



Highlights of [GAO-08-831](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense's (DOD) operational dependence on space has placed new and increasing demands on current space systems to meet commanders' needs. DOD's Operationally Responsive Space (ORS) concept is designed to more rapidly satisfy commanders' needs for information and intelligence during ongoing operations. Given the potential for ORS to change how DOD acquires and fields space capabilities to support the warfighter, this report discusses to what extent DOD (1) is developing ORS to support warfighter requirements and (2) has a plan that integrates ORS into existing DOD and intelligence community processes and architecture. GAO reviewed and analyzed ORS planning documents, the ORS concept of operations, and processes for meeting warfighter needs and also interviewed defense and intelligence community officials who are involved with the ORS concept.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) DOD define ORS key terms, how timely satisfaction of a need is evaluated, and what Joint Force Commander needs the ORS concept is trying to satisfy; (2) establish an ongoing communications and outreach approach for ORS; and (3) identify the steps necessary to ensure the integration of the ORS concept into existing DOD and intelligence community processes and architecture. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-831](#). For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

DEFENSE SPACE ACTIVITIES

DOD Needs to Further Clarify the Operationally Responsive Space Concept and Plan to Integrate and Support Future Satellites

What GAO Found

DOD is making some progress in developing the ORS concept, but whether it will meet warfighter requirements is unclear, principally because the concept is in the early stages of development and not commonly understood by all members of the warfighter and national security space communities. Our prior work examining successful organizational transformations shows the need to communicate to stakeholders often and early and to clearly define specific objectives. Since the Joint ORS Office was established in May 2007, it has developed a process for converting warfighter needs into formal requirements and identifying potential ORS solutions. Moreover, DOD issued the ORS Implementation Plan in April 2008 and is also developing new ORS guidance documents. However, GAO found disparity in stakeholder understanding of the ORS concept within the warfighter and national security space communities. This disparity exists because DOD has not clearly defined key elements of the ORS concept and has not effectively communicated the concept with key stakeholders. For example, initial ORS planning documents are broad and lack the specificity needed to guide the ORS concept, according to some members of the warfighter and national security space communities. Moreover, officials from the intelligence community were concerned about DOD's lack of consultation and communication with them regarding the ORS concept. Without having a well-defined and commonly understood concept, DOD's ability to fully meet warfighter needs may be hampered.

DOD has acknowledged the need to integrate ORS into existing DOD and intelligence community processes and architecture, but it has not fully addressed how it will achieve this integration. The 1999 DOD Space Policy states that an integrated national security space architecture that addresses defense and intelligence missions shall be developed to the maximum extent feasible in order to minimize unnecessary duplication of missions. DOD plans to begin integrating any new ORS processes or systems that are developed for ORS sometime between 2010 and 2015. However, integrating national security space systems can be a complex activity, involving many entities within DOD and the intelligence community. GAO previously reported that DOD's existing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) processes activities already face significant integration challenges, and adding new ORS systems into the existing ISR enterprise will increase the challenges of an already complex and challenging environment. Given the concept's immaturity, members of the national security space community have raised concerns about how the ORS concept will be integrated with existing DOD and intelligence processes and architecture, and voiced concerns about being burdened by an additional new requirements process specific to ORS. Nonetheless, as GAO described earlier, DOD is developing a process unique to ORS for submitting ORS warfighter requirements. The complexity of the national security space environment calls for DOD to begin to adequately plan integration of the ORS concept now to help ensure that DOD avoids the risk of duplicative efforts and wasted resources.