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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-254](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In August 2000, the Defense Department's (DOD) Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E), made 50 recommendations on a test program for a system to defeat long-range ballistic missile threats against the United States. DOD's Missile Defense Agency (MDA) plans to begin fielding the system by September 2004.

GAO examined (1) how MDA addressed DOT&E's recommendations and (2) what is known about the effectiveness of the system to be fielded by September 2004. GAO issued a classified report on this subject in June 2003. This unclassified, updated version reflects changes in MDA's test schedule.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOT&E report on the status of MDA's responses to its recommendations and advise MDA how to modify the test program to address long-standing concerns. DOD agreed with these recommendations, while noting there have been many changes in its test program and its acquisition strategy and structure since DOT&E's August 2000 report. GAO revised the report to reflect the latest, approved test program but believes most DOT&E recommendations remain relevant given the significant technical challenges and uncertainties facing MDA.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-254.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bob Levin at (202) 512-4841 or levinr@gao.gov.

MISSILE DEFENSE:

Actions Being Taken to Address Testing Recommendations, but Updated Assessment Needed

What GAO Found

MDA is addressing most of DOT&E's recommendations on flight testing but will not complete many actions before September 2004. For example, DOT&E recommended removing flight test range limitations by adding more intercept regions and launch locations to add greater realism to its tests. MDA is expanding the test range infrastructure to add five intercept regions and target and interceptor launches out of new locations. By September 2004, one of the regions will be tested.

MDA is generally not addressing DOT&E's proposals on ground testing. For example, although MDA had begun upgrading a ground facility to provide a realistic testing environment for the interceptor, MDA deferred testing at the facility to fund other priorities. Finally, MDA is addressing DOT&E's recommendations on discrimination—the system's ability to find an enemy warhead among decoys—by funding analysis programs.

Predictions of how well the system will defeat long-range ballistic missiles are based on limited data. No component of the system to be fielded by September 2004 has been flight-tested in its deployed configuration. Significant uncertainties surround the capability to be fielded by September: MDA will not demonstrate in flight tests a critical radar called Cobra Dane before that date or conduct a system-level demonstration, and has yet to test its three-stage boosters as part of a planned intercept.

GMD Interceptor



Source: Ground-Based Midcourse Defense Program Office.