



Highlights of [GAO-07-836](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Combatant commanders carrying out ongoing operations rank the need for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities as high on their priority lists. The Department of Defense (DOD) is investing in many ISR systems, including unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), to meet the growing demand for ISR assets to support the warfighter. GAO was asked to evaluate DOD's efforts to integrate UAS into ongoing operations while optimizing the use of all DOD ISR assets. Specifically, this report addresses the extent that (1) DOD has taken steps to facilitate the integration of UAS into combat operations, and (2) DOD's approach to allocating and tasking its ISR assets considers all available ISR capabilities, including those provided by UAS. GAO also reviewed the extent that DOD evaluates the performance of its ISR assets, including UAS, in meeting warfighters' needs. To perform this work, GAO analyzed data and guidance on the use of ISR assets, and interviewed DOD officials, including those supporting ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending actions to improve DOD's ability to coordinate the deployment of its UAS and other ISR assets, consider the availability of all ISR assets in allocating and tasking them, and evaluate the performance of its ISR assets. DOD generally concurred with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-836.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

Advance Coordination and Increased Visibility Needed to Optimize Capabilities

What GAO Found

DOD components have developed guidance to facilitate the integration of UAS into combat operations; however, further steps are needed to coordinate the deployment of these assets. For example, DOD developed guidance for the tactical employment of UAS and a Joint UAS Concept of Operations. This guidance is an important first step but does not address coordinating UAS and other ISR assets prior to deploying them to ongoing operations, which U.S. Central Command recognized is a critical factor in integrating UAS into combat operations. Until DOD addresses the need for DOD-wide advance coordination, it may continue to face challenges in successfully integrating UAS and other ISR assets into combat operations and may exacerbate integration challenges such as limited bandwidth.

DOD's approach to allocating and tasking its ISR assets, including UAS, hinders its ability to optimize the use of these assets because it does not consider the capabilities of all available ISR assets. The command charged with recommending how theater-level DOD ISR assets should be allocated to support operational requirements does not have awareness of all available ISR assets because DOD does not have a mechanism for obtaining this information. Similarly, the commander responsible for coordinating ongoing joint air operations does not have information on how assets controlled by tactical units are being used or what missions they've been tasked to support. Nor do tactical units have information on how theater-level assets and ISR assets embedded in other units are being tasked, which results in problems such as duplicative taskings. This lack of visibility occurs because DOD does not have a mechanism for tracking the missions both theater- and tactical-level ISR assets are supporting or how they are being used. Without an approach to allocation and tasking that includes a mechanism for considering all ISR capabilities, DOD may be unable to fully leverage all available ISR assets and optimize their use.

DOD is unable to fully evaluate the performance of its ISR assets because it lacks a complete set of metrics and does not consistently receive feedback to ensure the warfighter's needs were met. Although the Joint Functional Component Command for ISR has been tasked with developing ISR metrics, DOD currently assesses its ISR missions with limited quantitative metrics such as the number of targets planned versus captured. While these metrics are a good start, DOD officials acknowledge that the current metrics do not capture all of the qualitative considerations associated with measuring ISR asset effectiveness such as the cumulative knowledge provided by numerous ISR missions. There is an ongoing effort within DOD to develop additional quantitative as well as qualitative ISR metrics, but no DOD-wide milestones have been established. Furthermore, DOD guidance calls for an evaluation of the results of joint operations; however, DOD officials acknowledge that this feedback is not consistently occurring due to the fast pace of operations in theater. Without metrics and feedback, DOD may not be able to validate how well the warfighters' needs are being met, whether it is optimizing the use of existing assets, or which new systems would best support warfighting needs.