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DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

Overarching Organizational Framework Needed to Guide and Oversee Energy Reduction Efforts for Military Operations

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-08-426, a report to the Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) relies heavily on petroleum-based fuel for mobility energy—the energy required for moving and sustaining its forces and weapons platforms for military operations. Dependence on foreign oil, projected increases in worldwide demand, and rising oil costs, as well as the significant logistics burden associated with moving fuel on the battlefield, will likely require DOD to address its mobility energy demand. GAO was asked to (1) identify key efforts under way to reduce mobility energy demand and (2) assess the extent to which DOD has established an overarching organizational framework to guide and oversee these efforts. GAO reviewed DOD documents, policies, and studies, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD establish an overarching organizational framework for mobility energy to improve the department's ability to guide and oversee mobility energy reduction efforts. To establish such a framework, DOD should designate an executive-level Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) official to be accountable for mobility energy matters, develop a comprehensive strategic plan, and improve DOD's business processes. In addition, the military services should designate executive-level focal points to establish effective communication and coordination among OSD and the military services. DOD partially concurred with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-426. For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

OSD, the Joint Staff, and the military services have undertaken efforts to reduce mobility energy demand in weapons platforms and other mobile defense systems. For example, OSD created a departmentwide Energy Security Task Force in 2006 that is monitoring the progress of selected energy-related research and development projects. The Joint Staff updated its policy governing the development of capability requirements for new weapons systems to selectively consider energy efficiency as a key performance parameter—a characteristic of a system that is considered critical to the development of an effective military capability. The Army is addressing fuel consumption at forward-deployed locations by developing foam-insulated tents and temporary dome structures that are more efficient to heat and cool, reducing the demand for fuel-powered generators. The Navy has established an energy conservation program to encourage ships to reduce energy consumption. The Air Force has developed an energy strategy and undertaken initiatives to determine fuel-efficient flight routes, reduce the weight on aircraft, optimize air refueling, and improve the efficiency of ground operations. The Marine Corps has initiated research and development efforts to develop alternative power sources and improve fuel management.

While these and other efforts are under way and DOD has identified energy as one of its transformational priorities, DOD lacks elements of an overarching organizational framework to guide and oversee mobility energy reduction efforts. In the absence of an overarching organizational framework for mobility energy, DOD cannot be assured that its current efforts will be fully implemented and will significantly reduce its reliance on petroleum-based fuel. GAO found that DOD's current approach to mobility energy lacks (1) a single executive-level OSD official who is accountable for mobility energy matters; sets the direction, pace, and tone to reduce mobility energy demand across DOD; and can serve as a mobility energy focal point within the department and with Congress and interagency partners; (2) a comprehensive strategic plan for mobility energy that aligns individual efforts with DOD-wide goals and priorities, establishes time frames for implementation, and uses performance metrics to evaluate progress; and (3) an effective mechanism to provide for communication and coordination of mobility energy efforts among OSD and the military services as well as leadership and accountability over each military service's efforts. GAO also found that DOD has made limited progress in incorporating fuel efficiency as a consideration in its key business processes—which include developing requirements for and acquiring new weapons systems. DOD has established new organizational frameworks to address other crosscutting issues, such as business systems modernization and corrosion control and prevention. Establishing an overarching organizational framework for mobility energy could provide greater assurance that DOD's efforts to reduce its reliance on petroleum-based fuel will succeed and that DOD is better positioned to address future mobility energy challenges—both within the department and as a stakeholder in national energy security dialogues.