



Highlights of [GAO-10-460](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have faced rapidly changing threats to mission failure or loss of life, highlighting the Department of Defense's (DOD) need to develop and field new capabilities more quickly than its usual acquisition procedures allow. Since 2006, Congress has provided nearly \$16 billion to counter improvised explosive devices alone. GAO and others have reported funding, organizational, acquisition, and oversight issues involving DOD's processes for meeting warfighters' urgent needs. The Senate Armed Services Committee asked GAO to determine 1) the extent to which DOD has a means to assess the effectiveness of its urgent needs processes, and 2) what challenges, if any, have affected the overall responsiveness of DOD's urgent needs processes. To conduct this review GAO looked at three urgent needs processes—joint, Army, and the Marine Corps processes—visited forces overseas that submit urgent needs requests and receive solutions, and conducted 23 case studies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the Secretary of Defense take nine actions to improve DOD's ability to assess how well its processes are meeting critical warfighter needs, address challenges with training, make decisions about when to use its rapid acquisition authority, and make reprogramming decisions to expedite fielding of solutions. DOD generally concurred with our recommendations and noted actions to be taken.

View [GAO-10-460](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact William Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

Improvements to DOD's Urgent Needs Processes Would Enhance Oversight and Expedite Efforts to Meet Critical Warfighter Needs

What GAO Found

Although DOD has taken steps to create urgent needs processes that are more responsive to urgent warfighter requests than traditional acquisition procedures, DOD is unable to fully assess how well the processes address critical deficiencies or to measure the effectiveness of solutions fielded in the theater because it has not established an effective management framework for those processes. GAO found that DOD's guidance for its urgent needs processes is dispersed and outdated. Further, DOD guidance does not clearly define roles and responsibilities for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all phases of those processes or incorporate all of the expedited acquisition authorities available to acquire joint urgent need solutions. Data systems for the processes lack comprehensive, reliable data for tracking overall results and do not have standards for collecting and managing data. In addition, the joint process does not include a formal method for feedback to inform joint leadership on the performance of solutions. In one case, a solution for a joint request was fielded for 18 months without meeting warfighter needs. In the absence of a management framework for its urgent needs processes, DOD lacks tools to fully assess how well its processes work, manage their performance, ensure efficient use of resources, and make decisions regarding the long-term sustainment of fielded capabilities.

In conducting field work in Iraq as well as 23 case studies, GAO found several challenges that could hinder DOD's ability to rapidly respond to urgent warfighter needs. First, not all personnel involved in the initial development and review of urgent needs documentation receive adequate training. DOD policy states that deploying personnel should receive priority for training and be responsive to the needs of the combatant commander; however, officers responsible for drafting, submitting, and reviewing Army and joint urgent needs requests are not likely to receive such training. Hence, once in theater, they often face difficulties processing the large volume of requests, in a timely manner. Second, in 11 of 23 cases GAO studied, challenges obtaining funding were the primary factor that increased the amount of time needed to field solutions. Funding has not always been available for joint urgent needs in part because the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has not assigned primary responsibility for implementing the department's rapid acquisition authority. Congress provided OSD with that authority to meet urgent warfighter needs, but OSD has played a reactive rather than proactive role in making decisions about when to invoke it. In addition, DOD can reprogram funds appropriated for other purposes to meet urgent needs requests, but authority for determining when and how to reprogram funds has been delegated to the services and combatant commands. Prior GAO work has shown that strong leadership from OSD over resource control is critical, and midlevel agencies such as the Joint Rapid Acquisition Cell, which is responsible for facilitating urgent needs requests, including funding, cannot guide other agencies at a high enough level to promote effective interagency coordination. Finally, GAO found that attempts to meet urgent needs with immature or complex technologies can result in significant delays.