ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

DOD Should Improve Strategies, Inventory Process, and Collaboration Guidance

GAO Highlights

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD strategies state that AI will transform the character of warfare, and failure to adopt AI technology could hinder the capability of warfighters to defend our nation. DOD is making organizational changes and investing billions of dollars to incorporate AI technology, such as establishing the Joint AI Center to accelerate the delivery of AI-enabled capabilities across DOD.

House Report 116-442 accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, includes a provision for GAO to assess DOD's resources, capabilities, and plans for AI technology. This report evaluates the extent to which (1) DOD's AI Strategy and associated plans include characteristics of a comprehensive strategy; (2) DOD has identified and reported AI activities across the department; and (3) DOD collaborates on its AI activities. GAO reviewed relevant laws and DOD strategies that outline plans and processes to manage AI across the department, interviewed officials, and conducted a department-wide survey. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in February 2022. Information that DOD deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including for DOD to issue guidance to include all characteristics of a comprehensive strategy; develop a high-level plan or roadmap for its AI inventory process; and finalize and issue guidance and agreements that define roles and responsibilities for AI collaboration. DOD concurred with all seven of these recommendations.

View GAO-22-105834. For more information, contact Brian M. Mazanec at (202) 512-5130 or mazanecb@gao.gov.
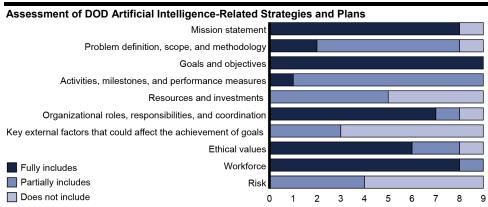
What GAO Found

The 2018 *Department of Defense (DOD) Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy* defines AI as the ability of machines to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. The strategy and associated plans include some, but not all, characteristics of a comprehensive strategy. For example, DOD's nine AI-related strategies and plans do not include full descriptions of resources and investments and risk associated with adoption of AI-enabled technologies (See fig.). Issuing guidance to include all characteristics of a comprehensive strategy in future AI-related strategies could help DOD be better positioned to help managers ensure accountability and responsible use of AI.

Assessment of DOD Artificial Intelligence-Related Strategies and Plans

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-22-105834

DOD has begun to identify and report on its AI activities, but limitations exist in its AI baseline inventory, such as the exclusion of classified activities. DOD officials said these limitations will be addressed in subsequent phases of the AI inventory identification process. However, DOD has not yet developed a high-level plan or roadmap that captures all requirements and milestones. Such a plan would provide DOD with a high-level, end-to-end view of all the features necessary to accomplish the program's goal to provide a complete and accurate inventory of AI activities to Congress and to DOD decision makers.

DOD organizations collaborate on AI activities, but can more fully incorporate leading collaboration practices. DOD uses a variety of formal and informal collaborative mechanisms that GAO's prior work has identified, such as interagency groups. DOD has partially incorporated leading collaboration practices, such as identifying leadership. However, DOD officials told us they are in the process of developing guidance and agreements that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of DOD components that participate in AI activities. By finalizing and issuing such guidance, DOD could help ensure all participants agree upon responsibilities and decision making on AI efforts across the department.

United States Government Accountability Office