



Highlights of [GAO-08-740](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) established the Missile Defense Agency to develop and deploy globally integrated ballistic missile defenses to protect the U.S. homeland, deployed forces, friends, and allies. To deliver an operational capability as quickly as possible, the agency was not subject to traditional DOD requirements and oversight processes. While directed to work closely with the combatant commands, the agency was not required to build missile defenses to meet specific operational requirements. GAO was asked to assess the extent to which DOD has developed a process that identifies, prioritizes, and addresses overall combatant command priorities as the Missile Defense Agency develops ballistic missile defense capabilities. To conduct its work, GAO reviewed relevant documents and visited several combatant commands, the Missile Defense Agency, Joint Staff, and other DOD organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD improve its process for identifying, prioritizing, and addressing combatant command priorities by completing and publishing guidance that clearly defines each organization's responsibilities; establishing effective methodologies; comparing the Missile Defense Agency's funding plans to the commands' priorities; and providing a DOD-wide perspective on the commands' priorities. DOD generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-740](#). For more information, contact John H. Pendleton, 404-679-1816, or pendletonj@gao.gov.

BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE

Actions Needed to Improve Process for Identifying and Addressing Combatant Command Priorities

What GAO Found

DOD has taken some steps to address the combatant 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. 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 combatant command capability needs. However, even as they move forward with the process, U.S. Strategic Command and the Missile Defense Agency have not yet overcome three interrelated limitations to the process's 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 combatant commands' capability needs. This has left the combatant 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 through 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.