



Highlights of [GAO-08-516](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) invests heavily in space assets to provide the warfighter with intelligence, navigation, and other information critical to conducting military operations. In fiscal year 2008 alone, DOD expects to spend over \$22 billion dollars on space systems. Despite this investment, senior military commanders have reported shortfalls in tactical space capabilities in each recent major conflict over the past decade.

To provide short-term tactical capabilities as well as identify and implement long-term solutions to developing low cost satellites, DOD initiated operationally responsive space (ORS). Following a 2006 GAO review of ORS, the Congress directed DOD to submit a report that sets forth a plan for providing quick acquisition of low cost space capabilities.

This report focuses on the status of DOD's progress in responding to the Congress and is based on GAO's review and analyses of ORS documentation and interviews with DOD and industry officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Air Force develop an investment plan—approved by stakeholders—that identifies how to achieve future capabilities, establishes funding priorities, and implements mechanisms to measure progress. DOD concurred with the recommendation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-516](#). For more information, contact Cristina Chaplain, (202) 512-4859, chaplainc@gao.gov

SPACE ACQUISITIONS

DOD Is Making Progress to Rapidly Deliver Low Cost Space Capabilities, but Challenges Remain

What GAO Found

Since GAO last reported on DOD's ORS efforts in 2006, the department has taken several steps toward establishing a program management structure for ORS and executing research and development efforts. On the programmatic side, DOD provided Congress with a plan that lays out an organizational structure and defines the responsibilities of the newly created Joint ORS Office, and describes an approach for satisfying warfighters' needs. DOD has also begun staffing the office. On the research and development side, DOD has launched one of its TacSat satellites—small experimental satellites intended to quickly provide a capability that meets an identified need within available resources—and has begun developing several others. It has also made progress in developing interface standards for satellite buses—the platform that provides power, altitude, temperature control, and other support to the satellite in space—and continued its sponsorship of efforts aimed at acquiring low cost launch vehicles. Despite this progress, it is too early to determine the overall success of these efforts because most are still in their initial phases.

Achieving success in ORS will be challenging. With relatively modest resources, the Joint ORS Office must quickly respond to the warfighter's urgent needs, while continuing research and development efforts that are necessary to help reduce the cost and time of future space acquisitions. As it negotiates these priorities, the office will need to coordinate its efforts with a broad array of programs and agencies in the science and technology, acquisition, and operational communities. Historically, it has been difficult to transition programs from the science and technology environment to the acquisition and operational environment. At this time, DOD lacks a plan that lays out how it will direct its investments to meet current operational needs while pursuing innovative approaches and new technologies.