provide feedback to the Missile Defense Agency about how well the agency has addressed their priorities in its funding plans.

- Third, senior civilian DOD leadership has not been involved in adjudicating potential differences among the commands’ priorities. Instead, U.S. Strategic Command has consolidated and submitted the commands’ prioritized capability needs to the Missile Defense Agency without first vetting these priorities though senior civilian DOD officials with departmentwide responsibilities for assessing risk and allocating resources. As a result, the Missile Defense Agency has not benefited from receiving a broader, departmentwide perspective on which of the commands’ needs were the most significant.

DOD has established a new board to advise senior Office of the Secretary of Defense officials on ballistic missile defense priorities; however, whether this board will be involved in reviewing or adjudicating differences among the commands’ priorities is unclear. Missile Defense Agency and U.S. Strategic Command officials stated that the Warfighter Involvement Process is evolving. However, unless and until they overcome these interrelated limitations, DOD remains at risk of not effectively providing the combatant commands with the missile defense capabilities they need.